



UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD  
DEPARTMENT OF BIBLICAL STUDIES

WHAT NOT TO DO WITH WORDS:  
USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

RESUBMITTED AS A PHD THESIS

BY  
REV'D BERNARD MINTON  
MARCH 2014

## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines some of the ways in which a particular theory of language known as Speech Act theory has been used as a hermeneutic tool, in particular in relation to Biblical hermeneutics. It begins by outlining the context in which the theory was conceived, and gives a brief description of Speech Act theory and some of its problems. Thereafter, some specific problems relating to the theory's use as a Biblical hermeneutical tool are explored.

These are, firstly, the fact that Speech Act theory relates explicitly to spoken language, but is being proposed as a textual tool; secondly that the nature of the relationship assumed in the theory, between intention and meaning, is compromised within the theory, and that the assumption of a 'sender view of meaning' often made by its advocates undercuts the most interesting implications of the theory; and thirdly that the concept of uptake, integral to the theory, is an inadequate substitute for the concept of understanding.

All of these problems are identified as fundamental flaws in Speech Act theory, that compromise its usefulness as a hermeneutic tool, particularly given that the theory is being used to buttress ideas of authorial revelation. This thesis also examines the relationship between meaning and significance proposed in the work of E D Hirsch and adopted as a supplement to Speech Act theory, and finds in this distinction also similar weaknesses.

However, this does not mean that the concept of revelation is untenable, and the thesis proposes an alternative view of revelation and authorial meaning, using the linguistic theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov, and based on co-operation between author and community. This proposal is claimed to be more hermeneutically appropriate and it is asserted that it also gives a far better theological account of the nature and work of the Holy Spirit.

**It would be a poor hermeneuticist who thought he could have,  
or had to have, the last word.**

Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Afterword' to *Truth and Method* (see bibliography)

### Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a long time in gestation. I am particularly grateful to Professor Hugh Pyper for his many years of patient midwifery, and to Mrs Alison Bygrave of the Department of Biblical Studies in Sheffield, for her sterling assistance at its eventual birth. I am very grateful also to the College of the Resurrection, Mirfield, for encouraging its conception, and especially to Dr Ken Farrimond and his family, for much neighbourly assistance.

During its pregnancy the thesis was sustained by significant support, financial, spiritual, and practical: in the first triennium from the Diocese of Chichester and Canon Peter Kefford, and from the parish of St James the Less, Lancing and Fr Roger Russell; in latter trienniums, from the Diocese of St Albans, Canon Dennis Stamps, Mrs Laura Hart, and from the clergy and people of the Ouzel Valley Team, and especially the Reverend Wyn Jones and the people of the parish of Linslade. Their support and encouragement has been particularly necessary and much appreciated.

I am very grateful to those I met on the Clergy Conversation 'How do we speak about God' in 2012 for suggesting many ways of inducing labour. My thanks are also due to many friends, for easing pre-eclampsia with gin and love, and for occasionally distracting my incarnate children, who are themselves joyous, a privilege to know, and capable of a diverse range of distracting performatives.

Finally, I must thank my parents for so much love and support over so many years, and for never admitting to have given up, and above all I thank Rowena, who has doubtless given up many times, but has always been there to hold my hand, and without whom nothing at all would have been possible. Whatever has been achieved, would not have been achieved without her constant support, sacrifice and love. Thank you, darling: you can have some evenings back now.

*Remembering with thanksgiving*

*John Brown 1947-2012*

*Richard Eckersley 1925-2013*

*Derek Moody 1941-2005*

*May they rest in peace and rise in glory*

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	9
1. An Introduction to the thesis.....	9
2. A Brief Introduction to Speech Act theory:	
2a: The Background to the theory .....	20
A Brief Introduction to Speech Act theory:	
2b: Locutions, Illocutions and Perlocutions.....	24
3. Uses of Speech Act theory as a hermeneutic.....	27
4. Some problems with Speech Act theory itself.....	30
5. Uptake and Understanding. ....	34
6. Conclusion: Meaning and Revelation .....	35
CHAPTER TWO: SPEECH ACT THEORY AND LITERARY CRITICISM .....	37
1. Austin’s and Searle’s dismissal of “Parasitic language uses”: can Speech Act theory be applied to texts? .....	37
Austin’s and Searle’s dismissal of “Parasitic language uses”:	
1a. Austin’s distinction .....	37
Austin’s and Searle’s dismissal of “Parasitic language uses”:	
1b. Searle’s development of Austin’s distinction.....	40
Austin’s and Searle’s dismissal of “Parasitic language uses”:	
1c. Derrida’s criticism of Austin’s distinction .....	44
2. Mary Louise Pratt’s and Michael Hancher’s use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics: how fixed are illocutions? .....	51
3. Richard Ohmann’s use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics. ....	59
4. Susan Snaider Lanser’s use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics. ....	62
5. Sandy Petrey’s use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics. ....	65
6. The use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics: Conclusion.....	67
CHAPTER THREE: SPEECH ACT THEORY AND BIBLICAL EXEGESIS.....	70
1. Introduction .....	70
2. Donald Evans’s use of Speech Act theory in Biblical Exegesis.....	70
3. Anthony Thiselton and Speech Act exegesis.....	74
4. Richard Briggs’s <i>Words in Action</i> and Speech Act exegesis.....	78
5. A brief description of a selection of Biblical Speech Act exegeses: Introduction. ....	80
Biblical Speech Act exegeses:	
5a. T M McNulty, ‘Pauline Preaching: A Speech-Act Analysis’ .....	81

Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5b. D J A Clines, <i>I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53 (JSOT Supplement Series 1)</i> . .....	82
Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5c. T Polk, <i>The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self (JSOT Supplement Series 32)</i> . .....	83
Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5d. J G du Plessis: two articles in <i>Neotestamentica</i> .....	87
Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5e. J Eugene Botha: two articles in <i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i> , and a book. ....	89
Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5f. W Houston; 'What did the Prophets think they were doing? Speech Acts and Prophetic Discourse in the Old Testament' .....	95
Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5g. D Neufeld; a book and an article .....	99
Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5h. B Gilfillan Upton, <i>Hearing Mark's Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory (Biblical Interpretation Series Volume 79)</i> .....	111
Biblical Speech Act exegeses: 5i. J W Adams, <i>The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55. (Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 448)</i> .....	115
6. Conclusion.....	130
CHAPTER FOUR: INCOHERENCIES IN INTENTION IN SPEECH ACT THEORY..	132
1. Introduction. ....	132
2. Intention in Austin: the Theory.....	133
3. Intention in Austin: Some discrepancies in practice. 3a: The Problem of Sincerity .....	140
Intention in Austin: Some discrepancies in practice. 3b: 'Polite Phrases.' .....	143
Intention in Austin: Some discrepancies in practice. 3c: Conclusion.....	147
4. The Sender View of Meaning. 4a: Introduction .....	148
The Sender View of Meaning. 4b: Intention, Authorial Authority, and Meaning in the pebbles of a beach .....	149
The Sender View of Meaning. 4c: Kevin Vanhoozer on Intention, Authorial Authority, and Meaning .....	153

The Sender View of Meaning.	
4d: Intention, Action and Consequences: Illocutions, Perlocutions, and Arson....	156
The Sender View of Meaning.	
4e: The Assessment of Intention: the work of R A Duff and R Gibbs.....	159
The Sender View of Meaning.	
4f: Intention in the work of Timothy Ward .....	164
5. Conclusion.....	167
CHAPTER FIVE: UPTAKE.....	170
1. Introduction .....	170
2. Uptake in Austin.	
2a. Uptake as a guarantor of the ‘acontextual’ Explicit Performative .....	171
Uptake in Austin.	
2b. The ‘vocabulary of acts’ as a distinction between uptake and understanding.	174
Uptake in Austin.	
2c. The existence of ‘a regular natural break in the chain of consequences’ as a distinction between uptake and understanding.....	180
Uptake in Austin.	
2d. The difference between attempt and achievement. ....	183
Uptake in Austin.	
2e. The ‘understanding’ of Consequences and the ‘uptaking’ of Effects. ....	186
Uptake in Austin.	
2f. Illocutions, Judgement and Context.....	195
3. Uptake in Donald Evans’s <i>The Logic of Self-Involvement</i> .....	200
4. The concept of the Perlocution in the work of Anthony Thiselton.....	208
5. The concept of Uptake in Richard Briggs’s <i>Words in Action</i> .....	214
6. The Concept of Uptake: Conclusion.....	222
CHAPTER SIX: MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE .....	226
1. Introduction .....	226
2. ‘Meaning’ and ‘Significance’ in Kevin Vanhoozer and Timothy Ward .....	226
3. The definitions of ‘Meaning’ and ‘Significance’ in E D Hirsch.....	228
4. E. D. Hirsch’s concept of understanding, and its relation to meaning.....	231
5. Authorial Intention and Transhistorical Intention:	
5a. In E. D. Hirsch.....	238
Authorial Intention and Transhistorical Intention.	
5b. In Kevin Vanhoozer and Timothy Ward .....	244

6. Problems with Transhistorical Intention.	
6a: Differences in genre. ....	246
Problems with Transhistorical Intention.	
6b. The irrelevancy of Authorial Intention. ....	246
Problems with Transhistorical Intention.	
6c. The Context of Reading and 'public consensus' ....	249
7. Conclusion.....	255
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE HERMENEUTICS OF MIKHAIL BAKHTIN AND VALENTIN VOLOSINOV .....	257
1. Introduction .....	257
2. The 'social' and dynamic nature of consciousness and identity. ....	260
3. The dialogic nature of utterances and meaning.....	269
4. 'Consummation' and the dialogism of meaning in utterances and in aesthetics .....	273
5. The nature of 'Understanding'.	
5a: John Searle's concept of 'the Background' .....	281
The nature of 'Understanding'.	
5b: Understanding, learning and consciousness in E. D. Hirsch, Bakhtin, Volosinov and Gadamer .....	283
The nature of 'Understanding'.	
5c: The act of reading. ....	295
6. Conclusion.....	307
CHAPTER EIGHT: COOPERATIVE REVELATION AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT .....	311
1. Introduction: the thesis thus far .....	311
2. The Holy Spirit and revelation:	
2a. The inadequacies of the sender view of meaning if the Holy Spirit lives.....	315
2. The Holy Spirit and revelation:	
2b. The inadequacy of Kevin Vanhoozer's account of the Spirit's work.....	322
3. The Holy Spirit and revelation: a cooperative 'sacramental' account .....	328
4. Conclusion of the thesis .....	336
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	343
Legal Cases.....	343
Books and Articles .....	343

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1. An Introduction to the thesis.

Imagine a situation in which a couple are about to go out to a party. One of them comes down the stairs and says to the other “how do I look?”, to which the response is “Oh, fine, just fine”. This leads instantly to accusations of undermining: “can’t you just be nice for once in your life, would it kill you to show me some support?” and protestations of bewildered innocence: “what? What did I say? I said you looked fine – what’s the problem with that?”

In this instance, what is in dispute is the meaning of what was said. What was meant by the phrase “Oh fine, just fine”: is this supportive, critical, indifferent? Of course, it depends among other things on the tone of voice used, but the interesting thing about this kind of dispute about the meaning of a phrase or utterance, is that there may never be an agreement about what was meant: both parties may remain irreconcilable. On the other hand, agreement may be reached, and this agreed meaning, reached after negotiation or argument or an appeal to third parties (“you’ll never guess what she said to me earlier” etc) may not be what the initial utterer originally claimed to be their meaning. In this instance, the meaning of a phrase is uncertain and to a degree pliable.

There have been a number of occasions in the last few years in which television celebrities and commentators have been accused of being racist and using racist words. One aspect of these furores has been the debate about whether or not such a word in such a context is racist; another has been the suggestion, made by friends of the accused, that so-and-so is not a racist, and did not mean to be offensive. In this latter instance, what is being suggested is that if the comment is accepted as being in fact racist in meaning, this was not what the speaker meant to say: the meaning of their utterance was, paradoxically, not what they meant.

Here, the intention of the speaker is being separated from the meaning of what they said: they just mis-spoke, or used an unfortunate phrase: they didn’t mean it. They meant (used here to mean ‘they intended’) something other than what they actually said. Of course, this defence may not necessarily be accepted, or may be treated in the so-called ‘court of public opinion’ as only a partial mitigation, but these examples illustrate that it is sometimes possible to successfully divorce meaning from intention.<sup>1</sup>

Not only is it the case that there is a less than complete overlap between meaning and intention, but these examples also illustrate that what something

---

<sup>1</sup> And thus that the argument of S Knapp & W B Michaels in ‘Against Theory’, *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer 1982) 723-742, that meaning simply is authorial intention, is wrong.



means is not always determined by the author or utterer of the phrase or utterance in question: meaning can be a negotiated quality. It is not enough to say “no, I meant this” and assume that such a declaration will be accepted. Your audience may (or may not) agree that ‘this’ is what you intended, but will not thereby necessarily agree that it is what you actually said. ‘What you said’ (which is here a function of ‘the meaning of what you said’) is something your audience will determine, and may disagree about.<sup>2</sup>

These examples therefore serve as a brief introduction to the idea associated with ‘post-modern thought’, that meaning is fluid. The examples quoted above both involve speech, and here disagreements about what something means become the subject of a debate between speaker and audience. Although there may be no ultimate agreement, meaning can be debated back and forth.

In the case of an author and a written text, however, this kind of clarification or development of the meaning of a phrase is much harder to achieve. The author is obviously not present to a reader in the same way as speakers are present to each other in conversation, although of course there are many different sorts of presence<sup>3</sup>, and it is not generally possible to have the same sort of debate between reader and writer as has been imagined above in spoken contexts. This does not, however, mean that written meanings are necessarily less debatable and debated.

There have been several good examples of this in recent years in the genre of childhood memoir. Accusations of fictionality and plagiarism have been made against several such books, for example *Rock me gently: the true story of a convent childhood*<sup>4</sup> by Judith Kelly, *A million little pieces*<sup>5</sup> by James Frey, and *Don't Ever Tell: Kathy's story: A True Tale of a childhood destroyed by Neglect and Fear*<sup>6</sup> by Kathy O'Beirne.

To ask ‘what is the meaning of a book’ is in fact a complicated question, involving an identification of the relationship between meaning, identity, and

---

<sup>2</sup> And what we think you said, can determine what words we heard. Did Mrs Thatcher ever say “there's no such thing as society”? Did Sherlock Holmes ever say “elementary, my dear Watson”? See also H H Clark and D Wilkes-Gibbs, ‘Referring as a Collaborative Process’, in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992) p491-492: “Participants in a conversation, we have argued, are mutually responsible for establishing what the speaker meant. ... They must collaborate, in one way or another, on most or perhaps all other parts of speaker's meaning”.

<sup>3</sup> A face-to-face conversation, a telephone conversation, video-conferencing, the reading of a handwritten letter, of a published novel, and of an advertisement, all involve different sorts of presence. The writer of a love-letter can be ‘really there’ in a more intimate way than the person next to you on the underground.

<sup>4</sup> Bloomsbury, London, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> John Murray, London, 2004

<sup>6</sup> Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 2005

effects<sup>7</sup>, but in the case of these three books, the initial meaning asserted by the author and publishers would in part at least be constituted by their identification as autobiographies (two have the word “true” in the title). This self-description asserts that these books are accurate accounts of horrific events and circumstances, told perhaps for reasons such as the following; to expose perpetrators; to provide relief to the authors; to inform and instruct readers; and to provide readers with emotional catharsis<sup>8</sup>. The meaning of these books is thus constituted by at least these strands.

James Frey’s book was first published as a true story in 2004, and he admitted in 2006 that some of the events depicted had been made up, leading his American publisher to offer some aggrieved purchasers their money back, in response to law suits<sup>9</sup>. Kathy O’Beirne’s account of her childhood has been vigorously contested by some members of her own family and has led to the publication of *Kathy’s Real Story: A Culture of False Allegations Exposed* by the journalist Hermann Kelly<sup>10</sup>.

Judith Kelly was alleged to have plagiarised from a number of authors, including Hilary Mantel, Graham Greene, Antonia White and Charlotte Bronte, and to have described fictional incidents as autobiographical. In this case, Judith Kelly’s publisher defended her against a charge of deliberate deception on the grounds that she had read the plagiarised books and had subsequently, and unintentionally, incorporated these events into her own narrative due to her photographic memory<sup>11</sup>.

Interestingly, all of these controversies are instances in which the meaning of a written text became the subject of a process of development, involving written and spoken debate<sup>12</sup>. These developments have led to the meaning of each evolving. ‘*A million little pieces*’ and ‘*Rock me gently: the true story of a convent childhood*’ are no longer simply ‘true accounts’: they are both accepted as containing elements of fiction. This may not make the books untrue, necessarily, but it has affected their perceived meaning (some readers read

---

<sup>7</sup> This is discussed in more detail in chapters six and seven of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> This list is not intended to be exhaustive!

<sup>9</sup> D Glaister, “Million Little Pieces may cost publishers millions in refunds” *The Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/sep/08/books.usa>> (13<sup>th</sup> March 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Prefect Press, Ireland, 2007. See also H McDonald, “Support for author accused of lying”, *The Observer*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2006, <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/sep/24/booksnews.ireland>> (13<sup>th</sup> March 2013).

<sup>11</sup> C Milmo, “Bloomsbury withdraws paperback accused of plagiarising ‘Jane Eyre’ and ‘Brighton Rock’” *Independent newspaper*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2005. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/bloomsbury-withdraws-paperback-accused-of-plagiarising-jane-eyre-and-brighton-rock-502659.html>> (8<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Books published in response, written articles and comment, interviews and press statements.

them as cheating or lying, others defend them as moving true accounts, works of creativity dealing with difficult and true subjects).

*Don't Ever Tell: Kathy's story: A True Tale of a childhood destroyed by Neglect and Fear* is in some ways even more extreme: this book now has at least two distinct meanings for two different 'camps' of readers: for some, its original meaning remains, perhaps made even more powerful and important after the attacks upon it; for others the book now means something quite different, a prime example of a 'culture of false allegations'. What these events illustrate is that even in the case of books, whose meaning is sometimes regarded as being as fixed as their print, their meaning can in fact be open to some debate, and the author's assertions are not necessarily the ultimate arbiter of the meaning of the book<sup>13</sup>.

Post-modern thought, however, has gone even further. The authority of the author has been denied, and the existence of any meaning beyond the subjective experience of the reader has been called into question. The most famous, and perhaps even foundational, example is Roland Barthes's essay simply entitled *The Death of the Author*, in which he asserts that "once an action is recounted, for intransitive ends, and no longer in order to act directly upon reality ... this disjunction occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters his own death, writing begins."<sup>14</sup>

Barthes suggests that "it is language which speaks, not the author: to write is to reach, through a pre-existing impersonality ... that point where language alone acts, "performs", and not "oneself"."<sup>15</sup> A text exists merely in the "here and now"<sup>16</sup> of each individual reading, and therefore, for Barthes,

we know that a text does not consist of a line of words, releasing a single "theological" meaning (the "message" of the Author-God), but is a space of many dimensions, in which are wedded and contested various kinds of writing, no one of which is original: the text is a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture. ... succeeding the Author, the writer no longer contains within himself passions, humors, sentiments, impressions, but that enormous dictionary, from which he derives a writing which can know no end or halt: life can only imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, a lost, infinitely remote imitation.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> As the critic E D Hirsch notes "we do not always understand by a text what we believe its author meant in composing it." 'Against Theory?' *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) p746.

<sup>14</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', published in *Aspen* 5 & 6 (1967) - this translation made by Richard Howard and available at <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes>, courtesy of UbuWeb at <http://ubu.com/>; the quote is from the beginning of the second paragraph.

<sup>15</sup> Op cit third paragraph.

<sup>16</sup> Op cit fourth paragraph.

<sup>17</sup> Op cit fifth paragraph.

Barthes himself makes clear reference here to the implications of this suggestion for religion: in his terms, theology requires “the Author-God” to insert His presence into a text, in a way that cannot in fact be achieved. Each reader at each reading constructs his or her own reading, and thus makes his or her own god. Revelation (if by this is implied the imparting by an author of a message or information to a reader) is impossible. All that the text can reveal is itself, its own infinite linguistic variety and possibility<sup>18</sup>.

The effect that this ‘exile’ of the author would have on Christianity lies at the basis of this thesis. Reading the Bible is a fundamental activity for Christians, and although there are many variations in attitude to the Bible within the various Christian denominations, the World Council of Churches asserts that “all Christians agree that Scripture holds a unique place in the shaping of Christian faith and practice”<sup>19</sup>. There are a variety of ways in which Christians conceive of God’s relation to the words of Scripture (such as direct Divine authorship, Divine inspiration of human writers), but whatever opinion is held, the idea that God communicates to His people through the Bible, is basic. Somehow, it is through the Bible that God addresses us, and is in turn addressed<sup>20</sup>.

The problem, then, that post-modernism as a general trend raises, is that if there is in fact no such thing as authorially-controlled meaning – if the meaning of a book or written utterance is indeterminate – then in what sense can Christians assert that God communicates to them through the Bible? If it is the reader that creates the meaning of a text, because the meaning of utterances is uncertain, and the author cannot be asked for clarification in their

---

<sup>18</sup> He addresses this implication again in his essay ‘From Work to Text’, published in *Image, Music, Text*, 1977, but also available on-line at <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/barthes05.htm>, courtesy of the Athenaeum Library of Philosophy available from the Evans Experientialism home page at <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/index.htm>: Barthes’s proposition 4 includes the following: “the work has nothing disturbing for any monistic philosophy ... ; for such a philosophy, plural is the Evil. Against the work, therefore, the text could well take as its motto the words of the man possessed by demons (Mark 5:9): ‘My name is Legion: for we are many’. The plural of demoniacal texture which opposes text to work can bring with it fundamental changes in reading, and precisely in areas where monologism appears to be the Law: certain of the ‘texts’ of Holy Scripture traditionally recuperated by theological monism (historical or anagogical) will perhaps offer themselves to a diffraction of meanings (finally, that is to say, to a materialist reading)”.

<sup>19</sup> World Council of Churches: *A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics* paragraph 37. Available through the WCC website at <http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/iv-interpretation-the-meaning-of-our-words-and-symbols/a-treasure-in-earthen-vessels-an-instrument-for-an-ecumenical-reflection-on-hermeneutics.html>

<sup>20</sup> As Bartholomew puts it, the Bible can be seen “as ‘the recording witness to God’s authority’.”: ‘Before Babel and After Pentecost: Language, Literature and Biblical Interpretation’, in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) p138

absence, is there not a danger that when Christians read the Bible, they are simply talking, by-and-large, to themselves<sup>21</sup>?

It is this allegation or problem that various theologians have sought to address, using a particular theory about how language works that appears to offer the possibility of countering this 'post-modern' view of meaning, or rather of the absence of meaning. The theory of language concerned is known as Speech Act theory, and it was first developed by the philosopher J L Austin. This thesis, then, is an examination of some of the ways in which various scholars have suggested that Speech Act theory can be profitably applied to hermeneutics in general and to Biblical hermeneutics in particular, as a way of overcoming the threat to the authority of the author over textual meaning. (It is interesting and perhaps even ironic to note that in the very essay by Barthes just cited as an instance of the destruction of the authorial idea, he himself adopts and utilises (albeit inaccurately) the same theory<sup>22</sup>).

There are various affinities and distinctions between the scholars who use Speech Act theory in this way, but they are united by their belief that Speech Act theory can, as a hermeneutic, provide a buttress to the idea of Scripture as God's self-revelation. Of particular, if sometimes unspoken, importance are the Reformation ideas of the 'plain sense of Scripture' – that the Bible needs no interpretation to be comprehensible; and that the Bible is itself sufficient to provide a knowledge of God leading to salvation (*sola scriptura*). Inherent in this is the idea that it is primarily and most importantly through Scripture that God reveals Himself 'unilaterally' to His readers and hearers<sup>23</sup>. The notions of 'the plain sense of scripture' and of 'the sufficiency of scripture alone' assume of necessity the idea that the author controls the meaning of their text.

However, even if these Reformation notions are not adopted, it cannot be denied that the post-modern dispersion of authorial meaning poses problems for Christianity. Irrespective of the extent to which it is asserted that Scripture requires a degree of interpretation, it is untenable to suppose that God could be entirely banished from the Bible: if there is within the Bible no element of Divine self-revelation, how could Christians claim to know anything about

---

<sup>21</sup> Or to their 'imaginary friend', in atheist parlance.

<sup>22</sup> "the modern writer (scriptor) is born simultaneously with his text: he is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now. This is because (or it follows that) to write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of "painting" ... but rather what the linguists, following the vocabulary of the Oxford school, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given to the first person and to the present), in which utterance has no other content than the act by which it is uttered: something like the I Command of kings or the I Sing of the early bards": Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', fourth paragraph.

<sup>23</sup> "Does the author's intention determine the meaning of a word, a sentence, or a text? That it does is the first premise of Reformation or evangelical hermeneutics": K J Vanhoozer, 'A Lamp in the Labyrinth: the Hermeneutics of "Aesthetic" Theology', *Trinity Journal* 8:1 (1987) p28.

God at all?<sup>24</sup> Conversely, if Speech Act theory can re-assert authorial control, it 'puts God back in charge' of Scripture and re-invigorates the belief that Scripture is indeed His self-revelation, even if *sola scriptura* is not adopted<sup>25</sup>.

Consequently, this thesis has three overlapping themes. The first is an examination of Speech Act theory itself, the second is an examination of the use of Speech Act theory as a textual hermeneutic (and specifically as a Biblical hermeneutic) and the third is to offer some reflections on the idea of revelation in a 'post-post-modern world', using other linguistic theories as a hermeneutic tool, by comparison with Speech Act theory.

At this point it should be acknowledged that Speech Act theory is not widely used in an 'undiluted' form as a theory of language, although it is still staunchly defended by its principal contemporary adherent John Searle, Slusser Professor of Philosophy at the University of California Berkeley, who has significantly developed and altered the theory as first conceived by J L Austin, and who has been generally regarded as having inherited Austin's "mantle"<sup>26</sup>. It has however also been adopted or adapted by a number of other academics, who have revised and developed related ideas of their own, in dialogue with and sometimes in opposition to Austin and Searle. Among these should certainly be included H Paul Grice, William P Alston, and François Recanati<sup>27</sup>.

Grice began his work at St John's College, Oxford but moved to University of California Berkeley in 1967 and remained there until he died in 1988. His contribution to speech act theory owes little to Austin, and his work has often been used to complement that of Austin and Searle. His most significant work on language and meaning was collected as *Studies in the Way of Words*<sup>28</sup> after his death. He does not focus on Speech acts or on illocutions<sup>29</sup> as concepts, but instead proposed the idea that meaning is a matter of "implicatures" –

---

<sup>24</sup> "Reformation hermeneutics thus presupposes realism in the realm of meaning. In other words, meaning is held to be "out there", independent of the mind's perception of it, waiting to be uncovered. But ... modern philosophy, historiography, and literary criticism are increasingly putting such a "realism" of meaning into question": Vanhoozer, 'A Lamp in the Labyrinth: the Hermeneutics of "Aesthetic" Theology' op cit p28. "The Christian theologian, however, cannot accept the premise of the death of the author": ibid p53.

<sup>25</sup> "The speech act theory of John Searle is admirably suited to meet our call for an ethics of language and literature": Vanhoozer, 'A Lamp in the Labyrinth: the Hermeneutics of "Aesthetic" Theology' op cit p54.

<sup>26</sup> H C White, 'Introduction: Speech Act theory and Literary Criticism', *Semeia 41: Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p1.

<sup>27</sup> It should also be noted that part of the conclusion of the Radio 4 programme 'In our Time' presented by Melvyn Bragg on 'Ordinary Language Philosophy' on the 7<sup>th</sup> of November 2013 and available through the BBC radio website, was that reports of the death of ordinary language philosophy in general have been greatly exaggerated! Programme available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03ggc19>

<sup>28</sup> Cambridge Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1991

<sup>29</sup> Which will be explained shortly

implications which speakers and listeners appropriately infer or imply in relation to utterances.

This thesis will not make any significant reference to Grice's work, because my primary focus is on the particular speech act known as the illocution, which will be described in the next section, and which is not a concept Grice employs. However, I will make plain here that I don't believe that the principles of language use Grice suggests in any way describe or help us to understand any actual linguistic or social behaviour, being far too simplistic and 'one-note'. I certainly don't believe that they have any 'predictive' usefulness. They relate to intention or meaning only as a rather elaborate byzantine superstructure with a tenuous 'post-facto' connection to the past events they describe.

As Max Black suggests, while commenting on Grice's developments of his initial formula, the theory is

both indefinitely pliable and incorrigibly rigid: rigid in its tenacious adherence to the intention-to-produce-in-the-hearer-certain-effects; pliable in its capacity to count any consequence of an act of communication as a case of the speaker's intending to produce *that* effect. ... It will always be possible to attach the intention operator to the *p* [the desired state-of-affairs] in question and thereby to ascribe to the agent a corresponding intention. But as soon as one perceives how automatic the adjustment is, one begins to wonder whether anything more is achieved than the invocation of a fictitious intention, bound to fit the refractory exceptions.<sup>30</sup>

He goes on later to suggest that Grice's theory "begins to look like some system of epicycles, infinitely adaptable, but showing less about the ostensible object of analysis than about the ingenuity of its creator" and refers in a footnote to the comparable fate of the 'Principle of Verifiability' which has "faded away" notwithstanding the "revisionary resourcefulness of its defenders"<sup>31</sup>. I am of a like mind with Black in this respect, and do not propose to discuss Grice's work in more detail.

William Alston finally published the fruits of his own long-term interest in Speech Act theory in *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*<sup>32</sup> nine years before his death in 2009. He does use the concept of the illocution, and thus his work has a slightly greater link to this thesis than does Grice's. However I do not devote a great deal of space specifically to Alston's work either. This is partly because Alston admits to a conception of meaning as being potential alone

---

<sup>30</sup> M Black, 'Meaning and Intention: An Examination of Grice's Views', *New Literary History* 4:2 (1973) 267. The words in [ ] are my own, which I have inserted for ease of understanding.

<sup>31</sup> Op cit p268 and footnote 27. For merely one example of this in action, I would refer to p47 of D Vanderveken's 'Universal Grammar and Speech Act Theory', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series* 77 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>32</sup> (Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 2000)

(‘language idling’, to use Wittgenstein’s phrase)<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, his ideas can have no relationship whatever to anything any speaker has ever actually *done*, and he appears unaware of the always-potential difference between what I say (or think) I have done, and what everyone agrees that I did: or in other words between intention and meaning. He is committed to the idea that meaning exists axiomatically in the dictionary, and while this has at least an initial plausibility in respect of individual words, it is simply inadequate (I will contend) in respect of sentences<sup>34</sup>.

It is also the case that the tendency to regard illocutions as a descriptive category, rather than a predictive one, runs throughout Alston’s work. I discuss this tendency in general briefly in chapter three of this thesis: I will simply say here that if illocutions are by-and-large a way of describing what *was* done, rather than what *must/will/could* or *should* be done, then they are simply a rather long-winded and highly convoluted way of talking about types of linguistic usage, and tend to confuse rather than illuminate.

François Recanati was born in 1952 and has since 1979 been a Research Director at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) in Paris. In addition to many articles, his books include *Meaning and Force; the Pragmatics of Performative Utterances*<sup>35</sup>, *Oratio Obliqua, Oratio Recta*<sup>36</sup>, and *Literal Meaning*<sup>37</sup>. His own views have evolved, and in for example *Literal Meaning* he scarcely mentions illocutions or any other of the Austinian types of speech act.

In that work he notes that the earlier antagonism between semantics (“the formal study of meaning and truth-conditions” in a language) and pragmatics (“the study of language in use”<sup>38</sup>) has evolved into a dispute between “literalism” which he regards as the “dominant position” and “contextualism”; or in other words between a view that ascribes “truth-conditional content to natural language *sentences*” as they might be found in a

---

<sup>33</sup> Alston asserts that “the fact that an expression has a certain meaning is what enables it ... to be used in a distinctive way in communication”, whereas it is in fact the other way round, as Wittgenstein famously suggested – ‘if you want to know the meaning, look for the use’. For Alston, however “the meaning of the sentence is all that the hearer need know about the language in order to interpret the utterance”: *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* p149.

<sup>34</sup> He suggests that “to specify the illocutionary act performed is to specify the *speaker meaning* of that utterance”: W P Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2000) p161. By contrast, I agree with J Margolis that “all talk of the speaker’s intentions or of his intentions to cause a certain effect are entirely otiose, and to speak of explaining the meaning of his utterances in terms of his intention is nothing but a redundant formulation for speaking of explaining the meaning of his utterance – unless it is to speak of an ulterior and occasional qualification by means of a speaker’s intention of a (usually) meaningful utterance”: J Margolis, ‘Meaning, Speakers’ Intentions, and Speech Acts’, *The Review of Metaphysics* 26:4 (1973) 685. This question is discussed in chapter four of this thesis.

<sup>35</sup> Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987

<sup>36</sup> Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2000

<sup>37</sup> Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

<sup>38</sup> *Literal Meaning* op cit p2



dictionary, and one which “holds that speech acts are the primary bearers of content”<sup>39</sup>, so that it is what speakers do that matters not what the grammar and ‘rules’ of the language might suggest or seem to permit.

I agree with Recanati’s view that ‘contextualism’ is a better option than ‘literalism’, but Recanati does not ‘go far enough’: he still believes that “what is said (the truth-conditional content of the utterance) is nothing but an aspect of speaker’s meaning”<sup>40</sup> and I do not agree, as will become clear. This overly speaker-centred view, which is – as I will show – by no means unique to Recanati, is one that he has held over the course of much of his work: in *Meaning and Force* he refers to Austin’s definition of illocutions and suggests that “an utterance’s ‘illocutionary force’ is the intention manifested by the speaker to perform a certain illocutionary act by means of his utterance”<sup>41</sup>. This reference to intention is incorrect, both as a description of Austin’s own theory, and as a description of meaning and action, as I will demonstrate over the course of this thesis.

As with Alston, I do not discuss Recanati’s work in any detail. This is because I believe that both of them, and indeed many other theorists, have the wrong view of meaning and intention, and misunderstand the difficulties inherent in Austin’s own work, of which Austin himself was I think aware. As a result, both Alston and Recanati rely far too easily on the identification of illocutions with intention. My approach to meaning is so far removed from that of Alston and Recanati, that if I have, by the end of this thesis, demonstrated the appropriateness of my view, their dictionary-based and speaker/intention-centred views will not be regarded as tenable<sup>42</sup>.

The reasons for examining so thoroughly Speech Act theory as Austin first proposed it are not because it is of mainstream significance in the philosophy of language, but because it is so central to the hermeneutic approach to the Bible under discussion in this thesis. Also, since Austin’s own suggestions have been adopted and considered not merely by advocates of a stable authorial meaning, but also by those who identify in his work exactly opposite implications, the enormously wide divergence of views as to the implications of what Austin suggested make it advisable to examine the source itself.

---

<sup>39</sup> *Literal Meaning* op cit p3

<sup>40</sup> *Literal Meaning* op cit p4

<sup>41</sup> *Meaning and Force* op cit p10

<sup>42</sup> Alston for example notes that: “my concept deals with language, not with speech. Moreover, in speaking of sentence meaning I am concerned with *linguistic* meaning – the meaning possessed by units of language, where a language is an abstract structure that is employed by people in speech – in contrast to ‘speaker meaning’, what a speaker means by what he said, and in contrast to ‘utterance meaning’, the meaning to be ascribed to particular utterances or sentence ‘tokens’, if, indeed, there is a coherent concept of this latter that is distinct from speaker meaning”: W P Alston, ‘Illocutionary acts and Linguistic meaning’, in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994).

In his introduction to the *Semeia* volume concentrating on Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism, H C White notes that there are “various ways of appropriating aspects of speech act theory”, and identifies these as being

a sharply circumscribed application which attempts to keep strictly within the terms of the thought of Austin and Searle ...; a use which extends the original theory to deal with certain problems unique to literary theory often utilizing the thought of another major speech act philosopher, (Paul Grice) ...; and a third approach which emphasizes, more generally, the performative dimension of language as such, and rests largely upon views which arose independent of the work of Austin.<sup>43</sup>

The Biblical scholars whose work is examined in this thesis have largely adopted the first policy. This is because it is one specific aspect of speech act theory that is attractive to them: the illocution<sup>44</sup>. The other ways of adopting a ‘speech act attitude’ listed by White, do not focus specifically on this aspect, and are consequently not of such interest for them<sup>45</sup>. In general, however, it is this ‘Austin-lite’ theory that is more attractive to literary critics, which can lead to problems, as discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

As a philosophy of language, Speech Act theory has proved controversial in application, particularly in its ‘Austin-Searle’ guise. Some of the problems with its use as a theory of language are mentioned by Edda Weigand, in reviews of the collection of essays *Foundations of Speech Act theory*<sup>46</sup> and of Marina Sbisà’s

---

<sup>43</sup> *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p4.

<sup>44</sup> “If the text is a speech act, it seems as far-fetched to separate an author from his language and literature as it does an agent from his action. The author “belongs” to his text. He is responsible for his illocutionary acts. Author-ity designates the right – indeed, the obligation – of the author to be held responsible for his speech act. And if the author is accountable for this speech act, surely the reader is responsible for treating the author in a way that he deserves. Wilfully to misinterpret a text is akin to attributing an action to the author that he did not commit. In combining intention *and* convention, speaker meaning *and* sentence meaning, speech act theory is able to preserve the emphasis on the present form of a text while at the same time preserving a normative role for the author and his author-ity. With speech act theory, the author has begun to rediscover his voice”: K J Vanhoozer, ‘A Lamp in the Labyrinth: the Hermeneutics of “Aesthetic” Theology’ op cit p55.

<sup>45</sup> For a fuller outline of the relationship between speech act theory and Biblical criticism up to 2001, see Richard Briggs’s excellent ‘The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation’, *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 9 (2001)

<sup>46</sup> E Weigand, ‘The State of the Art in Speech Act Theory (Review Article of S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)’ in *Pragmatics and Cognition* 4 (1996) 367-406. Her impatience with many of the contributors to that work is almost tangible, and in particular she accuses them of concentrating on a philosophical and abstract idea of language, of ignoring the work of linguists, and omitting the fact that natural language is dialogic and expressed in use. Perhaps somewhat over-optimistically, she proclaims “Speech act theory based on truth-values has come to an end ... There has to be a new beginning ...” (p377).

*Linguaggio, ragione, interazione*<sup>47</sup>, where she identifies that “many linguists ... have for a long time now prophesied a crisis for, and the end of, speech act theory”<sup>48</sup>. I also am inclined to agree with Dorothea Franck’s objection that

even if we assume that every utterance could unanimously be classified by speakers of the language – if asked – this does not imply that such a procedure is a necessary part of the speaker’s intentions or the hearer’s way of interpreting. If we look through all the expressions which are in use, whenever people discuss ongoing or past verbal communications, speech act notions do in fact occur, but also a great number of other sorts of categorization are used. The number of ways in which a given speech event can be described seems almost infinite ... What makes speech acts so special?<sup>49</sup>

Once again, I stress that the time taken in this thesis to discuss the work of J L Austin at some length is not based on a belief that Speech Act theory is necessarily useful as a theory of language, but because it is proposed as a Biblical hermeneutic, in answer to a real hermeneutical problem that requires addressing. It is necessary that this thesis consider some of the drawbacks to Speech Act theory as a philosophy of language, in the course of examining it as a hermeneutic tool. For the moment, however, it is enough to recognise that Speech Act theory is not necessarily a widely-used tool in general philosophy or literary criticism, but has been recently and consistently proposed as particularly a Biblical hermeneutic, as will shortly be demonstrated<sup>50</sup>.

## **2. A Brief Introduction to Speech Act theory:** **2a: The Background to the theory**

Before embarking on a more detailed discussion of these themes, however, some background information is doubtless necessary, primarily about Speech Act theory itself. The theory was proposed by the White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford University, J L Austin. Austin was by general agreement an immensely charismatic lecturer and tutor, who had a considerable influence on his students<sup>51</sup>. However, he died (in 1960) before he had formulated his

---

<sup>47</sup> E Weigand, ‘Review of M Sbisà, *Linguaggio, ragione, interazione. Per una teoria pragmatica degli atti linguistici* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989),’ *Journal of Pragmatics* 20:4 (1993) p385-390.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid p390.

<sup>49</sup> D Franck, ‘Speaking about Speech Acts’, *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) p91. See also C G New’s objection to ‘Ordinary language’: ‘A Plea for Linguistics’, in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 148-165.

<sup>50</sup> A detailed examination of what Austin himself said (and wrote) will also prove instructive for a consideration of issues of intention and what it is to perform any action, as well as the apparently simpler question of how we determine what a text means. To understand the hermeneutical use to which it is proposed to put Speech Act theory, it is necessary to understand the theory.

<sup>51</sup> See for example G J Warnock ‘John Langshaw Austin, a Biographical Sketch’ in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, p14-15, Sir Isaiah Berlin, ‘Austin and the Early Beginnings of Oxford Philosophy’ in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973), or H Paul Grice ‘Conceptual Analysis

theory for publication. He had, though, outlined his approach to language in various lectures and lecture tours and these, together with other articles and reviews, were collected and published after his death, most notably in *Philosophical Papers*<sup>52</sup> and *How to do things with Words*<sup>53</sup> (hereafter *How To*). The latter work, which contains the drafts of the William James Lectures that Austin gave at Harvard University in 1955, represents his most systematic account of his philosophy of language.

In order to understand the impact of Austin's theory of language it is necessary first of all to understand its context. At the time when Austin was lecturing, the dominant philosophy of language in England was that propounded by A J Ayer, whose *Language, Truth and Logic*<sup>54</sup>, first published in 1936, remained the principal context for all linguistic philosophy into the 1950's: the eighth impression of the second edition was published in 1951, and there had been a new impression of the second edition annually since it was first published in 1946.

Ayer expounded a version of what was called the 'Logical Positivism' of the 'Vienna Circle' of philosophers. In the preface to the first edition he himself noted that "the views which are put forward in this treatise derive from the doctrines of Bertrand Russell and Wittgenstein, which are themselves the logical outcome of the empiricism of Berkeley and David Hume"<sup>55</sup>. His approach was most notable for "the principle of verification"<sup>56</sup>, which Ayer described as being "supposed to furnish a criterion by which it can be determined whether or not a sentence is literally meaningful. A simple way to formulate it would be to say that a sentence had literal meaning if and only if the proposition it expressed was either analytic or empirically verifiable."<sup>57</sup>

He goes on to assert, in the introduction to the second edition, in which he slightly revised his theory, that by verifiable he means "that a statement is directly verifiable if it is either itself an observation-statement, or is such that in conjunction with one or more observation-statements it entails at least one observation-statement which is not deducible from these other premises alone"<sup>58</sup>: statements may also be indirectly verifiable on similar grounds. Analytic statements are those which "do not make any assertion about the

---

and the Province of Philosophy', in his *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1989), where he refers to Austin's "Playgroup" – see p181.

<sup>52</sup> Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979, Third Edition.

<sup>53</sup> Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970 (edited by J O Urmson). All subsequent references are to this edition, and not to the second edition of the work published in 1975 and edited by M Sbisà and J O Urmson (Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA), unless specifically stated otherwise (as *How To* 2).

<sup>54</sup> London, Victor Gollancz, 1951.

<sup>55</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p31

<sup>56</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* Introduction to the Second edition p5.

<sup>57</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p5

<sup>58</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p13

empirical world, but simply record our determination to use symbols in a certain fashion” such as the statements of pure mathematics or logic<sup>59</sup>.

Ayer seeks to prove that metaphysical statements are “neither true nor false but literally senseless”<sup>60</sup>:

I take it to be characteristic of the metaphysician, in my somewhat pejorative sense of the term, not only that his statements do not describe anything that is capable, even in principle, of being observed, but also that no dictionary is provided by means of which they can be transformed into statements that are directly or indirectly verifiable.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, one of his assumptions is that for language to be meaningful, it has to be essentially descriptive, such that it could either be true or false. Although he recognizes that there are other uses of the word ‘meaning’ than this sort, which Ayer calls ‘literal meaning’, nonetheless he asserts that unless a statement “satisfied the principle of verification, it would not be capable of being understood in the sense in which either scientific hypotheses or common-sense statements are habitually understood.”<sup>62</sup> Every statement, if it is literally meaningful, “expresses a genuine proposition about a matter of fact”<sup>63</sup>.

It is this assertion that Austin sets out to question<sup>64</sup>. He points out firstly that most uses of language are not, contrary to what Ayer assumes, descriptive. In general, when we speak, or make “common-sense statements”<sup>65</sup>, we are not simply describing things in such a way that our statements could be true or false. Instead, we are using language to perform actions, and to engage in continuing dialogues with others. Language is not, primarily, used to describe, and is therefore not primarily analysable as being either true or false.

Thus, according to Austin, Ayer is not describing actual or ‘ordinary’ language in *Language, Truth and Logic*, but rather some sort of rarefied ‘statement-making’, philosophical language, far removed from the language we use every day to order meals, arrange dates, and buy tickets. Moreover, as Austin goes on to show, not merely is most language not descriptive or propositional, but in fact even the sort of language that *is* propositional or ‘statement-making’,

---

<sup>59</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p31

<sup>60</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p31

<sup>61</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p 14

<sup>62</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p 16. There is of course an interesting comparison here with what Mikael Stenmark refers to as ‘Scientism’: the approach to philosophy of scholars like Richard Dawkins.

<sup>63</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p 35

<sup>64</sup> See also his introduction to his talk on the BBC in 1956, a transcript of which was published as ‘Performative Utterances’ in *Philosophical Papers* op cit, p233-234.

<sup>65</sup> *Language, Truth and Logic* p 16.

which Austin calls “constative”<sup>66</sup>, even this language is also in fact active as opposed to merely descriptive.

In almost every case of actual language-use, according to Austin, something is being achieved or done; an act is being performed. Hence, he coined the phrase “performative”, and spoke of actions performed simply by using words in the right circumstances<sup>67</sup>: hence the term ‘speech acts’, coined by others to describe the theory. Interestingly, particularly in view of the fact that Ayer cites him as an inspiration, Ludwig Wittgenstein was working on his own *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>68</sup>, along many of the same lines as Austin, at the same time<sup>69</sup>. Both Wittgenstein’s later work, and Austin’s, are a response to Logical Positivism and to Ayer’s view of language.

Thus the fundamental insight which underlies Speech Act theory is that speaking is an action and a performance<sup>70</sup>, rather than simply a report or a description of factual states of affairs, and that spoken utterances are thus not, or not merely, true or false, but are also actions which effect changes in states of affairs. Austin gives as examples expressions such as ‘I bet’ or ‘I promise’, and he observes that these expressions are not in fact statements or descriptions, but are the actual performance of the act of, as it might be, betting or promising<sup>71</sup>.

In *How to do things with Words*, Austin examines from a number of angles the fact that language is used to do various things, and after a number of ‘false starts’, (including the putative constative-performative divide) he proposes the existence of a number of specific categories of performative actions using language: these are the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. Since these three kinds of speech act will be of some importance later, it is necessary to briefly outline them now.

---

<sup>66</sup> *How To* p3

<sup>67</sup> *How To* p6

<sup>68</sup> Hereafter *Phil Inv*

<sup>69</sup> Although Austin and Wittgenstein were apparently too different in style and approach to co-operate: G J Warnock ‘John Langshaw Austin, a Biographical Sketch’ in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969, p11

<sup>70</sup> However, there is a point to Cerf’s objection that in describing things done with words as ‘performances’ Austin is not quite using ‘ordinary language’, nor does it sit entirely comfortably with Austin’s views on ‘parasitic’ performing – see Chapter 2 of this thesis (and W Cerf, ‘Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words’, in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p360).

<sup>71</sup> *How To* p5ff

**A Brief Introduction to Speech Act theory:  
2b: Locutions, Illocutions and Perlocutions**

Austin suggests that all utterances (except those he has already reserved as 'etiologies' and the like<sup>72</sup>, which are utterances that are for Austin "parasitic" upon 'normal usage'<sup>73</sup>) are a combination of phonetic<sup>74</sup>, phatic<sup>75</sup> and rhetic<sup>76</sup> acts. When performed as rhetic acts, they have a meaning defined as being composed of their sense and reference. Austin suggests that "the act of 'saying something'" in its "full normal sense"<sup>77</sup> includes the act of uttering phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts, and this 'act of saying something' he calls "the performance of a locutionary act"<sup>78</sup>, which is "roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference"<sup>79</sup>. Thus, to utter a 'normal sentence' that makes sense, is to perform a locutionary act.

However, in addition to meaning conceived as sense and reference, many utterances are also, according to Austin, examples of a specific way of using language with "force"<sup>80</sup>: illocutionary acts are "utterances which have a certain (conventional) force"<sup>81</sup>, or are "the performance of an act *in* saying something"<sup>82</sup> as opposed to the locutionary act which is a "performance of an act *of* saying something"<sup>83</sup>.

As Austin later observes, there seems in fact to be in practice no such thing as a pure locutionary act<sup>84</sup>, since all acts of language appear to be a performance of an act in saying something, and this seems to be a virtually ever-present aspect of the meaning of utterances in use. The question of 'how our utterance ought

---

<sup>72</sup> *How To* p92 footnote 1.

<sup>73</sup> This exception will be discussed in detail in chapter two of this thesis, in relation to Derrida's criticism of Austin.

<sup>74</sup> "the act of uttering certain noises"; a "phone". *How To* p92

<sup>75</sup> "the act of uttering certain vocables or words, i.e. noises of certain types belonging to *and as* belonging to a certain vocabulary, in a certain construction" etc; a "pheme". *How To* p92

<sup>76</sup> "the act of using that pheme or its constituents with a certain more or less definite 'sense' and a more or less definite 'reference' (which together are equivalent to 'meaning')"; a "rheme". *How To* p92-93

<sup>77</sup> *How To* p94

<sup>78</sup> *How To* p94

<sup>79</sup> *How To* p108, and which presumably lies at the heart not merely of illocutionary acts and perlocutionary acts but also other acts in language such as insinuation, swearing or poetry.

<sup>80</sup> *How To* p99

<sup>81</sup> *How To* p108

<sup>82</sup> *How To* p99

<sup>83</sup> *How To* p99

<sup>84</sup> "in general the locutionary act as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech act is both. (This is similar to the way in which the phatic act, the rhetic act, &c, are mere abstractions)": *How To* p146. Max Black concurs: 'Austin on Performatives' in K T Fann (ed.), *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 410, as does John Searle: 'Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973) p149: "every locutionary act is an illocutionary act".

to be taken', of its force in any situation, is as central to the practical aspect of the meaning of utterances as the perhaps more easily abstracted 'sense' and 'reference'. It is thus – as L J Cohen argues in *Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?*<sup>85</sup> – part of the usual meaning of the word 'meaning' in this context<sup>86</sup>.

It might, then, be fair to regard the locution in Austin's theory as a necessary abstraction rather than a practical, existent part of speech. Any act that is actually performed will by definition be an illocution (or perhaps a perlocution): as Austin notes "to perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and *eo ipso* to perform an *illocutionary* act."<sup>87</sup> Thus Austin establishes the idea of a locutionary language act with sense and reference, which is purely conceptual, and an illocutionary act, with sense and reference and force. This illocutionary act is the most important and most debated single concept Austin suggested.

Austin also suggests, however, that there is a third category of language act: the perlocution. With regard to this distinction between perlocutions and illocutions Austin himself observed that this one "seems likeliest to give trouble"<sup>88</sup>. Both are, unlike the locutionary act, performative acts, since they can be performed, and have force (unlike the locution, which has no force, and is not 'real').

---

<sup>85</sup> L J Cohen, 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) pp118-137.

<sup>86</sup> "When you say 'I protest', you are not describing your protest nor reporting it. You are just protesting. If your utterance is to be assigned a meaning of any kind, this meaning must be of a performative kind. The meaning lies solely in the making of the protest... It is thus clear that wherever explicitly performative expressions are used, the illocutionary force, if such a thing exists at all, cannot be distinguished from the meaning.

"But even where explicitly performative expressions do not occur the term 'illocutionary force' turns out to be just as otiose. After all, if the utterance 'Your haystack is on fire' gives a warning that is rendered explicit by 'I warn you that your haystack is on fire', and if the warning is part of the meaning of the latter utterance, it is hardly unreasonable to suppose that the warning is also part of the former utterance's meaning, though inexplicitly so": 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?' p122-123. Searle agrees with him: 'Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973) p154. However, Margolis does not: in 'Meaning, Speakers' Intentions, and Speech Acts', *The Review of Metaphysics* 26:4 (1973) he believes that "merely to restore the distinction between act and utterance, however, outflanks Cohen's criticism" (p691) because he believes that Cohen uses the term 'utterance' to cover "both act and what is produced" (690). To which, I suspect Cohen would reply: isn't 'what is produced' the act: how can they be distinguished, except by regarding the act as an entirely 'interior' and 'intention-based' phenomenon, which concept Austin opposes?

<sup>87</sup> *How To* p98

<sup>88</sup> *How To* p109. P N Campbell, in his 'A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Acts', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) 284-296, notes the interesting fact that for the most part, Austin's prediction has not been borne out in subsequent studies, most of which have concentrated on the locutionary – illocutionary distinction, and ignored the illocutionary – perlocutionary one. This distinction, and the reasons why it is less often discussed, is the subject of chapter five of this thesis.



## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Austin suggests that while the illocutionary act is the “performance of an act *in* saying something”<sup>89</sup>, the perlocutionary act is initially distinguished from it by being an act that is intended by its enactor to be a *consequence* of a locutionary or illocutionary act. The perlocutionary act, however, is not effective ‘directly’ or by convention, cannot be guaranteed, and can only be reported on by the recipients:

saying something will often, or even normally, produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons: and it may be done with the design, intention or purpose of producing them; and we may then say, thinking of this, that the speaker has performed an act in the nomenclature of which reference is made either {as in ‘he persuaded me to shoot her’} only obliquely, or even {as in ‘he got me to (or made me, & c) shoot her’} not at all, to the performance of the locutionary or illocutionary act.<sup>90</sup>

We could say, in describing a perlocutionary act, ‘I attempted to persuade’ (or ‘I persuaded’; past tense), or ‘I attempted to get him to shoot’, but we could not say ‘I persuade’ in the first person present, or even ‘I insult you’. The illocutionary act is performed in saying, on the basis of conventions. The perlocutionary act (as described<sup>91</sup>) would seem to be only performed in hearing and responding. Austin is subsequently insistent that while the illocutionary act is conventional and predictable in its occurrences, the perlocution is neither: “clearly *any*, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever”.<sup>92</sup>

Although they are only introduced about half way through his series of lectures, in Lecture Eight, it is these three speech acts that have been of most interest generally to followers of Austin, and in particular the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. For those who seek to find in Speech Act theory a useful Biblical hermeneutic, it is the illocutionary act that is most attractive and useful, because it is the one which seems to present a conceptual vehicle to explain and support the idea that the meaning of an utterance or phrase resides in the nexus of the author, their intention, and the words spoken,

---

<sup>89</sup> *How To* p99

<sup>90</sup> *How To* p101, where the words in { } are Austin’s own definitions to which he referred using shorthand nomenclature, and which I have inserted for ease of understanding.

<sup>91</sup> It is noteworthy that Austin is here imagining a conversational, dialogic context – this is suggestive in the context of weaknesses in the theory which will be discussed in subsequent chapters

<sup>92</sup> *How To* p109. There is, of course, as Austin will subsequently demonstrate, no such thing as a straightforward constative, nor is there any way of distinguishing constative and performative utterances on the grounds that one is a doing of something and the other is not. However, the fact that Austin will subsequently abandon the performative-constative distinction does not prevent him retaining the illocutionary-perlocutionary one. The implication here again is clearly that only illocutions are performative.

rather than in the uncertainty and particularity of the reception by an audience of the phrase heard.

The concept of the illocution as Austin outlines it, particularly in its distinction from the perlocution, provides a conceptual vehicle to embody the assumption that meaning is 'transmitted' by an illocutionary phrase from speaker to hearer, rather than constructed in being heard. The illocution allows for the perpetuation of, and relies for its intelligibility upon, an underlying assumption that meaning is, as it were, 'begotten not created'<sup>93</sup>, and thus represents an example of the 'sender' view of meaning, a concept I discuss in detail later in this thesis. The concept of the illocution is used because it appears to 'outflank' or contradict the idea of the death of the author, and restores to them an authority over meaning.

### 3. Uses of Speech Act theory as a hermeneutic.<sup>94</sup>

The first person to suggest that Speech Act theory had potentially interesting or useful applications for biblical hermeneutics was Donald Evans, in his *The Logic of Self-Involvement*<sup>95</sup>, published in 1963. Evans had studied under Austin and developed Austin's theory in some respects, suggesting that it had relevance as a philosophy of language and as a tool to aid in Biblical exegesis. His use of Speech Act theory was in turn taken up by Anthony Thiselton, who gave new impetus to attempts to use it in Biblical hermeneutics. Thiselton initially referred to Austin's work in his article "The Parables as Language Event"<sup>96</sup>. He elaborated on this suggestion in further articles, notably "The Use of philosophical Categories in New Testament Hermeneutics"<sup>97</sup> and "The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings"<sup>98</sup>, and particularly in his magisterial overview of Hermeneutics as it relates to issues of reading the Bible, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*<sup>99</sup>, published in 1992. His work, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*<sup>100</sup>, published in 2007, also refers to the theory.

---

<sup>93</sup> Adopting the words of the last line of the second verse of the Christmas carol *Adeste, Fideles*, translated from the Latin by Frederick Oakley and others as *O Come, all ye faithful*, which is, of course, a version of the affirmation in the Nicene Creed which, in its modern English translation affirms that "We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, ... begotten not made": the difference being between that which is a creation of the Divine (made), such that there was a time when it did not exist, and that which is Divine in its essence, generated but eternal (hence "eternally begotten"). For the Word, the purpose is to affirm His essential Divinity as opposed to a 'creatureliness'; for meaning, it expresses the difference between that which is made in the moment of recognition, and that which is pre-existent in the mind of the agent, begotten there and then 'sent out'.

<sup>94</sup> For a slightly more detailed account of some of the same territory, see R Briggs 'The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation', op cit.

<sup>95</sup> London, SCM Press, 1963.

<sup>96</sup> *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23:4 (1970): 437-468, where he refers also to Evans.

<sup>97</sup> *The Churchman* 87:2 (1973): 87-100

<sup>98</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 25:2 (1974)

<sup>99</sup> London, Marshall Pickering, 1992

<sup>100</sup> Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.

Thiselton's themes have been taken up by Richard Briggs who, in a work which began as a Doctoral thesis supervised by Thiselton, re-examined the use of Speech Act theory in Biblical hermeneutics, and Evans's *Logic of Self-Involvement*, in his book *Words in Action*<sup>101</sup> published in 2001. Briggs has also written a useful introduction to the use of Speech Act theory in Biblical hermeneutics under the entry for Speech Act theory in the *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*<sup>102</sup>, edited by Kevin Vanhoozer.

As Briggs notes in this entry, Speech Act theory has also been adopted, although in a slightly different 'key', by Kevin Vanhoozer and Timothy Ward. Vanhoozer has not come to Speech Act theory through Evans and is particularly interested in using Speech Act theory in an attempt to recover a notion of 'authorial intention' against attacks on the concept by Derrida and others. This is the concern of his suggestively-titled *Is there a meaning in this text?*<sup>103</sup> (hereafter referred to as *Is There?*), published in 1998. He is followed in this by Ward, whose *Word and Supplement*<sup>104</sup>, published in 2002, began life as a Doctoral thesis supervised by Vanhoozer, and who follows Vanhoozer in the use he makes of Speech Act theory, although the specific focus of his work is the concept of *sola scriptura*. Vanhoozer, like Thiselton, continues to refer to speech acts in his work *The Drama of Doctrine*<sup>105</sup> although here, as in Thiselton's own work on Doctrine, Biblical hermeneutics plays a lesser role.

There have also been a number of Speech-Act analyses of various Biblical texts, for example *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An Analysis of 1 John* by Dietmar Neufeld<sup>106</sup>; *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* by Jim W Adams<sup>107</sup>; *Hearing Mark's Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory* by Bridget Gilfillan Upton<sup>108</sup>; *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* by D J A Clines<sup>109</sup>, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self* by T Polk<sup>110</sup>, and *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman: A Speech Act reading of John 4:1-42* by J Eugene Botha<sup>111</sup>. The approaches of some of these works, and the usefulness of the part played in them by Speech Act theory will be addressed in chapter three of this thesis.

---

<sup>101</sup> Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2001. It is subtitled *Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation*

<sup>102</sup> London, SPCK, 2005. p763.

<sup>103</sup> Leicester, Apollos, 1998. Hereafter abbreviated to *Is There?*

<sup>104</sup> Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>105</sup> *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic approach to Christian Theology*, (Louisville KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)

<sup>106</sup> *Biblical Interpretation Series volume 7* (eds.) R A Culpepper and R Rendtorff (Leiden, E J Brill 1994).

<sup>107</sup> *Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 448* (New York, T&T Clark, 2006).

<sup>108</sup> *Biblical Interpretation Series Volume 79*, (Leiden, Brill, 2006).

<sup>109</sup> (*JSOT Supplement Series 1*), (JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1983).

<sup>110</sup> (*JSOT Supplement Series 32*), (JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1984).

<sup>111</sup> (Leiden, E J Brill, 1991).

Richard Briggs and Donald Evans, as well as Anthony Thiselton, have also used Speech Act theory for specific exegetical work, as well as making points about Speech Act theory's general hermeneutical usefulness. This thesis will not, for reasons which I hope will become obvious, employ Speech Act theory as a specific hermeneutical tool. Instead, I will concentrate, particularly in the later chapters of the thesis, on the theory's usefulness for a 'reconceptualization' of hermeneutics, and in particular on the role Speech Act theory plays in defending a particular concept of revelation.

As Briggs notes in his article 'The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation'<sup>112</sup>;

the various types of communicative situation relevant to biblical interpretation can be grouped into two broad categories: those where the communication takes place within the narrative world of the biblical text ... and those where the communication takes place between the author and the reader, or the narrator and the reader. To my mind this distinction corresponds roughly to that noted by Buss concerning whether speech-act theory is a tool for exegesis (i.e. relating to speech acts within the narrative world), or whether it is part of the reconceptualisation of exegesis (concerning how a reader is acted upon by the speech acts of the text).<sup>113</sup>

Although writing from the point of view of Biblical hermeneutics, Ward and Vanhoozer are both interested in the implications of Speech Act theory for hermeneutics in general. In their concern for the identity of the agent, they share an interest with Nicholas Wolterstorff, although his interest in Speech Act theory and agency, expressed in the Wilde Lectures at Oxford University in 1993 and published as *Divine discourse*<sup>114</sup> in 1995, is distinctive.

Wolterstorff is more concerned with what is meant by the phrase 'God speaks' than with Biblical hermeneutics *per se*, and his work is not discussed in any detail in this thesis<sup>115</sup>. However, the illocution as a category is integral to his thesis, which accordingly stands or falls with the plausibility of the illocution, a concept which he nevertheless does not discuss in any detail. All of these

---

<sup>112</sup> R S Briggs, 'The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation', *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 9 (2001)

<sup>113</sup> Op cit. p237 - although I would rather see the "reconceptualisation of exegesis" as concerning 'how a reader and the text-act interrelate', than "how a reader is acted upon by the speech acts of the text". The reference to Buss, as Briggs indicates, is to the opening sentence of his response article 'The contribution of Speech Act Theory to Biblical Studies,' *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p125.

<sup>114</sup> Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995

<sup>115</sup> As a general judgement, I agree with B S Childs that "Wolterstorff's application of speech-act theory to biblical interpretation is deeply flawed", not merely because of flaws in Speech Act theory itself, but also for the reason Childs's gives in his article, that Wolterstorff ignores the canonical context of Scripture: see B S Childs, 'Speech-act theory and biblical interpretation', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:4 (2005) 375-392, quote from p391. Childs also accuses Wolterstorff of confusing two distinct hermeneutical contexts he wants to address; 'canonical' and 'history-of-religions'. The danger here, though, is that Childs could be taken as assuming that there can be no bridge between the two.

approaches are illustrations of the contemporary use and relevance of Speech Act theory in Biblical hermeneutics.

As already noted, this thesis examines the possibility of using Speech Act theory as a textual hermeneutic tool. One of the oddities that needs to be considered is the fact that Speech Act theory for Austin, as its name would suggest, is a theory about spoken language. While it may be perfectly legitimate to apply this theory to written texts, such an application requires an explanation and a defence. This question is dealt with in chapter two.

#### 4. Some problems with Speech Act theory itself.

It should be noted that there are some issues relating in particular to the coherence of Speech Act theory which I do not address in detail in this thesis. Some of these are integral to the way Austin approached philosophy, and to the fact that the theory is presented on the basis of his lecture notes, published posthumously.

Austin often worked on the basis of creating and then knocking down ideas, as is the case with the performative-constative distinction, which he creates and then dismantles in *How To*. There are one or two suggestions in his notes that he was doing this also with the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction. It is quite possible that, had he lived longer, he might have considerably revised the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary categories<sup>116</sup>. In this sense, the published form of his lectures 'fixes' his ideas in a form he might not have wished<sup>117</sup>.

*How To* is based largely upon Austin's lecture notes, supplemented by his own handwritten corrections, and recordings and notes made by members of his audiences. Some of its distinctive style is attributable to these origins. Often, when Austin gives the impression of 'thinking aloud', this is precisely because this is what he *was* doing. *How To* is itself an example of a text that lies across

---

<sup>116</sup> W Cerf, 'Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 352

<sup>117</sup> In this context it is worth noting Stanley Fish's suggestion that Austin writes "under erasure", a phrase Derrida takes from Heidegger: 'With the Compliments of the Author' in *The Stanley Fish Reader*, (Blackwell, Malden MA, 1999) p79ff. Elsewhere, he suggests that Austin created "a self-consuming artifact": 'How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism', *MLN* 91:5 (October 1976) 1011. J H Miller regards *How To* as "a ruefully comic report" of an ultimately failed undertaking, the failure of which "has been ignored at their peril by subsequent theoreticians who have attempted to build a solid and comprehensive theory of speech acts on the foundations Austin laid. ... If such speech-act theorists had been slightly more careful readers of Austin they would have seen that he had already demonstrated the impossibility of establishing a clear and complete doctrine of speech acts" J H Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2001) p12-13.

several generic boundaries: it is both a spoken and a written document, in which the memories of the one have supplemented the other<sup>118</sup>.

That said, one of the problems with *How To* which should be noted here, is the confusion between rituals and linguistic conventions, and indeed between conventions and 'mere contexts'<sup>119</sup>. The relationship between rituals and conventions is not clearly established: in *How To*, Speech Act theory is a linguistic theory only, but some of Austin's examples are rituals. This problem is not discussed in detail in the thesis because it does not relate directly to the use of the theory in Biblical hermeneutics. But it is noteworthy that throughout his description of possible "infelicities" (that is, ways in which a speech act can fail) Austin refers to a "procedure", which implies a ritual of some sort.

This leads to some confusion between explicit performatives and ritualised acts with a linguistic element, a confusion which initially crops up when Austin includes "I do (sc. take this woman...)" as a performative, together with "I name this ship", "I ... bequeath my watch" and "I bet"<sup>120</sup>. It also leads to a confusion between conventions and rituals, which is explored by a number of scholars. This confusion is discussed briefly in chapter five of this thesis. It should further be noted that the question of sacramentality lurks underneath this whole question of 'performativity'; the Eucharistic prayer is, for some Christian traditions at least, a *prima facie* case of a speech act having an effect<sup>121</sup>.

This is never explicitly acknowledged by Austin, but in his discussion of the nature of intention he has already 'piggy-backed' on a long history of theological debate over '*ex opere operato*' and the relationship between Priest, Church and words in the consecration of sacraments<sup>122</sup>. The very phrase he

---

<sup>118</sup> As is made abundantly clear in the second edition (*How To 2*), in the preface to the Second edition (p v) and the Appendix (p 165).

<sup>119</sup> This is the argument made by J Schleusener in 'Convention and the Context of Reading', *Critical Inquiry* 6:4 (1980) 669-680, where he notes that "literary language is supposed to differ from ordinary speech because it must be understood differently: it relies on a background of conventions known to the author and his audience, but it has nothing to do with the circumstantial contexts they might share", so that conventional meaning "is determined by a body of more or less invariant rules" while contextual meaning "depends on an assortment of more or less contingent facts": p670.

<sup>120</sup> All *How To* p5

<sup>121</sup> As is discussed, I think, inadequately, by A P Martinich, in his two articles 'Sacraments and Speech Acts', *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975) 289-303, 405-417. That his view is too limited is a point made by B R Brinkman in his comments on the articles, 'Notes and Comments: Sacramental man and Speech Acts again', *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975) 418-420. Brinkman's own articles on 'sacramentality' in previous edition of the Journal are very much more suggestive, though not 'speech act based' - see the bibliography.

<sup>122</sup> '*ex opere operato*' being a phrase relating to the effectiveness or validity (note the similar words to those used by Austin in relation to performative utterances) of Sacraments, which defines them as being effective "by virtue of the 'work' having been done": A Loades, 'Sacraments', in A Hastings, A Mason and H Pyper (eds.) *The Oxford Companion to Christian*

uses is drawn from the definition of a sacrament in the Book of Common Prayer, which was at the time of his lectures the only authorised service book in the Church of England<sup>123</sup>.

Another aspect of Austin's discussion is also worth remarking upon: Austin begins his analysis of possible "infelicities" by observing that "a good many other things have as a general rule to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action"<sup>124</sup>. This highlights again the air of uncertainty and dialogue that sits at the heart of all of *How To*: "have as a general rule" implies, as Austin almost always seems to, that there might be (unspecified and unexamined) exceptions. Then "to be said to have", as often in *How To*, begs the question "be said" by whom; presumably by the dialogue partners who adjudge our action, but who are not explicitly identified either here or elsewhere in Austin, but are subsumed into the abstract and unexamined idea of "convention"<sup>125</sup>?

There is a related confusion about constitutive and non-constitutive rules. Austin does not use the terms, but his successor John Searle does. This question is discussed briefly in chapter two, in the context of a discussion of Mary Louise Pratt, specifically the criticism made of her work by Michael Hancher<sup>126</sup>.

---

*Thought*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000) p634-637, quote taken from first column on p636 - where the 'work' is the proper form of the sacrament - the correct words. The alternative would be that the sacraments were effective by virtue of, say, the worthiness of the minister or congregation. The former suggestion, that sacraments are valid if the work is done properly, is directly analogous to the idea that a Speech Act is effective if the "accepted conventional procedure" is adopted, while the latter suggestion, that sacraments depend on the Minister or congregation, is directly analogous to the idea that Speech Acts depend on the interior intention of the speaker. M Hancher identifies the Institution Narrative (the recital of Christ's actions and words at the Last Supper) as a performative in 'Performative Utterance, the Word of God, and the death of the author', *Semeia* 41 op cit.

<sup>123</sup> *How To* p9, referring without any acknowledgment to the definition of a sacrament found in the Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace...". It is worth wondering whether Austin's original Harvard American audience, unfamiliar with the Book of Common Prayer and having no sole authorised form of service, would have 'picked up' on this, whether Austin's contemporary English audience did, and whether a modern English audience does, in the days of Common Worship, when Anglican catechisms have fallen out of fashion, and Church attendance is the habit of so few?

<sup>124</sup> *How To* p14

<sup>125</sup> Which is, as G J Warnock observes "not absolutely hard-edged, especially perhaps in the slightly stretched sense of the term" which Austin employs and bequeaths to his successors (and I fancy that this is something of an understatement): G J Warnock, 'Some Types of Performative Utterance', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973) p71.

<sup>126</sup> Alston also notes that Searle's' definition is unclear in his *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2000) p256.

There is also confusion between performatives (Austin's first linguistic category, proposed as an alternative to non-performative constative utterances) and illocutions (a category of speech acts proposed in his second attempt to categorise utterances, after he has demolished the performative-constative divide). This relationship is examined by J O Urmson, who edited *How To*, in his article *Performative Utterances*<sup>127</sup>, where he suggests that Austin was wrong to conclude that the doctrine of illocutionary force should envelop that of 'performativity'. Urmson in fact argues that Austin's original, and correct, assumption was that 'performative utterances' are not in fact primarily *speech* acts at all, but are "those conventional acts the primary conventions for which are non-linguistic"<sup>128</sup>, in other words that performatives are properly all rituals of some sort.

In particular, Urmson wants to distinguish performatives from speech acts such as 'I warn you' which, he correctly acknowledges, are not especially conventional in other than linguistic terms<sup>129</sup>. Following Urmson, however, would make the category of 'performatives' a very much smaller one, excluding speech acts which operate primarily through linguistic conventions. It does not affect the existence of illocutions and other speech acts, but merely preserves a distinct category of performatives<sup>130</sup>.

Urmson may well be correct in asserting that there is in Austin a confusion between rituals and speech acts: however, the distinction between linguistically conventional acts (speech acts) and ones that are "primarily non-linguistic" (performatives) is likely to prove a trifle porous<sup>131</sup>. Indeed, J R Cameron suggests that "speech acts ... are but one family within a large class of acts which we may call *performances*; and performances in turn are one species of the kind of act known as institutional acts."<sup>132</sup> Irrespective of the merits of Urmson's scheme, however, it is certainly true that for Austin in *How To*, all speech is performative, but it is not all illocutionary, and that the relationship between illocutions, and the 'performative criteria' or 'conditions' for speech acts he outlined in his first lectures is not clearly expressed.

---

<sup>127</sup> 'Performative Utterances', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* II (1977) p120-127.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid* p124.

<sup>129</sup> A contention with which P F Strawson also agrees: see 'Intention and Convention in Speech Acts,' in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p385

<sup>130</sup> There is an interesting parallel between Urmson's paper and the suggestion by Grimes that Austin's 'doctrine of infelicities' can provide the basis for an analysis of how rituals work: Grimes is though unconcerned by illocutions and the like, and has no interest in distinguishing rituals from speech acts – see R L Grimes, 'Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 103-122.

<sup>131</sup> And both require the existence of and recognition by the appropriate community or context.

<sup>132</sup> J R Cameron, 'Sentence-Meaning and Speech Acts'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) p98. He later makes explicit that "the term [performance] is intended to suggest a generalization of Austin's notion of a performative utterance" p101 footnote 7.



John Searle has adopted Austin's theory, revised it, and removed some of Austin's inconsistencies. However, in so doing, he has changed the style of the theory, and its direction, while failing to deal with its most fundamental inconsistencies concerning intention and action. It is these problems with intention and with guarantees of authority that I examine in chapter three of this thesis, where I show that although some of the philosopher Jacques Derrida's criticism of Austin is ill-founded, he is correct in his conclusion that Speech Act theory is incoherent.

### 5. Uptake and Understanding.

For Austin, one of the distinctions between illocutions and perlocutions is that illocutions, being conventional, only require 'uptake'. They do not require anything much in the way of 'consequential' occurrences, unlike perlocutions, which are sometimes even accidental consequences of a separate pre-existing act. Because of the – admittedly quite widespread – assumption that meaning pre-exists any particular context, the illocutionary act in Speech Act theory seems to be a way in which the speaker can achieve a guarantee that 'their' meaning will be recognised and 'taken up', without becoming rather more tenuously reliant on contextual consequences and recognition<sup>133</sup>.

One might, then, say that in the illocution, the speaker's intention is unequivocally the meaning of the act, conveyed by its 'enacting' conventions. To exist, the illocution merely requires the existence of an activity or a 'pseudo-activity' called 'uptake'. The concept of 'uptake' is also required in the work of E D Hirsch. This concept is discussed in chapter five of this thesis. Uptake is the conventionally-mandated acceptance of the act as embodying the speaker's intention, which does not involve either a creative activity of understanding or the prior recognition of consequences of the act. It is foundational for the existence of the illocutionary act, although not always recognised as such.

John Searle's concept of "the Background" is in some ways another attempt to illuminate and describe the idea of uptake, or at least to explain how meaning is recognized. It, like the concept of uptake, is inadequate, because like all the other similar attempts that implicitly assume the necessity of a view of meaning that relates it solely to the intention of a speaker or author, it ignores the true nature of both meaning and understanding as things which are

---

<sup>133</sup> Of course, there is a perfectly legitimate sense in which meaning does pre-exist any particular set of circumstances or context. One can look up a word in a dictionary and find any number of 'meanings' given for it. However, this list of 'meanings' is in fact only provisional: it doesn't tell you what that word *will* mean in the context of a particular phrase or utterance in a particular context, both because language is continuously evolving, and because the meaning of utterances in communication is contextual. The 'dictionary-meaning' of a word is only a place to start, and it is interesting to note that dictionaries are by and large loath to give 'meanings' for too many *phrases*: the possibilities and contextual variations are too large. This is discussed in chapters six and seven of the thesis.

collective and creative. This concept of understanding is explored and drawn out in the work of the twentieth-century Russian thinkers Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov. They provide a more sophisticated and accurate view of understanding and of meaning, which is discussed in more detail in chapter seven of this thesis.

There is a direct analogy between the proposed uptake-understanding distinction in those who adopt Speech Act theory as a Biblical hermeneutic, and the distinction that is also proposed, especially by Hirsch and Vanhoozer, between meaning and significance. The distinction between meaning and significance parallels that between uptake and understanding and indeed depends upon it for its own plausibility. The meaning-significance distinction is also examined in chapter six of this thesis.

## 6. Conclusion: Meaning and Revelation

The inconsistencies inherent in the work of Hirsch and in Speech Act theory stem from some of the assumptions that underlie their work, and which are not made explicit, but affect the shape of Speech Act theory and of Hirsch's work on meaning. Austin and Hirsch (along with many other scholars) both assume a 'sender view of meaning' and start their ideas of meaning from the standpoint of a single, 'isolated', self or agent<sup>134</sup>.

Communication begins with 'me' – the 'sender' – someone who is a speaker or agent, and is the process whereby I move 'outwards' to another, 'sending' my meaning out to them in words and actions. As Vanderveken, for example, puts it, "speakers who make meaningful utterances of elementary sentences always relate propositional contents to the world with a certain illocutionary force. They mean to perform in the context of their utterances elementary illocutionary acts ... It is part of what they intend to communicate to their hearers".<sup>135</sup> This is also the assumption that lies behind much of what is generally called Post-modernism, except that in this case more attention is paid to the 'chasm' 'between' me and anyone else, than to the 'initiating' or 'sending' agent.

This initial assumption of a starting point means that if the sender's intention is not identical to meaning, and if what I say is not 'correctly recognized', then

---

<sup>134</sup> This is a similar idea to that of "code models" and the "conduit metaphor", which are defined by Mika Lähtenmäki as "models in which communication is construed in terms of mechanical transmission of information. It is typical of these models ... that the conceptualization of linguistic communication is based on the 'conduit metaphor', that is, on the idea of language as a kind of conduit or container for the speaker's encoded thoughts" M Lähtenmäki, 'On Meaning and Understanding: A Dialogical Approach', *Dialogism* 1 (1998) 77.

<sup>135</sup> D Vanderveken, 'Universal Grammar and Speech Act Theory', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series* 77 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) p25

communication collapses and we are all doomed to remain as we started, isolated individuals stuck in isolated worlds. Either meaning is the possession of the sender and is made by them a property of the utterance or meaning is the property of each individual reader and thus collapses into chaos. The idea of the sender view of meaning – the idea that meaning is ascribed to an utterance by the initiator who sends the meaningful utterance out to be recognized (or not) by his or her audience – is a bulwark against a chaos of individualistic, competing, unrecognized meanings.

However, as I will discuss further in chapter seven of this thesis, this entire assumption is based on a false model of identity and communication, that ignores the fact that I do not start with my own self-awareness and identity as a given. My sense of my 'self' is acquired and learned: it is a given gift, one might say, which is not a static intellectual possession but is something fluid and relational. I cannot be an isolated individual, doomed to be forever misunderstood, because my identity as 'I' is itself something communicated and corporate or shared. If there were no others, relating to me, 'I' would not exist.

Moreover, the assumptions underlying the sender view of meaning, concerning communication and identity, conflict with some of the implications of Speech Act theory itself, especially those concerning the nature of intention, and the question of what makes an act recognizable as 'an act'. They conflict, too, with Hirsch's own recognition of the nature of understanding as an activity. Therefore, there is an element of incoherence at the heart of Speech Act theory and of Hirsch's work, which affects their usefulness in any field, and especially in defence of authorial meaning and thus revelation.

This does not, however, mean that meaning is chaotic or completely unpredictable, nor does it destroy the possibility that God (or any author) can communicate. It does, though, suggest that the concept of revelation – of God communicating – needs a revision which will, at the same time, make it more theologically coherent, and which will allow much greater recognition for the role of the Holy Spirit. This thesis accordingly concludes with a discussion of the concept of revelation, from the context of a more collaborative concept of meaning.

## CHAPTER TWO: SPEECH ACT THEORY AND LITERARY CRITICISM

### 1. Austin's and Searle's dismissal of "Parasitic language uses": can Speech Act theory be applied to texts?

In the introductory chapter I noted the premise which this thesis is examining: that Speech Act theory can be used as a hermeneutic tool. However, before examining the particular uses of Speech Act theory by scholars such as Briggs, Thiselton, Ward and Vanhoozer, it is necessary to address some general problems with the theory, since some of these contaminate all of the subsequent uses to which it is put.

The first problem is, as noted in the section title above, that both Austin and John Searle explicitly reject the idea that Speech Act theory can be applied to texts, and thus that it can have any use or validity as a hermeneutic tool. Most importantly, the philosopher Jacques Derrida examines this assertion of Austin's and uses it to dismantle the entire theory. The next task of this thesis, then, is to examine why Austin and Searle are so emphatic about Speech Act theory's oral exclusivity; whether Derrida's argument is conclusive; and how other scholars have sought to deal with this issue, in particular those on whom Biblical hermeneutists rely.

The next three parts of section one, then, examine first Austin's distinction, then its development in Searle, and finally Derrida's criticism. Having done this, the following four sections of this chapter examine individual uses of Speech Act theory as a hermeneutic tool by those literary critics specifically cited by the scholars whose Biblical hermeneutic arguments are the subjects of this thesis.

#### Austin's and Searle's dismissal of "Parasitic language uses":

##### 1a. Austin's distinction

Austin himself rules out any relationship between his theory of Speech Acts and most other sorts of language use. He suggests that the 'ills' which affect the proper performance of a speech act and which may render it ineffective, include the possibility that a performative utterance be spoken in the context of a poem or play, a context which he describes as "*parasitic*"<sup>1</sup> upon 'normal', 'serious' language.

Subsequently, having noted that since actions must be performed by actors, and thus that all performative utterances must have a performer, who will be the utterer, Austin observes that the utterer or performer will be identifiable

---

<sup>1</sup> *How To* p22

either as the person who says 'I ...', or "in verbal utterances, by his being the person who does the uttering"<sup>2</sup>, or "in written utterances (or 'inscriptions'), by his appending his signature (this has to be done because, of course, written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are)"<sup>3</sup>. This suggests that only those texts which are signed can be performative, let alone illocutionary<sup>4</sup>.

At this point it should also be noted (as was mentioned in a footnote in chapter one of this thesis) that W Cerf observes that the very word 'performing' to describe speaking, has a hint of this parasitic context about it<sup>5</sup>. Cerf also points out that Austin's use of the term 'performing an act' is unusual (and certainly not 'ordinary') not merely because Austin uses the word 'performing' to describe speaking, but also because he refers to 'an act' not 'an action'. Not merely does this again refer to a 'parasitic context', but it also, for Cerf, helps obscure the distinction between most sorts of speech, and the sorts that are, or might be, those that perform actions, which is, he thinks, a 'stronger sense' than merely that of performing an act<sup>6</sup>.

It is certainly true that Austin has departed from 'ordinary language' in his description of performatives, and it is true also that we do not usually describe speaking as "performing an act" or as an "action". This may merely indicate the confusion between rituals and speech acts identified in chapter one of this thesis. This creeping infiltration of the 'parasitic' is not, however, noticed by Austin<sup>7</sup>, who develops and reaffirms the initial opposition he has identified

---

<sup>2</sup> *How To* p60

<sup>3</sup> *How To* p60-61, Austin's italics.

<sup>4</sup> He goes on to note that "thus what we should feel tempted to say is that any utterance which is in fact a performative should be reducible, or expandable, or analysable into a form with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active (grammatical)" and that "unless the performative utterance is reduced to such an explicit form, it will regularly be possible to take it in a non-performative way": *How To* p61-62.

<sup>5</sup> W Cerf, 'Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p360.

<sup>6</sup> 'Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words' op cit, p 363. This point is also made, by implication, when J Hornsby notes that "Austin struggled with distinctions between acts and actions, and between acts and consequences; and he never settled on a single way of using the term 'act': 'Illocution and its Significance', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994) p187. In *How To 2* the editors note, in the Appendix (p165), that Austin himself notes in his first chapter that "'uttering words' not so simple a notion anyway!". Indeed Gadamer suggests that "no one thinks of speaking as an action": *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p599.

<sup>7</sup> As Jonathan Culler notes, not merely is there an irony in Austin, whose "own writing is often highly playful and seductive" and who undermines his own suggestions, attempting to separate the parasitic and non-serious, from the 'serious' and ordinary, but Austin is in fact performing a similar exclusion to the constative-based exclusion of 'metaphysical' or 'meaningless' language he is himself attacking: J Culler, 'Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) p21. See also J H Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2001) p20, 40ff.

between ordinary and 'parasitic' language, while outlining the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary uses of language.

Austin notes that there are additional and separate uses of language, which do not fall into his categories, such as when language is used "for something, e.g. for joking"<sup>8</sup>, or for acting a part or writing poetry, and there is such a thing as "the poetical use of language"<sup>9</sup> by which he means, it appears, 'purple prose' or 'high flown' usage, which is not the use of language for writing poetry, but the use of language 'poetically'. Such usages, he states, are not illocutionary acts since even if the meaning and force of them is clear it may remain "wholly unresolved which of these other kinds of things I may be doing", among these "parasitic uses of language, which are 'not serious', not the full normal use'. The normal conditions of reference may be suspended, or no attempt made at a standard perlocutionary act, no attempt made to make you do anything, as Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar."<sup>10</sup>

In addition, there are other "things we 'do' in some connexion with saying something"<sup>11</sup>, which seem to Austin to be less remote than this category of joking and poetry, but which nonetheless either fall into none or more than one of the three classes of locution, illocution and perlocution. These actions or almost-actions include things such as insinuation or "evincing emotion"<sup>12</sup> by, for example, swearing; which we might say we use "for relieving our feelings". In all of these actions, as with joking and poetry, there is no relation to "performative formulas and the other devices of illocutionary acts" since "we must notice that the illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention"<sup>13</sup>.

In these excerpts Austin clearly suggests that literature is 'parasitic' upon normal and serious language<sup>14</sup>, and that it is not conventional and thus not illocutionary. Indeed, writing can only be performative when signed, which would restrict 'performativity' to particular classes of written text such as notices or declarations, rather than books or literature in any form. It would, on Austin's own account, be impossible to regard the Bible, a collection of books which are not merely unsigned, but whose authorship is in most cases disputed, as an illocutionary or even performative 'text act'. This would be the case whether or not the Bible counts as literature.

---

<sup>8</sup> *How To* p104

<sup>9</sup> *How To* p104

<sup>10</sup> *How To* p104

<sup>11</sup> *How To* p104

<sup>12</sup> *How To* p105

<sup>13</sup> *How To* p105

<sup>14</sup> In discussing the need for language to be 'spoken' and 'taken seriously' he notes "this is, though vague, true enough in general - it is an important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem": *How To* p9.

**Austin's and Searle's dismissal of "Parasitic language uses":  
1b. Searle's development of Austin's distinction**

Austin's exclusion of 'literary' language uses from his thesis has been developed and supported by John Searle who quite correctly distinguishes between literature and fiction<sup>15</sup>, but goes on to suggest that "roughly speaking, whether or not a work is literature is for the readers to decide, whether or not it is fiction is for the author to decide"<sup>16</sup>. While I agree with him in respect of literature, it is clearly not the case that 'fictionality' is the author's decision alone. This is demonstrated in one direction by for example *The Education of Little Tree*<sup>17</sup>, originally and authorially described as biography, and so published, which was subsequently alleged to be a work of fiction, and is now published in this latter category<sup>18</sup>, or by 'childhood memoirs' like '*Rock me gently: the true story of a convent childhood*', or '*A million little pieces*', both of which were mentioned in the introduction to this thesis.

In the other direction, it is often said that a work such as Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* is not just a work of fiction, but is in part autobiographical. This is also the case in *The Transylvanian Trilogy* by Miklós Bánffy. Towards the end of the second volume (*They were found wanting*) of this fictional novel there is the following sentence: "In the afternoons and evenings they went to concerts or to the cinema, but not to the theatre as Countess Roza, who had always loved plays, did not now want to go lest it should upset Balint" followed by the following:

*Translators' note:* This last phrase seems to be a Freudian slip on the author's part for though it hardly makes sense in relation to Balint and Adrienne, it may possibly be an unconscious echo of an important moment in Miklós Bánffy's own life when he found himself obliged to renounce his love for the well-known actress, Aranka Varady. Some years later, after his father's death, they married and Katalin Bánffy-Jelen is their daughter.<sup>19</sup>

This, then, is an indication of how easily an author themselves may get confused as to the fictionality or not of their narrative: in this case, the fictional life of a Hungarian aristocrat from Transylvania in the early twentieth century, written by one who lived such a life. It is marketed as fiction, but may perhaps be considered as semi-autobiographical?

---

<sup>15</sup> J R Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge University Press 1979) p58-9

<sup>16</sup> Ibid p59

<sup>17</sup> by Forrest Carter (Albuquerque NM, University of New Mexico Press, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> See also R Gibbs Jr, *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* (Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 1999) p209, where this case, and others, is discussed.

<sup>19</sup> M Bánffy, translated by P Thursfield and K Bánffy-Jelen, *The Writing on the Wall: The Transylvanian Trilogy Book Two: They Were Found Wanting* (London, Arcadia Books, 2000) p468.

Searle, however, continues by firstly demonstrating that “certain quite specific semantic and pragmatic rules”<sup>20</sup> that apply to assertive illocutions do not apply to assertions made in fiction, and then by denying the assertion that “any ... writer of novels is not performing the illocutionary act of making an assertion but the illocutionary act of writing a novel”<sup>21</sup>. This he denies on the grounds that

if the sentences in a work of fiction were used to perform some completely different speech acts from those determined by their literal meaning, they would have to have some other meaning. Anyone therefore who wishes to claim that fiction contains different illocutionary acts from nonfiction is committed to the view that words do not have their normal meanings in works of fiction ... [which would in turn require that] it would be impossible to for anyone to understand a work of fiction without learning a new set of meanings for all the words and other elements contained in the work of fiction.<sup>22</sup>

It is noteworthy that Searle imagines that fiction either does or does not ‘contain’ acts, rather than that it simply is an act. Although ostensibly addressing the question of fiction as an act, he is in fact already imagining and considering word or sentence acts *within* a specific work of fiction. As his previous quotation from an Iris Murdoch novel indicates, he is examining an instance of discourse out of its context, not the context itself.

His dismissal of the idea that writing could be a distinct kind of illocutionary act also depends on the existence of ‘normal’ and ‘literal’ meanings for words, when in fact utterances or acts were the topic under consideration. In addition it depends on the assumption that a word can have a ‘normal, literal meaning’, and that there can be only one of these per word because, of course, there is only one ‘normal, literal’ context. For Searle, fictionality is a context requiring examination and defence – it is not a ‘normal’, ‘literal’ context but something exceptional or ‘other’<sup>23</sup>.

Instead, Searle suggests that a writer of fiction “is pretending, one could say, to make an assertion”, which he further defines as “engaging in a nondeceptive pseudoperformance which constitutes pretending to recount to us a series of events”<sup>24</sup>. It is not clear how one might distinguish pretending to recount from actually recounting: the difference seems to lie in the reality of the events described. Or rather, as Searle continues, it lies in the author’s intention in

---

<sup>20</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p62

<sup>21</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p63

<sup>22</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p64.

<sup>23</sup> Searle would presumably insist, as in his defence against Derrida, *Reiterating the Differences* (see Bibliography), that this distinction has no hierarchy; but then, unless one is radically revising the meaning of words like ‘normal’ ‘ordinary’ and ‘parasitic’, all of these in fact do imply specific hierarchies and relationships, as M L Pratt observes in ‘The Ideology of Speech Act Theory’, *Centrum NS* 1.1 (1981) 5-18 – see later in this section.

<sup>24</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p65



pretending to recount events. This is why Searle believes that fiction is an authorially-determined category: because “*pretend* is an intentional verb” and therefore

the identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author. There is no textual property ... that will identify a text as a work of fiction. What makes it a work of fiction is, so to speak, the illocutionary stance that the author takes toward it, and that stance is a matter of the complex illocutionary intentions that the author has when he writes or otherwise composes it.<sup>25</sup>

Searle is quite right that often nothing in the text identifies it as a work of fiction: this is normally done by the cover and blurb of the text, or in its bibliographic details. This ascription of fictionality owes something, presumably to the author, as well as to the editor, who provided it with the appropriate contextual packaging, but as I have previously suggested, in the longer term, fictionality is a property which is decided by the reading community. The illocutionary stance of an author towards their text is not always obvious, at least from the text outside its ‘packaging’ and ‘context’.

Moreover, the genres that exist, such as prose fiction, poetry, romantic fiction, crime novels, or whatever, are not just determined by the author, but are inherited. They, and the author’s own language, context and experience, will to an extent determine what he or she creates, just as they will also to an extent determine how readers read. The existing context will play a part in the creation of any particular text.

Searle indeed, goes on to note that this fictional “pretense” is made possible by “a set of extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world established by the rules mentioned earlier”<sup>26</sup>. He describes these extra conventions as

horizontal conventions [which are] not meaning rules; they are not part of the speaker’s semantic competence. Accordingly, they do not alter or change the meanings of any of the words of other elements of the language. What they do rather is enable the speaker to use words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by those meanings. My third conclusion then is this: the pretended illocutions which constitute a work of fiction are made possible by the existence of a set of conventions which suspend the normal operation of the rules relating illocutionary acts and the world ... these [fictional] conventions are not meaning rules; and the [fictional] language game is not on all fours with illocutionary language games, but is parasitic on them.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p65-66

<sup>26</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p66

<sup>27</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p66-67

It is again interesting to note that Searle here twice refers to “the speaker”, although he is apparently discussing fiction and his original example was drawn from a prose novel which has a writer, rather than a speaker. Again it seems that Searle is in fact imagining and discussing the illocutionary acts spoken by characters within fiction, not the act of writing, or indeed of reading. Further, it is not clear what makes the horizontal conventions of fiction “parasitic” and abnormal. Austin himself was aware that conventionality extends a long way, into the swinging of a stick<sup>28</sup> or “doing obeisance”<sup>29</sup>.

Searle assumes that the horizontal conventions of fiction must be “parasitic”, because for him there can be only one, literal, meaning to any word. This literal, normal, acontextual meaning – which is that of ‘normal’ conventions and ‘normal usage’ – is the meaning used by speakers to achieve illocutions. If Searle assumed that the horizontal conventions of fiction were just as normal as the “vertical” conventions of illocutionary acts, this would destroy the author-based illocutionary guarantee. Therefore, rather than describe the act of writing as a normal conventional act, he suggests that “it is the performance of the utterance act with the intention of invoking the horizontal conventions that constitutes the pretended performance of the illocutionary act.”<sup>30</sup>

Searle thus sees works of fiction as containing both fictional and non-fictional utterances: “in part, certain fictional genres are defined by the nonfictional commitments involved in the work of fiction”<sup>31</sup> and “a work of fiction need not consist entirely of, and in general will not consist entirely of, fictional discourse”<sup>32</sup> but that it may well also contain instances of “serious utterance” or “genuine assertion”<sup>33</sup>: a serious utterance, for Searle, being one that entails a ‘serious commitment to its truth on the part of the speaker’, and which is thus opposite to the “nonserious” pretence of fiction<sup>34</sup>. It might, then, be possible to see the Bible as a patchwork of utterances, some of which are serious, and some of which are not, but none of which, presumably, can be illocutionary. This is described by J Schleusener, I think correctly, as “an absurd argument ... since the fact that nonserious utterances do not *refer* to an immediate context has nothing to do with the question of whether they *presume* one.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> “it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end; thus I may warn him by swinging a stick or I may give him something by merely handing it to him. But if I warn him by swinging a stick, then swinging my stick is a warning: he would know very well what I meant: it may seem an unmistakable threatening gesture” *How To* p118

<sup>29</sup> *How To* p69

<sup>30</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p68

<sup>31</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p72

<sup>32</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p74

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*

<sup>34</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p60

<sup>35</sup> J Schleusener, ‘Convention and the Context of Reading’, *Critical Inquiry* 6:4 (1980) 675.

Searle himself states of his 'serious/nonserious' distinction that "this jargon is not meant to imply that writing a fictional novel or poem is not a serious activity"<sup>36</sup>. It is interesting how a study of 'ordinary language' so quickly creates its own exceptional language and jargon. As Mary Pratt somewhat acerbically suggests;

you can uphold the standard account [of language use as inherently cooperative and open] and say that all these other instances are violations of it, that quarrelling, gossiping, flattery, exaggeration, bargaining, advertising and so on involve deviant or infelicitous kinds of language use. No social value attaches directly to the words "deviant" and "infelicitous," of course. They mean merely that the instance in question falls outside the system accounted for by the grammar and must be dealt with at a different theoretical level, outside the grammar proper.<sup>37</sup>

However, if one takes this route, and given the extent of the linguistic behaviour that falls outside the scope of the allegedly 'normal' conventional illocutionary act,

such an analysis would seem to make sense only if embedded in a social critique of some sort. In other words, if you have a theory that designates much of what people do linguistically as in violation of the rules of their language, such an analysis would, it seems, have also to argue that a society in which such activities are routine is itself structured in ways that are divergent from some norm. Needless to say there has been no stampede to elaborate such an argument.<sup>38</sup>

### **Austin's and Searle's dismissal of "Parasitic language uses":**

#### **1c. Derrida's criticism of Austin's distinction**

The criticism of the inherent value-judgment implicit in the illocution is also a part of the criticism of Speech Act theory made by Jacques Derrida. He attacks the division of language into 'serious' and 'parasitic' categories in his

---

<sup>36</sup> *Expression and Meaning* p60

<sup>37</sup> M L Pratt, 'The Ideology of Speech Act Theory', *Centrum NS* 1.1 (1981) p14.

<sup>38</sup> The ideology of Speech Act Theory op cit p14-15. See also Stanley Fish's argument that the distinction between 'ordinary language' and 'literature' stigmatizes literature and damages both, in 'How ordinary is ordinary language', *New Literary History* 5:1 (Autumn 1973) p45: "ordinary language loses its human content [and thus can hardly be ordinary], and literature loses its justification for being because human content has been declared a deviation. The inevitable end of the sequence is to declare human content a deviation from itself", or in other words "deviation theories always trivialize the norm and therefore trivialize everything else" p44, 49. P N Campbell also attacks Austin's distinction, on the grounds that he has merely asserted rather than demonstrated it, and because it is possible to argue for a reverse priority 'A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) p295-296 - also he points out that Austin's own use of language does not always preclude the parasitic or etiolated use of metaphor, although I strongly disagree when he suggests that Austin's style is "oddly dead" and "dull" because of a deliberate absence of personality in the text.

somewhat acrimonious exchange with Searle<sup>39</sup>. In his first essay, *Sec*, Derrida examines Austin's *How to do Things with Words* and he characterizes Austin's mode of operating as follows: it

consists in recognizing that the possibility of the negative (in this case, of infelicities) is in fact a structural possibility, that failure is an essential risk of the operations under consideration; then, in a move which is almost *immediately simultaneous*, in the name of a kind of ideal regulation, it excludes that risk as accidental, exterior, one which teaches us nothing about the linguistic phenomenon being considered.<sup>40</sup>

For Derrida, Austin ignores the conventionality of language itself, as opposed to just the conventionality of the circumstances of performative speech acts, and "does not ponder the consequences issuing from the fact that a possibility - a possible risk - is *always* possible, and is in some sense a necessary possibility ... What is a success when the possibility of infelicity continues to constitute its structure?"<sup>41</sup>

Derrida concludes that "the opposition success/failure in illocution and in perlocution thus seems quite insufficient and extremely secondary. It presupposes a general and systematic elaboration of the structure of locution"<sup>42</sup> which he suggests that Austin puts off "on at least two occasions". These are occasions when Austin identifies various "other 'unhappy' features of the doing of actions"<sup>43</sup>, in addition to the "infelicities" which affect performative actions specifically.

The first category of 'unhappy features' that Austin identifies is of

whole dimensions of unsatisfactoriness to which all actions are subject but which are distinct - or distinguishable - from what I have chosen to discuss as infelicities ... [and which] normally come under the heading of 'extenuating circumstances' or of 'factors reducing or abrogating the agent's responsibility', and so on.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Which, on Derrida's part at least, is contained in the book *Limited Inc* (Evanston IL, Northwestern University Press, 1988), which contains three separate essays by Derrida: "Sec", "Limited Inc abc ...", and "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion", which is a letter answering some questions posed by Gerald Graff. It also contains, between "Sec" and "Limited Inc abc ..." a paraphrase of Searle's article 'Reiterating the Differences: A reply to Derrida', *Glyph* 1 (1977) 198-208, written in response to "Sec", and to which "Limited Inc abc ..." is itself a reply. Searle apparently refused permission to reprint the entire article, described by Culler as an "egregious misunderstanding" of Derrida in J Culler, 'Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) p16. Searle, by contrast, thinks that in "Sec", Derrida "has misunderstood and misstated Austin's position at several crucial points" ('Reiterating the Differences' p198), in an argument which is full of 'confusions', and that "Derrida has a distressing penchant for saying things that are obviously false" ('Reiterating the Differences' p203).

<sup>40</sup> *Limited Inc (Sec)* p15

<sup>41</sup> *Limited Inc (Sec)* p15

<sup>42</sup> *Limited Inc (Sec)* p15

<sup>43</sup> *How To* p21

<sup>44</sup> *How To* p21

The second involves “language ... used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiologies* of language.”<sup>45</sup> It is this category which is of most interest to Derrida since for him “it involves precisely the possibility for every performative utterance ... to be ‘quoted’.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Derrida asks

isn't it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, “non-serious” *citation* ... is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a “successful” performative? So that – a paradoxical but unavoidable conclusion – a successful performative is necessarily an “impure” performative.<sup>47</sup>

Austin's third category arises “out of ‘misunderstanding’.”<sup>48</sup> This comes into play if, for example, a promise is not “*heard* by someone, perhaps the promisee”, or is not “understood ... as promising”. Derrida does not mention this category, perhaps because Austin himself seems unsure about whether it is an example of “infelicity” or not.

Austin ‘puts off’ the exposition of a general linguistic theory for the same reason as that which lies behind the exclusion of these three categories from the study of ‘ordinary language’. This reason becomes clear when these three categories of additional “‘unhappy’ features of the doing of actions”<sup>49</sup> are considered in the light of Austin's concept of the “explicit performative”: all of them diminish the ability of the speaker to establish and determine the meaning of an utterance on his or her own. All of them require an acknowledgment of the part played by the audience in the context-based creation of the meaning of the speech act, in order to understand how it is that an explicit performative<sup>50</sup> is felicitous.

---

<sup>45</sup> *How To* p22

<sup>46</sup> *Limited Inc (Sec)* p16

<sup>47</sup> *Limited Inc (Sec)* p17. To this point, Searle responds “the answer is a polite but firm “No, it isn't true” (p206) because he believes that there is a distinction between using and mentioning (p203 and 206). Searle believes that citation is an example of mentioning a word or phrase, rather than using it, as happens in “parasitic discourse” such as acting (p206), where someone else's words are *used*. This distinction does not however seem clear to me: it seems perfectly possible to *use* a quote for some purpose or other: I wonder whether Searle thinks that the distinction between use and mention relates to the distinction between token (specific instance of something – something as *used* for a specific intentional purpose) and type (that of which a token is a specific instance – something as *mentioned* as a ‘neutral’ dictionary reference), a distinction which Derrida does not accept: his concept of the iterable argues that all types are ‘tokenised’: or as Searle sees it, Derrida makes “a simple confusion of iterability with permanence” (p201). (All Searle's quotes come from ‘Reiterating the Differences: A reply to Derrida’, *Glyph* 1 (1977))

<sup>48</sup> *How To* p22

<sup>49</sup> *How To* p21

<sup>50</sup> Such as “get thee to a nunnery” or “Shoot the President”

All of these categories of 'exceptions' which Austin excludes from consideration require that we appreciate that it is the audience which agrees and recognizes the existence of what are, in these cases, firstly "extenuating circumstances"; secondly various culturally-regularised contexts (ranging from 'ordinary conversation' to 'Art'); and thirdly the specific and individual existence and shape of each specific speech act in relationship in its specific and unique context. The audience needs to recognise the existence, or not, of these factors. The need for meaning to be established on the basis of such recognition cannot happily co-exist with the assumption, inherent in *How To*, that meaning is brought to the sentence by the speaker.

It is interesting to note that Derrida himself concentrates only on the category of "etiologies", and does not reflect on the other two more obviously relational and contextual categories. Had he done so, the active role they all together indicate for the audience in respect of the determination of meaning, might have affected Derrida's own stress on the possibility of failure and of the 'structural risk'. As it is Derrida, like Austin, remains in some sense captivated by the idea of a sender view of meaning, except that since Derrida recognizes the impossibility of guaranteeing a 'sent' meaning, this leads him close to doubting communication itself.

Austin dismisses the various 'parasitic' uses of language – and all the other categories of potential unhappiness – from his theory, in order to retain an element of plausibility for his distinction between explicit and primary or primitive performatives. I thus agree with Derrida's criticism that the exclusion of writing from Speech Act theory serves the purpose of allowing Speech Act theorists to ignore some of the uncertainty inherent in speech acts, and that it is a part of Austin's assumption about the controlling authority of "the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act"<sup>51</sup>, which relies for its plausibility on the existence of "an exhaustively definable context, of a free consciousness present to the totality of the operation, and of absolutely meaningful speech master of itself: the teleological jurisdiction of an entire field whose organizing center remains *intention*."<sup>52</sup>

Ironically, both Austin and Derrida are aware of the 'vulnerability' of 'ordinary language', and the sense in which the link between authorial intention and meaning is fragile, but both react to this in very different ways. Austin attempts to 'cordon off' a kind of 'safe area', within which authorial

---

<sup>51</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p14.

<sup>52</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p15. Or, as White puts it, in Speech act theory, "the operation of intentionality requires a "full" subject as a given, which then fills the forms of language with a certain intended meaning": 'Introduction: Speech Act theory and Literary Criticism', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p 12.

intention can be guaranteed in the meaning of an utterance<sup>53</sup>, while Derrida revels in the uncertainty. Derrida makes a virtue of what Austin considers a vice<sup>54</sup>.

Austin's safe area is inadequate, however. Austin never makes clear why, for example, poetry or quoting is not recognisable as a performance of the act of quoting or the act of being poetic or artistic. The reciting of poetry is simply another sort of performative use of language, recognizable by the audience in just the same way as is the use of language to order or threaten; through the context in which it is spoken.

In the end, therefore, both Austin's and Derrida's arguments here are flawed for the same reason: they do not adequately reflect on the contextual and conversational element of meaning-creation. Derrida is correct that the 'ordinary/literary' distinction is necessary to preserve the assumption that authorial intention equals meaning which is essential to Speech Act theory, and that it is inadequately defended. The distinction, if examined solely from the author's point-of-view, will not stand up.

The point that Derrida is making with his "isn't it true that" question about iterability, and which Searle fails to grasp, is that for Austin performatives 'work' on the basis of contextual conventions, but that one cannot be sure in advance whether they will 'work' or not. When describing the actual meaning of utterances, you can't predict, but only describe after the event, so that the successful performative and later the illocution will always be a past-tense concept. This is precisely what Dorothea Franck observes:

if we talk about the speech acts which we, the analyzers, mean to be represented by the sentence, isn't there a danger of circularity? If, in our imaginary speech situation which surrounds the uttering of the sentence, we imagine exactly those conditions as given which define the sort of speech act that we want to get at, then the claim is trivial. Or rather, we are not making an empirical, but rather an analytical claim.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> Compare this to Hirsch, who applies the guarantee not through a specific sort of language, but in a kind of moral reading posture: we should read like this (and can).

<sup>54</sup> Although, given Austin's tendency to set up and then knock down his own distinctions, and the unfinished nature of *How To*, it has been argued, by J H Miller for one, that Austin himself would have brought his audience to recognise the virtue here given time. J H Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2001) 12-13.

<sup>55</sup> D Franck, 'Speaking about Speech Acts', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) p88. See also H P Grice, who I take to be making the same point when he observes of "Strawson, Searle and Mrs Jack" (p351) that their "position hardly seems satisfactory when we see that it involves attributing to speakers an intention which is specified in terms of the very notion of meaning which is being analyzed (or in terms of a dangerously close relative of that notion). Circularity seems to be blatantly abroad", *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 1989) p352.

As I have already noted<sup>56</sup>, you can have a discussion about the possible meanings of a word or, less easily, a phrase – what it has the potential, in the right circumstances, to mean – but you can't predetermine the context completely: as Derrida notes, to do so means to imagine a saturated<sup>57</sup> or "exhaustively definable"<sup>58</sup> or "total"<sup>59</sup> context, in which we describe what did happen, rather than predict what will occur<sup>60</sup>.

If an 'illocution' has been 'successful', by which I here mean that both speaker and hearers appear to agree on an unremarkable (because agreed) co-incidence between intention and meaning such that everyone (more or less, perhaps) agrees that the same act has been performed, then in that case we can be (relatively, depending on what happens next) sure that the context as it has unfolded means that this utterance was recognised as that particular illocution.

However, what we cannot conclude from this 'success', is that there was any necessary guarantee that this agreement would have been reached, or indeed will be sustained. There may be no grounds for doubting it, and it may not occur to us or to anyone else that there should be any doubt, but nonetheless, just because it did happen like that last time, doesn't mean that it will do so next time, in what might turn out to be a different context: and of course, how an act is taken will affect the context we think we are in.

It is not possible to pre-determine the context absolutely before the utterance is spoken, as Alston for example admits when he notes that rules don't need to be defined in order to exist<sup>61</sup>. Only when the utterance is uttered and heard do we know for sure what the context is – and depending on what unfolds, we may not be 'sure' even then. The fluidity of conventions is indeterminate.

---

<sup>56</sup> In chapter one

<sup>57</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p18.

<sup>58</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p15.

<sup>59</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p17.

<sup>60</sup> There is, of course, nothing wrong with description, necessarily. Fish's Speech Act analysis of Coriolanus, for example ('How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism', *MLN* 91:5 (October 1976) 983-1025), works well as a description of the action of the play. What Fish could not have done, however, is predict beforehand with any absolute certainty what would happen in a similar 'real-life' situation, nor does he try to. Indeed, Fish himself makes exactly this point: his analysis of Coriolanus only works because it is a "Speech Act play": that is, "it is about speech acts". Therefore, "*Coriolanus* is a Speech Act play in its narrowness ... Consequences ... follow necessarily and predictably; they are not contingent and therefore they are not surprising" which almost makes it undramatic (p1024). However, for texts with a wider focus, Speech Act analysis "will always be possible, it will also be trivial, (a mere list of the occurrence or distribution of kinds of acts)" (p1025). This is at the root of the problem I identify with Speech Act biblical analysis in the next chapter: that it works well (potentially) as description of a particular reading or context, but is unable to be applied beyond specific contextually-determined, ecclesiological or 'pneumatic' situations.

<sup>61</sup> W P Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2000) p262. He notes that terms like 'rules' and 'conventions' are used sometimes without definition. It is true that for concepts like 'rules' and 'conventions', while we all 'know what we mean', it may be that we don't quite all mean the same thing by them!



Alston acknowledges this, and in order to get round the indeterminacy that must then pervade meaning, he does what Austin is also forced to do in the end, which is to describe illocutions as being determined by speaker-intention, in complete variance with Austin's initial description of speech acts<sup>62</sup>.

As I have already noted, at the root of much of this lies the 'sender' view of meaning in which meaning is begotten not created. This is why Austin also has to distinguish illocutions and perlocutions<sup>63</sup>; this distinction only matters if you want some determinacy, or security, (or 'guarantee') for the meaning of a specific category of speech acts, such as those Austin and his successors describe as 'illocutions'.

When I here refer to a 'guarantee', I mean only what I think Austin means; that there is some sense in which an illocution does not depend for its existence on the actual reception the utterance actually got<sup>64</sup>. Austin certainly accepts that there will be circumstances in which an illocution does not "come off" – it might be partially successful. But the question is what exactly does this mean – what exactly is 'unhappiness'? Has the illocution happened or not? The truth is, you can't be sure in 'general' terms, or in advance of that *specific* situation – and this uncertainty pervades every illocution, which is Derrida's point. You don't know in advance what will constitute 'success', but Austin's identification of a category of speech acts called 'illocutions', described as being distinct from another called 'perlocutions', suggests – indeed *requires* – that you can<sup>65</sup>.

However, Austin's restriction on the application of speech act theory to written texts in general has in any case been widely ignored, not least by those who apply it to Biblical texts, and having established that Austin's and Searle's

---

<sup>62</sup> See the discussion about intention in chapter four.

<sup>63</sup> As discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>64</sup> As Recanati puts it: "a Performative utterance is an utterance that, in virtue of its force, *claims* to be self-verifying, that is, claims to have as its effect he bringing about of the state of affairs it represents. ... When the state of affairs in question is the current performance, by the speaker, of an illocutionary act (i.e. , when the utterance is an explicit performative), the self-verification is necessarily brought about": F Recanati, *Meaning and Force; the Pragmatics of Performative Utterances* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987) p211

<sup>65</sup> One can see the same tendency at work in Vanderveken and Subo when they assert, in their Introduction to D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) that "the proper task of the theory of conversation is to analyze only the logical and dynamic structure of conversations whose type is provided with an internal discursive purpose" p19. To limit the class of 'conversations' to those that have an internal purpose, is to confuse communication and speech (overlapping categories), with the imparting of information, or the achievement of goals. These latter are important activities, but one suspects that many, if not the majority, of conversations, include far more than simply this, which is an example of a focus on 'dictionary' as opposed to 'actual' meaning. This point is demonstrated by A Trognon in his essay in the same volume, 'Speech Acts and the logic of mutual understanding', pages 121-133.

distinctions are flawed, this thesis will now examine some of the particular uses made of Speech Act theory by literary critics.

In defence of their application of Speech Act theory to Biblical hermeneutics, Briggs and Vanhoozer both refer to the work done by Susan Snaider Lanser, Sandy Petrey, and Mary Louise Pratt in the field of literary criticism<sup>66</sup>. However, this work is not supportive of a defence of authorially-guaranteed meaning. The work of Lanser, Petrey, and Pratt does however, demonstrate that there is a certain lack of subtlety in the view of texts as illocutionary actions that mean solely and simply whatever authors intended to say. This will be demonstrated in the following sections, as their work is analysed for evidence of an illocutionary text.

## 2. Mary Louise Pratt's and Michael Hancher's use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics: how fixed are illocutions?

Mary Louise Pratt was the first to seek to apply Speech Act theory to texts in a systematic way. She argues in her book *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*<sup>67</sup> that there is no structural divide between literary and ordinary language that would be apparent unless we already knew that something was literary: "The concepts of a "poetic language" and hence of a linguistically autonomous literature can remain intact as long as the scope of linguistic aesthetic investigation is limited to works known to *be* literature."<sup>68</sup>

She uses Speech Act theory to show how important context is to reading and thus to identifying literary speech-acts, and she shows how the context of any utterance, be it literary or not, determines what it is: "the grammatical surface structure of an utterance is not enough"<sup>69</sup> to allow us to identify "poeticity", and "the aesthetic organization of prose fiction" cannot be attributed to "literariness" but only to

the nature of the speech situation in which the utterance occurs, in which the speaker and his audience are engaged. The formal and functional similarities between literary and natural narrative can be specified in terms of similarities in

---

<sup>66</sup> Ward refers only to Pratt.

<sup>67</sup> (Bloomington/London, Indiana University Press, 1977).

<sup>68</sup> p22. See also Fish, 'How ordinary is ordinary language' op cit: "what characterizes literature then is not formal properties, but an attitude – always within our power to assume – toward properties that belong by constitutive right to language. ... Literature is still a category, but it is an open category ... definable ... by what we decide to put into it" p52. This echoes B Vermazen's description of 'art': "'art' as a term designating products or performances ... gets applied to whatever resembles already accepted designata of 'art' ... and both the preferred subset and the criterion of resemblance shift from age to age, or within an age from influential critic to influential critic" B Vermazen, 'Aesthetic Satisfaction' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) p212.

<sup>69</sup> *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p72

the speech situation and their differences identified in terms of differences in that situation.<sup>70</sup>

This allows her to suggest that

speech act theory provides a way of talking about utterances not only in terms of their surface grammatical properties but also in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, and expectations of the participants, the relationships existing between participants, and generally, the unspoken rules and conventions that are understood to be in play when an utterance is made and received,<sup>71</sup>

and which allow us to understand the utterance. However, Pratt doesn't apply this to a consideration of meaning itself as a dialogic property, and she underestimates the dialogic nature of literary contexts. Her view of meaning retains the assumption that the speaker 'makes' the meaning and the audience 'receives' it, as illustrated in the quote above. Nonetheless, I entirely agree with her suggestion that "the real lesson speech act theory has to offer is that *literature is a context, too, not the absence of one*"<sup>72</sup>.

However, as Michael Hancher argues in his review article 'Beyond a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse'<sup>73</sup>, Pratt does not use Speech Act theory very rigorously. Hancher accuses Pratt of confusing the constitutive rules that create speech acts, with the regulative rules that help us identify genres, so that speech act theory is effectively neutered<sup>74</sup>.

The distinction between regulative and constitutive rules is one coined by Searle in *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*<sup>75</sup>. Searle suggests that "regulative rules regulate a pre-existing activity, an activity whose existence is logically independent of the rules. Constitutive rules constitute (and also regulate) an activity the existence of which is logically dependent on the rules."<sup>76</sup> Constitutive rules, although varying in "centrality"<sup>77</sup>, are foundational of the activity in question, and their definitions may appear

---

<sup>70</sup> *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p73

<sup>71</sup> *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p86

<sup>72</sup> *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p99

<sup>73</sup> *Modern Language Notes* 92 (1977) 1081-1098

<sup>74</sup> White agrees with Hancher here, suggesting that Pratt "moves from an Austinian/Searlean perspective which places heavy emphasis upon the constitutive nature of the speech act conventions, to a Gricean perspective which proposes only regulative maxims, without making clear the nature of this transition", : 'Introduction: Speech Act theory and Literary Criticism', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p10. J Margolis suggests that Pratt "assimilates to speech-act analysis ... categories that are not in any clear sense kinds of speech acts or acts falling under the analyses presented by Austin, Grice or Searle", and there is some substance to this criticism also: J Margolis, 'Literature and Speech Acts', *Philosophy and Literature* 3:1 (1979) p49

<sup>75</sup> (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969). Hereafter *Speech Acts*

<sup>76</sup> *Speech Acts* p34

<sup>77</sup> *Speech Acts* p34

tautological, or of the form “X counts as Y”<sup>78</sup>, while regulative rules tend to be imperative. Searle goes on to suggest that “the semantic structure of a language may be regarded as a conventional realization of a series of sets of underlying constitutive rules, and that speech acts are acts characteristically performed by uttering expressions in accordance with these sets of constitutive rules.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, the conventions that govern the felicity of an illocutionary act are constitutive rules.

According to Hancher, however, “Pratt treats them as if they were merely regulative. This allows her to associate them with various genre “rules” of literature, which by and large are regulative, not constitutive. What she gains in breadth she loses in precision, at the point in the theory where it most matters.”<sup>80</sup> He cites other examples of Pratt’s confusion of regulative literary and behavioural rules with constitutive illocutionary rules, and concludes “perhaps the constitutive/regulative distinction is not beyond criticism ... but it needs to be dealt with ... not simply ignored.”<sup>81</sup>

There is some substance to this criticism, but Austin himself is as guilty of this confusion as Pratt: there is plenty of confusion in *How To* between rituals and performatives, and between illocutions and gestures, and Austin himself does not use the terms constitutive or regulative. Pratt assumes that constitutive rules are collective and fluid in a way that Austin sometimes does, and sometimes doesn’t. The question is, who decides what is constitutive and what regulative, and how much flexibility is there about this?

For Pratt, the answer is that there is considerable flexibility and the context decides (because she doesn’t take illocutions or the constitutive/regulative distinction terribly seriously). For Hancher, the constitutive rules are more impersonal and rigid, as for Austin (sometimes); Hancher does take illocutions seriously. Hancher is right to show how open are the conventions that make literature, but they are in fact equally open for supposedly closed illocutionary speech acts.

Indeed, the distinction between constitutive and regulative rules is not as helpful as it might first appear<sup>82</sup>. Hancher and Searle regard constitutive rules as “underlying”<sup>83</sup> and Searle notes that “constitutive rules come in systems”<sup>84</sup> as well as having “degrees of centrality”<sup>85</sup>. This is to begin to approach the

---

<sup>78</sup> *Speech Acts* p35

<sup>79</sup> *Speech Acts* p37

<sup>80</sup> *Beyond a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p1085.

<sup>81</sup> *Beyond a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p1087

<sup>82</sup> Wolterstorff suggests that Searle’s concept of institutional rules for speech acts analogous to the rules of games is ultimately “illusory”, *Divine Discourse* op cit p81.

<sup>83</sup> *Speech Acts* p40

<sup>84</sup> *Speech Acts* p36

<sup>85</sup> *Speech Acts* p34

central problem, which is that it is not possible to say in advance which specific rules are constitutive and which are regulative. There is always the possibility that the breach of an apparently 'constitutive' rule does not in fact destroy the 'game' – whether or not it does will depend upon the agreement of the players and spectators and those responsible for rule-making, and as ever there may well be disagreements.

Searle cites chess as having “underlying rules”, but it is not the rules that make chess 'chess', but the entire system taken as a whole, which collectively we recognise as 'chess'. It is not possible to say in advance which chess rules could be broken without the game becoming something else<sup>86</sup>. Is “fischerandom chess”<sup>87</sup> still chess, for example? That which constitutes any game is a series of interrelated rules and assumptions, and the point at which the game no longer exists is not clear or pre-determinable. The history of cricket, with all its various developments and revisions, and its various current manifestations from 'French cricket' and 'beach cricket' to 'quick cricket' and through to Test matches, is another indication of the fact that the only thing that is constitutive is the agreed description.

Searle imagines that constitutive rules are those which are “necessary and sufficient” for the felicitous occurrence of an illocution<sup>88</sup>. In fact, the existence of such rules may be necessary for the adequate description and delineation of any 'game' or system, but they are not sufficient. It is not possible to distinguish the set of variants 'cricket' and 'baseball' except by the vocabulary used to describe them<sup>89</sup>, which will depend on what we have agreed that we are playing. As Austin himself wonders, when did Henry Webb Ellis stop being a cheat and become a pioneer: “sometimes he may 'get away with it' like, in football, the man who first picked up the ball and ran. Getting away with things is essential, despite the suspicious terminology.”<sup>90</sup> Austin continues

much more common, however, will be cases where it is uncertain how far a procedure extends – which cases it covers or which varieties it could be made to cover. It is inherent in the nature of any procedure that the limits of its applicability, and therewith, of course, the 'precise' definition of the procedure, will remain vague. There will always occur difficult or marginal cases where nothing in the previous history of a conventional procedure will decide

---

<sup>86</sup> Although if you specify a context, such as 'an official championship match' it might be, although here the rules will include, possibly, many things relating to breaks etc, that are not included in inter-schools tournaments or exhibition matches.

<sup>87</sup> The version proposed by Bobby Fischer that begins with the pieces set out in random positions.

<sup>88</sup> *Speech Acts* p54

<sup>89</sup> For example 'backstop' or 'wicketkeeper'

<sup>90</sup> *How To* p30. it is also noteworthy that this story of the 'invention' of rugby is itself of dubious historicity. Inter-village “football matches” of some antiquity very often allow all sorts of activities that would not be permitted in the Premier League.

conclusively whether such a procedure is or is not correctly applied to such a case.<sup>91</sup>

This is a profoundly 'un-Searlean' reflection<sup>92</sup>. It does, however, reflect Wittgenstein's observations on the same topic, which also deconstruct the supposed regulative-constitutive distinction<sup>93</sup>.

Hancher, however, assumes that all constitutive rules have an absolute guarantee about them; if they exist and operate, the act will occur – if they do not, it won't<sup>94</sup>. In the terms suggested by L J Cohen in his article 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?'<sup>95</sup> they have only a 'happy' existence. However, as Austin himself noted, "in ordinary life, a certain laxness in procedure is permitted – otherwise no university business would ever get done"<sup>96</sup>.

Constitutive rules, which in effect create an illocutionary context, are generally assumed by Austin's followers to guarantee authorial control over meaning: in practice they do not. They are only reliable 'up to a point', and it is not necessarily possible to pre-determine when that point will be reached, because

---

<sup>91</sup> *How To* p31

<sup>92</sup> Although in his later work *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, Penguin Books, 1996) Searle himself comes to realise something similar: writing about the American Founding Fathers' Declaration of Independence, he notes that "they got away with this, that is, they created and sustained acceptance of the institutional fact because of local community support and military force": p118-119.

<sup>93</sup> "For how is the concept of a game bounded? What still counts as a game and what no longer does? Can you give the boundary? No. You can *draw* one; for none has so far been drawn. (But that never troubled you before when you used the word "game".)

"But then the use of the word is unregulated, the 'game' we play with it is unregulated." – It is not everywhere circumscribed by rules; but no more are there rules for how high one throws the ball in tennis, or how hard; yet tennis is a game for all that and has rules too,"

Philosophical Investigations (*Phil Inv*) I §68 p33, and again "one might say that the concept 'game' is a concept with blurred edges. – "But is a blurred concept a concept at all?" – Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all? Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn't the indistinct one often exactly what we need?" *Phil Inv* I §71 p34. As Mika Lähteenmäki also notes, following Wittgenstein, in 'On rules and rule-following: obeying rules blindly', *Language and Communication* 23 (2003) 45-61, "rules do not exist independently of action and to know a rule amounts to mastering a technique" p55, rules are a "*praxis*" and "are not external to the behaviour nor do they cause the behaviour from outside" p56.

Searle himself almost realises this in his later *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, Penguin Books, 1996) when he notes that "part of being a cocktail party is being thought to be a cocktail party; part of being a war is being thought to be a war" (p34).

<sup>94</sup> Here it is worthwhile noting that A Kasher, in 'Are speech acts conventional', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 65-69, argues that if speech acts are governed by constitutive rules, and if "a convention is a solution of an independently given coordination problem" (p68), then speech acts cannot be conventional.

<sup>95</sup> Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?, *The Philosophical Quarterly* Volume 14 Issue 55 (April 1964) pages 118-137.

<sup>96</sup> *How To* p27

this depends on the context and audience, as Wittgenstein notes<sup>97</sup>. In practice, therefore, there can be no strict delineation between rules that constitute and those that merely regulate an activity – break enough regulative rules and your action might not be recognised – nor is it always possible to decide where regulative cultural norms cease and specific constitutive rules take over.

Indeed, the use of the word ‘rule’ at all is misleading, implying something demarcated and clear<sup>98</sup>: in all cases what is in sight are cultural conventions of varying importance and opacity, depending on the specific circumstances of the culture and the actors involved, and on the realization of the audience (which is to some degree unpredictable<sup>99</sup>). As Searle notes, what is constitutive is a “system” rather than a set of rules. Searle’s observation that “it is possible that artifacts in general require constitutive rules to be describable”<sup>100</sup> is a further indication that he is partly aware of the inadequacy of ‘rules’ as an image<sup>101</sup>.

This distinction between regulative and constitutive rules is addressed by Pratt in her article ‘The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory’<sup>102</sup>, where she notes that “the regulative/constitutive distinction itself is known to have serious weaknesses”<sup>103</sup>. She argues correctly that

speech act theory implicitly adopts one-to-one speech as the norm or unmarked case for language use ... Now it is true that private one-to-one interaction does characterize certain highly valued, and highly privileged, contexts in this society ... But we need to be sceptical about this as representing any kind of natural norm. Certainly one-to-one speech is not likely to be a quantitative norm, in this society or in any other.<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> “How should we explain to someone what a game is? I imagine that we should describe *games* to him, and we might add: “This *and similar things* are called ‘games’”. And do we know any more about it ourselves? Is it only other people whom we cannot tell exactly what a game is? - But this is not ignorance. We do not know the boundaries because none have been drawn. To repeat, we can draw a boundary – for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all! (Except for that special purpose.)” *Phil Inv* I §69 p33.

<sup>98</sup> With, as Derrida would note, policemen and a Judicial system whose authority is recognised by the players.

<sup>99</sup> See also the discussion of ‘judgment’ in chapter five of this thesis. See, too, D Føllesdal, ‘Comments on Stenius’s ‘Mood and Language-game’’, *Synthese* 17 (1967) p 279: “even Stenius’s own simplified games attest to the difference between a game where language is learned and a game where language is used, and thereby support our conclusion that, in the language-game which consists in using English, the rules for the moods are not constitutive, but preservative” which he has defined as rules which can be broken, but not too often: they preserve the character of the game rather than constitute it.

<sup>100</sup> *Speech Acts* p36 footnote 1

<sup>101</sup> Searle’s confusion on this point is also commented on by Alston in his review of Searle’s *Speech Acts* in *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) 172-179, see p178-9.

<sup>102</sup> *Centrum* NS 1.1 (1981) 5-18

<sup>103</sup> *The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory* p11

<sup>104</sup> *The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory* p7

This leads to the suggestion that

once you set aside the notion of speech acts as normally anchored in a unified, essential subject, it becomes apparent that people always speak from and in a socially constituted position, a position that is, moreover, constantly shifting, and defined in a speech situation by the intersection of many different forces... Nor is there any guarantee that these positions will be internally consistent or consistent with each other.<sup>105</sup>

Thus Pratt indicates here that the idea of self itself is a complex, socially-determined one, and that the nature of communication is thus much more complex than is generally assumed in Speech Act theory.

Pratt does not, though, use this realization to undermine the concept of the illocution to the extent that it deserves, probably because, as already suggested, the illocution as a concept is rather irrelevant to her concerns (it is not mentioned in this article except under the guise of “illocutionary intentions”<sup>106</sup> and in a brief discussion of Bach’s and Harnish’s suggestion on how to retain the purity of illocutionary acts).

She underestimates the part played by the audience’s realization of acts (which includes their realization of the actor’s intentions) when she discusses intention<sup>107</sup>, and when she asserts that “authorship is no more, and no less, than another of the many ways a subject realizes itself through speech”. It does not occur to her that a subject is realized, rather than responsible for its own realization. Nonetheless, she clearly points out that many approaches to Speech Act theory neglect at least “three factors: affective relations, power relations, and the question of shared goals”<sup>108</sup>.

Her conclusion is that

what we need is a theory of linguistic representation which acknowledges that representative discourse is always engaged in both fitting words to world and fitting world to words; that language and linguistic institutions in part construct or constitute the world for people in speech communities, rather than merely depicting it. We need to think of all representative discourses, fictional or nonfictional, as simultaneously world-creating, world-describing, and world-changing undertakings. ...Speech-act theory tends to uncritically reproduce the norms of “assertive discourse”, the discourse of truth and falsehood.<sup>109</sup>

This is a theme that will be picked up subsequently, in the discussion of the work of the Russian thinker Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle. The irony is, of

---

<sup>105</sup> *The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory* p9

<sup>106</sup> *The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory* p8

<sup>107</sup> *The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory* p10

<sup>108</sup> *The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory* p13

<sup>109</sup> *The Ideology of Speech-Act Theory* p16



course, that the idea that language was either true or false was one of the principal targets Austin himself had in view in *How To*.

Returning to Hancher's criticism of Pratt, he suggests that Searle, by contrast, offers "not a theory of fictional discourse, but a theory of discrete fictional acts", and that "Searle leaves open the old-fashioned possibility that the author may on occasion be telling the story himself"<sup>110</sup>. However, he does not identify the means by which Searle *recognizes* a fictional act: Searle does so, of course, on the basis of the author's intention alone. Searle thus assumes an unmediated and rather one-sided relation between author and reader, which very much resembles that particular Christian approach to Scripture that sees it as God's unmediated revelation.

Indeed Hancher confuses himself: he suggests that Searle and Pratt provide "two competing speech act models for fictional discourse"<sup>111</sup>. However, Hancher has already noted that Searle denies the unity of the fictional act in favour of "a patchwork of fictional and non-fictional utterances"<sup>112</sup>. Searle then does not provide a model for fictional discourse; rather he fillets fiction to identify the discrete acts of an unmediated author. Searle breaks up the idea of a fictional utterance and identifies fiction as an intentional pretence between serious episodes, parasitic on normal illocutionary conventions.

Pratt, then, is correct to assume that what constitutes an 'illocution' or a genre, is in either case our recognition of it as its audience, rather than simply the presence or absence of definitive rules. However, she does not argue this case explicitly. Hancher is correct that Pratt does not address this issue, but Pratt's implicit 'take' on it as suggested by her practice, is closer to the truth of the matter than Hancher's defence of the illocution, and its constitution by "necessary and sufficient conditions"<sup>113</sup>. Nonetheless, it is the case that Pratt does not show how a text might be illocutionary, or try and interpret an illocution in textual terms, and only mentions perlocutions glancingly<sup>114</sup>.

This is an indication of the fact that the categories of illocution, perlocution *et al* are, aside from their plausibility or not as linguistic categories, useless in

---

<sup>110</sup> *Beyond a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p1094

<sup>111</sup> *Beyond a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p1095

<sup>112</sup> *Beyond a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse* p1094

<sup>113</sup> Hancher quoting Searle, see for example 'Beyond a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse' p1085, 1087.

<sup>114</sup> *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* page 81 and in footnote 15 on page 150 where she remarks that "a description of display texts, and indeed a basic typology of assertions may have to wait for a theory of perlocutions. Jerry Sadock's hypothesis (Sadock, 1974) that all speech acts are perlocutions and that illocutions are only one subset of perlocutions seems to suggest a possible way out for the display text." - the quote actually from p151.

literary criticism, and inapplicable to texts; something that Pratt does not explicitly acknowledge<sup>115</sup>.

### 3. Richard Ohmann's use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics.

Unlike Pratt, Richard Ohmann asserts, in 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature'<sup>116</sup>, that "all three kinds of acts may be performed in and through writing. The nature of the locutionary act is thereby altered in obvious ways, the illocutionary act is more or less attenuated, and the perlocutionary act is more or less delayed."<sup>117</sup> He explicitly sets out to look for an illocutionary theory of literature. However, he identifies performatives as one class of illocutions<sup>118</sup>, and this seems to be rather questionable, as is the suggestion that stating is an illocutionary act but not a performative. He is unable to come up with an example of several of Austin's "criteria for the "felicity" (successful functioning) of one class of illocutionary act"<sup>119</sup>, and thus he concludes that literature cannot be a real illocution<sup>120</sup>.

Thus, he misses the importance of his own observation that "a reader who rejected the speech act because of them [his avowedly irrelevant suggestions for inappropriate circumstances] would demonstrate thereby that he had mistaken the poem for something else"<sup>121</sup>. The question is 'what sort of statement or performance, if any, is a literary work?' not simply 'what sorts of statements does a literary work contain?'<sup>122</sup> Ohmann here makes the same mistake as Hancher and Searle: they are not considering "speech act models for fictional discourse"<sup>123</sup> but only 'speech act models within a context already identified as a work of fictional discourse'<sup>124</sup>.

---

<sup>115</sup> As Mary Hesse notes: "in all serious natural language texts, and pre-eminently in Scripture, metaphor and the other tropes are pervasive. No theory of interpretation that neglects them can be adequate for biblical hermeneutics": 'How to Be a Postmodernist and Remain a Christian', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) p93

<sup>116</sup> Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature, *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 4, 1971 p1-19.

<sup>117</sup> Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature, p10.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid p11

<sup>119</sup> p10-11: these being the existence of 'inappropriate circumstances' or of 'persons affecting the making of a statement' within a literary work

<sup>120</sup> A view he repeats in 'Speech, Literature and the Space between', *New Literary History* 4 (1972) p53: "literary works are discourses with the usual illocutionary rules suspended".

<sup>121</sup> 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature' op cit p12

<sup>122</sup> A point also made by Joseph Margolis in his 'Literature and Speech Acts', *Philosophy and Literature* 3:1 (1979) p47, when he discusses Ohmann.

<sup>123</sup> Hancher, 'Beyond a Speech-Act Theory of Literary Discourse' p1095.

<sup>124</sup> See also Fish's dissolution of this binary opposition in 'How ordinary is ordinary language' op cit. Ohmann's article 'Literature as Act' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, New York, Columbia University Press, 1973) 81-108, is another instance of this - he analyses various individual speech acts from various plays, but does not analyse the plays themselves as actions. J H Miller notes (in *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2001)) that "the phrase "speech acts in literature" has at least three possible and by no means necessarily compatible meanings" which he identifies as being "speech acts that are uttered

Moreover, they all presume a sender-based view of speech acts: Ohmann, for example, states that a burnt poem is still a poem, a view I would challenge on the same basis as the opposition to the possible existence of a 'private language'. For a language to exist, it must be possible to communicate in it: part of the definition of a language is 'something capable of being understood by more than one person'<sup>125</sup>. Likewise, part of the definition of a poem involves its being able to be read.

Ohmann himself appears to draw this conclusion in his later article 'Literature as Act'<sup>126</sup>, when he asserts that "the reader builds on his tacit knowledge of the conventions – past and present, actual and possible – for illocutionary acts, and what he builds is an image of the world implied by the acts that constitute the work"<sup>127</sup>: the reader 'builds-up' the work on the basis of the writers 'pretended-illocutions', and this would clearly not be possible if a poem had been burnt and no copies remained<sup>128</sup>.

This view would certainly seem to contradict that of his earlier article, in which he suggests that "no misunderstanding will alter the status of the poem as speech-act"<sup>129</sup>, which is surely incorrect: unless someone recognizes that 'the poem' is an act, it cannot be said to exist. There may, of course, be disagreement, so that someone recognizes 'it' as a poem, while the majority assert that it is not a poem but a lyric, or a piece of prose: this kind of

---

within literary works", "a possible performative dimension of a literary work taken as a whole" (p1), and a sense of speech acts in "disguise" (p2).

<sup>125</sup> "Any system we call a "language" is a system for *use* ... it is a language only in being used to communicate (or having been so used, or being designed for such use)": J R Cameron, 'Sentence-Meaning and Speech Acts'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) 97-98. There may be languages which only one person currently understands, but for them to be 'languages', they must be in principle learnable by others – Tolkien's Elvish languages, or Klingon, come into this category: when Tolkien began to invent Quenya and Sindarin, they were not 'languages', but as he developed them, and as Klingon was developed beyond its initial appearances in Star Trek, they acquired linguistic status and shareable structures, and it is now possible to communicate in them. In the same way, 'dead' or 'dying' languages in Alaska or Papua New Guinea or elsewhere with no remaining speakers or only one 'native speaker' have sustained communication, and could do so again in principle. However, unless they are or have been demonstrably capable of sustaining communication, they are indistinguishable from gobbledegook, no matter what their 'creator' might allege (although these boundaries have a fluidity over time). Thus, the current consensus on the Voynich manuscript, for example, is that it is not language but gobbledegook, but this of course will change if it is deciphered, or appears to be potentially decipherable!

<sup>126</sup> 'Literature as Act' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973)

<sup>127</sup> 'Literature as Act' p99.

<sup>128</sup> At best we might have 'the memory of a poem', and memory is by no means the same thing as what one might call 'the agreed past that really happened' (a possible, if question-begging, definition of history). Memory is rather – using the same lines of thought – 'the narrative I am currently telling myself about where I have been and thus who I am'.

<sup>129</sup> 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature', op cit p12.

'misunderstanding' will alter the kind of act that 'it' is recognized as being. But a speech act is only an act if it is recognized as such, though the recognition need not be unanimous or in agreement as to kind<sup>130</sup>. This is a characteristic of all acts. 'Misunderstanding' is indeed only possible in a conversational or dialogic setting: if the poem has already been understood as a poem or at the least as an act. Otherwise, it will not be 'misunderstood'; it will simply be unrealized, and will be unimaginable<sup>131</sup>.

Ohmann does not adequately demonstrate that literary works cannot be speech acts; he merely shows that the decision as to the kind of speech acts they are is not simply sender-based<sup>132</sup>. It is not adequate to conclude, as Ohmann does, that "a literary work is a discourse whose sentences lack the illocutionary forces that would normally attach to them"<sup>133</sup> because the whole point about the categories "normal" and "literary" is that they are not binary opposites, as Derrida or Fish demonstrate. Indeed, as Ohmann subsequently notes himself "it is the whole context of the whole discourse that establishes its literary status"<sup>134</sup>, reflecting Austin's interest in the 'total speech act in the total speech situation'. The flaw here then lies not in 'literature' but in the illocutionary category.

Ohmann, too, seems confused when he suggests that

a written literary work preserves in its words a record of purported speech acts. They are frozen in its text, to be brought alive whenever a reader reenacts them as a participant. ... the stage of a literary work is the reader's mind, and ... I would

---

<sup>130</sup> In this context I recall being the subject, together with my Lower Sixth classmates, of an experiment conducted by the Upper Sixth and our English Teacher. We were asked to comment upon a series of poems, which we duly did, as I remember it quite happily and without any sense of something odd - we were then told that in fact they were not poems, but song lyrics - something of which we (or certainly I), had been unaware. The 'misunderstanding' of Gulliver's Travels as a children's book is another example of this, as is the episode Fish recounts in 'How to Recognize a Poem When You See One': this essay occurs in his book *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*, S Fish, (Harvard University Press, 1990) discussed in Robert Scholes's review 'Who Cares about the Text', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 17:2 (Winter 1984) 171-180.

<sup>131</sup> Anything we can imagine as a poem, or as a speech act, has by definition been recognized as such - we can't truly imagine the unrecognized, only that which is only partially recognized. This subject is discussed further in chapter four.

<sup>132</sup> It is also not entirely clear what he means when, in 'Literature as Act' op cit, he suggests that "we assume felicity and infer a speaker and a fictional world from the circumstances that felicity requires. Needless to add, we may drop the hypothesis of felicity at any time, given conflicts within the world or between the work and what we know of the world" (p100). Quite what the status of a narrator in a prose work might be is entirely unclear - who, for example, is 'speaking' at the beginning of *Pride and Prejudice*? Nor is it clear what happens if we drop the felicitous hypothesis - do we construct another, and if so, on what basis?

<sup>133</sup> 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature', op cit p14

<sup>134</sup> 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature', op cit p15

add that the action on the stage is illocutionary. Like illocutionary action outside literature, it is inescapably ethical.<sup>135</sup>

Not only does this subsume all literature into the category of drama, but it is not clear how the reader can participate in an illocutionary act inside their own mind.

None of Ohmann's many examples are taken from a novel: they are all poems or plays. He seems to be adopting a secular version of the stance Donald Evans adopts: that of the reader-as-actor. Indeed, Ohmann comes quite close to adopting a kind of Reader-response theory of literature based on the reader's own political engagement with the text<sup>136</sup>, which would seem to classify literature as perlocutionary, in Austinian terms.

I agree entirely with Ohmann's conclusions that the status of a literary work can change: literary status is not a given. I also agree that reading is a social action. However, the reason that, in 'Speech Acts and Literature', Ohmann cannot distinguish "jokes, ironic rejoinders, parables and fables within political speeches, some advertisements, and many other such" from literature, any more than could Austin, is because Ohmann, like Austin, remains attached to the idea that the meaning of a speech act is sender-determined<sup>137</sup>.

Even in the later 'Literature as Act', which recognizes the role of the reader, Ohmann is unwilling to extend this realisation to include the effect of context on meaning: the reader is an individual phenomenon, and Ohmann remains committed to the view of Literature as an entity which contains acts, rather than being itself a contextually-created social act: "Literature is made of acts. Literature is political, for writers and readers."<sup>138</sup> How this belief co-exists with Ohmann's belief that literature contains even "pretended" illocutionary acts is entirely opaque, which renders ineffective his whole enterprise, the ultimate purpose of which also remains uncertain.

#### **4. Susan Snaider Lanser's use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics.**

Susan Snaider Lanser argues in *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction*<sup>139</sup> that there is a place in literary criticism for "a historical creator"<sup>140</sup> but she is clear that the meaning of the text is produced relationally. For her, Speech Act theory is useful because

by situating literary communication within a speech act framework, a concept of the text as message/object gives way to a more dynamic and fruitful notion of the

---

<sup>135</sup> 'Literature as Act' op cit p101

<sup>136</sup> 'Literature as Act' p102-104

<sup>137</sup> He refers to "bizarre side-effects": 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature', op cit p15

<sup>138</sup> 'Literature as Act' p107

<sup>139</sup> Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1981

<sup>140</sup> *The Narrative Act* p49

text as a specific kind of communicative and aesthetic act. Structural analysis then becomes not a matter of extracting the “message” or one of its formal elements out of the system and analysing it in a use-free vacuum, but of encountering the speech act which the text makes possible. Without making simplistic equations between the mechanisms of literary production and the structuring of fictional discourse, we can use speech act theory to open for analysis a network of interrelated levels of communication which produce, and are produced by, the fictional narrative.<sup>141</sup>

It is highly significant though that she here uses the term ‘speech act’, as do Pratt and Sandy Petrey, rather than anything more specific. Lanser is thus susceptible to the criticism that she elides performatives with illocutions, in a similar manner to that which Hancher identifies in Pratt. Lanser is also in agreement with Pratt and others that ordinary language is not intrinsically distinguishable from literary language<sup>142</sup>. For her, Speech Act theory is useful because “it defines meaning not as an abstraction but in terms of use”<sup>143</sup>.

Lanser uses the concepts of the illocution, locution and perlocution more than Pratt, accepting Austin’s distinction between illocutions and perlocutions based on the conventionality of illocutions: “the illocutionary force of an utterance is produced according to the conventions for both the specific act and the total speech activity”<sup>144</sup>, although not without a certain degree of confusion: “I cannot, however, guarantee that the conventional perlocutionary effect will occur; all I can do is behave (speak) in ways conventionally designed to elicit the particular effect.”<sup>145</sup>

However, she seems to imply that the meaning of all language is based on illocutionary conventions: she avoids confusing regulative and constitutive rules but asserts both that “the meaning of a given utterance is a function of its production according to certain conventions (rules) applied under particular conditions”<sup>146</sup> (but are rules and conventions synonymous?) and that “linguistic rules encompass both constitutive and regulative rules.”<sup>147</sup> She seeks to distinguish the perlocutionary effect of speech from the illocutionary action of speaking and suggests that

effects upon others, as I said earlier, reside in the receivers rather than with the speaker of an utterance; thus perlocutionary effects are never guaranteed by the mere fact that an illocutionary act is being correctly performed... Perlocutionary effects, while conventionally associated with certain illocutionary activities,

---

<sup>141</sup> *The Narrative Act* p62.

<sup>142</sup> “the distinction between “literary” and “ordinary” language which poetics have tended to assume is not supported by linguistic research ... there is nothing inherent in the surface of the linguistic construct to indicate whether or not it is literary, or even, frequently, whether or not it is fictional” *The Narrative Act* p64-65.

<sup>143</sup> *The Narrative Act* p68

<sup>144</sup> *The Narrative Act* p73

<sup>145</sup> *The Narrative Act* p72

<sup>146</sup> *The Narrative Act* p69

<sup>147</sup> *The Narrative Act* Footnote 17 p72, quote occurring on p73.

depend not only on the illocutionary and propositional content of a message and its surface form, but on the hearer's knowledge, values, emotions, etcetera, as these interact with respect to the given utterance, its speaker and the specific speech context.<sup>148</sup>

There is something here reminiscent of Yueguo Gu's suggestion in his thesis<sup>149</sup> that perlocutions are not proper acts at all because of their dependence on reception. Thus while I agree with Lanser that

where speech act theory has been inadequate for describing the fictional text, the problem lies not with fiction but with speech act theory itself; any theory of language use must encompass all conventional uses of language; as Mary Louise Pratt points out, a great deal of human discourse is indeed fictional or hypothetical discourse,<sup>150</sup>

she does not in fact apply this insight rigorously enough as a critique of the conventionality of Speech Act theory.

I also agree that "the verbal act, in other words, implies not only a sender, receiver, and message, but some potential for successful speech activity which depends for its realization on the sender's authority and the receiver's validation of this authority"<sup>151</sup>, and that "like all speech acts, the novel-writing act presumes a specific kind of authority and is highly determined by the author-audience dynamics surrounding its production."<sup>152</sup> However, the element of dialogue and meaning-creation is stronger than Lanser realizes, as is made clear when she discusses "stance", defined as "the speaker's relationship to the message s/he is uttering"<sup>153</sup>.

She suggests that "stance co-determines the emotional and ideological response the audience will take from, and bring to, the discourse. In this way stance not only signifies meaning but also powerfully determines it: a given stance and its phraseological form can affect the very substance of what is said."<sup>154</sup> I do not disagree, except to note that it is not the case, as Lanser implies, that the speaker's stance is something they convey in an 'illocutionary' or guaranteed sense. It needs to be recognised as a part of the recognition of the act, and the audience will recognize what they recognize, not necessarily what the speaker wants consciously – there may, too, be disagreement.

---

<sup>148</sup> *The Narrative Act* p73

<sup>149</sup> *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric: An Investigation of the Perlocutionary Phenomenon in Conversation*. Unpublished Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD, Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language, University of Lancaster November 1987 - discussed in Chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>150</sup> *The Narrative Act* Footnote 19 p74

<sup>151</sup> *The Narrative Act* p82

<sup>152</sup> *The Narrative Act* p84

<sup>153</sup> *The Narrative Act* p92

<sup>154</sup> *The Narrative Act* p93

### 5. Sandy Petrey's use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics.

Sandy Petrey, in his *Speech Acts and Literary Theory*<sup>155</sup>, is very interesting on the nature of texts, but entirely ignores the Speech Act distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, concentrating solely on that between locutions and illocutions. He uses the terms performative and illocution as though the former were simply a class with illocutionary force, or even synonymous with each other<sup>156</sup>, and defines illocutions in a slightly idiosyncratic way, suggesting that "illocutionary force is a combination of language and social practice" and hence that Speech Act theory "must always move beyond the formal analyses practiced by other linguistic schools".

He thus concludes that

twentieth century linguistics has been largely characterized by concentration on the initial features that allow language to convey a meaning. Austin shifts attention to the things language does other than convey a meaning. As a formal locution, language stands apart from society; it becomes a pragmatic illocution within society. Illocutionary identity consists solely of language's function within the conventional interactions that characterize a given sociohistorical group.<sup>157</sup>

He identifies language as having two somewhat separate identities: a grammatical system having meaning (locutionary), and a practice having force (illocutionary): "speech versus acts, saying versus doing, meaning versus performing, structure versus practice, locution versus illocution: every pair opposes language in itself to language in context, for context alone determines the conventional effects produced by an utterance governed by Rule A.1"<sup>158</sup>.

The neatness of the binary oppositions alone ought to be enough to raise suspicions. Moreover, the suggestion that 'context alone determines' force is contradicted by his suggestion that "you were indeed warned" even if you ignored the warning, or that

when the generalissimo felicitously suspends the constitution, it's suspended even if a perlocutionary uprising hangs the generalissimo. Although perlocutionary events can ignore or undo as well as affirm the things done by words, the words' illocutionary status is unaffected, if the convention is observed when the words are spoken.<sup>159</sup>

This is a clear restatement of the idea<sup>160</sup> of a distinction between force/illocutionary meaning, that requires no understanding, and something

---

<sup>155</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York, Routledge, 1990)

<sup>156</sup> for example *Speech Acts* p25: "the fact made obvious by the performative, that the illocutionary force borne by words is always also a relationship lived by people ..."

<sup>157</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p13

<sup>158</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p14

<sup>159</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p16

<sup>160</sup> that will be discussed in detail in chapter five of this thesis



else (here perlocutionary meaning) which does require understanding. Despite what Petrey asserts about illocutions being pragmatic, they are here revealed as being, for him, absolutely systematic (or semantic). The possibility that the reception of an act helps create the context itself, is missing from his analysis.

It does though lie somewhere behind Petrey's sweeping but essentially accurate dismissal of Austin's attempt to separate literature and conventional speech<sup>161</sup>, and it is also present in Petrey's criticism of John Searle. Searle, he suggests, ignores the act of reading, and concentrates solely on the act of writing:

in Austinian speech act theory, illocutionary force is the work of a community. Searle restricts it to an individual, the single person whose illocutionary intentions are all by themselves able to suspend the illocutionary conventions that govern linguistic performance for the rest of the world. His essay on literature is therefore consonant with Searle's general deemphasis of the collective character of illocution; his approach to fiction purposely and purposefully ignores fiction's circulation within a community.<sup>162</sup>

I agree entirely with this, at least in respect of Searle, but suggest that it fatally undermines the idea of the guaranteed illocution. But Petrey's description of Searle: that he "makes authorial purpose the sole determining factor in identifying fiction: only pretending counts, and the author alone can make himself or herself pretend"<sup>163</sup> could equally well apply to Kevin Vanhoozer's and Timothy Ward's elevation of the author as sole authority. Indeed, Petrey goes on to criticise Pratt for paying insufficient attention to the "crucial idea that the social formation defining illocution is not the speaker's but the audience's. In speech, the operative communities are usually the same. In non-literary as well as literary writing, they can be wholly distinct"<sup>164</sup>.

Petrey suggests that "an aesthetic performative produced by the message rather than the author foregrounds the fact that the forces making literary words do things for readers must be part of the reading, not the writing, experience"<sup>165</sup>, and that "textual illocution cannot be a serious category if illocutionary force depends on authorial intention"<sup>166</sup>: it must instead be the case that "textual illocutions" are conventional not intentional.

Thus Petrey is absolutely correct to assert that "speech acts count as what a collectivity determines, and their only constitutive rules are those Austin labelled A and B. Rules about individual intention and behaviour are at most

---

<sup>161</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p52

<sup>162</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p68

<sup>163</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p67

<sup>164</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p78

<sup>165</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p81

<sup>166</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p82

regulative"<sup>167</sup>. However he does not recognize that Austin himself is confused about this question, as Derrida has shown, nor that this has implications for the guaranteeability of illocutions, and thus for the distinction between them and perlocutions, and for the 'difference' between meaning and force<sup>168</sup>. Petrey does not recognize the apparent conventionality of perlocutionary results, and does not attempt to distinguish them from illocutionary consequences<sup>169</sup>. Moreover, it is quite true to state that "representation, far from restricted to literature, is essential to everyday life"<sup>170</sup>, but this has no necessary bearing on illocutionarity, and is profoundly un-Austinian, for reasons Petrey does not explore.

Petrey is furthermore an uncomfortable bedfellow for those, like Ward or Vanhoozer, who seek to use a Speech Act hermeneutics to restore a degree of authorial authority over meaning:

speech-act analysis stands opposed to every vision of the text as an object, as a given and permanent entity that is what it's always been and will always remain so. Considered as *acts*, literary and non-literary utterances alike change in conjunction with the conventions they invoke and by which they are assessed. The concept of the text as static, autonomous, and determinate is radically incompatible with the Austinian vision of language as an interactive constituent of collective existence in history.<sup>171</sup>

Austin himself might not be comfortable with this either. As becomes clear when he discusses Derrida and his criticisms of Austin, Petrey has effectively abandoned the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction<sup>172</sup> and the illocutionary guarantee as it exists in Austin, and has turned the illocution into a kind of perlocution.

## 6. The use of Speech Act theory in Textual hermeneutics: Conclusion

This excursion into the use of Speech Act theory in literary criticism, then, does not support the suggestion that texts are 'illocutionary' in an Austinian sense, or that Speech Act theory as a philosophy proposing an illocutionary category of language-use is applicable to texts. Pratt, Lanser and Petrey are all interesting on the contextuality of texts, and on the interrelationship between readers and texts, positions Speech Act theory has been helpful to them in reaching. However, they do not adequately show how an illocution in the sense in which such a thing is described by Austin, can exist textually.

---

<sup>167</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p84

<sup>168</sup> There isn't one!

<sup>169</sup> for example *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p91

<sup>170</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p114

<sup>171</sup> *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* p131

<sup>172</sup> His chapter 8 is titled "Locution, Illocution and Deconstruction"

All of them tend to oversimplify Austin's description of illocutions and perlocutions in *How To*, and they tend to ignore perlocutions. All of them also, to a greater or lesser degree, ignore one particular element of the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction as expressed by Austin; the sense in which conventions guarantee illocutions but not perlocutions. As such, they tend generally to confuse illocutions and perlocutions (for the perfectly good reason that they are indistinguishable – a fact Pratt, Lanser and Petrey do not, however, acknowledge<sup>173</sup>).

Thus while their work does illustrate that the idea that language use operates through 'conventions' involving the speaker/author and the hearers/readers is fruitful, and provides interesting insights into literary theory, it never manages to demonstrate successfully that "speech act theory can apply to texts"<sup>174</sup>. This is at least the case if Speech Act theory includes a belief in the existence of Austin-defined illocutions and perlocutions, and the concomitant assumption that meaning is begotten not created. Indeed, if illocutions and perlocutions along the lines described by Austin are assumed to exist, Pratt, Petrey and Lanser all come close to demonstrating something with which Austin himself might possibly have agreed: that literature is a perlocutionary action, not an illocutionary one.

Thus, this detailed exploration of the work of Pratt, Lanser and Petrey has demonstrated at least that Speech Act theory cannot be applied to texts without a clear illustration of how textual illocutions might be supposed to work, or a clear re-fashioning of Speech Act theory that redefines the illocution to fit it into the reading contexts, and evade the strictures of Austin and Searle. Fish's assertion, written before Pratt, Petrey or Lanser had published their texts, that

speech Act theory has been sacrificed to the desire of the literary critic for a system more firmly grounded than any afforded him by his own discipline. The career of this desire always unfolds in two stages: (1) the system or theory is emptied of its content so that the distinctions it is able to make are lost or blurred, and (2) what remains, a terminology and an empty framework, is made into a metaphor,<sup>175</sup>

seems prescient, if a trifle negative. It cannot then be appropriate to cite Pratt, Petrey or Lanser as evidence that Speech Act theory can be applied to texts such as the Bible, at least without additional hermeneutical work.

This chapter has, then, highlighted two significant problems in using Speech Act theory as a textual hermeneutic, let alone a Biblical one. The first problem is that Austin's initial exclusion of all except signed texts from his theory is

---

<sup>173</sup> This distinction is explored in more detail in succeeding chapters.

<sup>174</sup> R S Briggs: *Words in Action* op cit p86.

<sup>175</sup> 'How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism', *MLN* 91:5 (October 1976) p1002.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

more fundamental than is realized by Pratt, Petrey or Lanser, and is an indication of a deep seated flaw that Derrida uncovers. The second problem is that although Austin's exclusion of so many types of language use is self-serving, this suggests not that texts can be illocutionary, but rather the reverse: texts suggest that there is no such thing as an illocution.

There may be no reason in principle why we should not regard texts as performative, but there seem to be a number of reasons for doubting that they could be illocutionary. This, however, has not stopped hermeneuts using Speech Act theory and talking about illocutions in their biblical exegesis. Some of these works will be examined in the next chapter, beginning with an examination of the relevant work of Donald Evans and Anthony Thiselton, the scholars who began the introduction of Speech Act theory into Biblical hermeneutics.

## CHAPTER THREE: SPEECH ACT THEORY AND BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

### 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter of this thesis, I discussed the application of Speech Act theory in literary criticism, and concluded that the work of Pratt, Petrey and Lanser in fact crucially undermines the idea that the illocution has a place in textual hermeneutics. The literary critics have revised Speech Act theory as Austin and especially Searle imagine it. In so doing, they have without generally realising it, greatly undermined Speech Act theory's distinctiveness, and effectively removed the idea of the illocution.

This might not matter, if biblical hermeneuts are only seeking to use Speech Act theory in similar ways to those of the literary critics; that is to say, without bothering unduly about things like illocutions as such, and concentrating more on the simpler idea that language is performative<sup>1</sup>. Work would still need to be done on how written texts 'perform'<sup>2</sup>, and on the relation between the whole text and individual phrases within it.

However, in at least some cases, the idea of the illocution is the particular concept that is most valuable to Biblical hermeneuts, because of the implication that in the illocution there exists a speech act in which the meaning does not require active understanding to be effective, and thus in some senses sidetracks the reading context. This is what makes Speech Act theory so attractive as a Biblical hermeneutic that will defend a traditional idea of revelation against the 'death of the author'.

This chapter examines some of the ways in which Speech Act theory has been used as a biblical hermeneutic, to see whether such attempts have been any more successful than those of the literary critics at evading Stanley Fish's gloomy prediction of vacuity and metaphoricity<sup>3</sup>.

### 2. Donald Evans's use of Speech Act theory in Biblical Exegesis

The use of Speech Act theory in Biblical and indeed textual hermeneutics was initiated, as I have already noted, by Donald Evans, in his book *The Logic of*

---

<sup>1</sup> Or, as Möller puts it, "Speech-act theory contributes to the discussion by drawing our attention to the sociolinguistic dimension of language": K Möller, 'Words of (In-)evitable Certitude? Reflections on the Interpretation of Prophetic Oracles of Judgement', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 377

<sup>2</sup> Or, if you prefer, on how written utterances are 'performed'

<sup>3</sup> Quoted at the end of the previous chapter

*Self-involvement*<sup>4</sup>. He suggests that Austin's identification of illocutionary, perlocutionary and locutionary speech acts has an application to Biblical hermeneutics. However, Evans also initiates the tendency to subvert and elide any difference between speaking and reading, by omitting any detailed study of 'textuality', and whether or not there might be any differences between a verbal and written illocution.

He does not adequately consider how to apply a theory about the act of speaking, to something (reading a written text) which certainly appears to be a different sort of action. Indeed, at the very beginning of his book, as he begins to give an outline of Austin's 'performative theory', Evans notes that "I shall restrict my analysis to spoken rather than written language, but this is merely a matter of convenience"<sup>5</sup>, an assertion requiring a defence he does not provide<sup>6</sup>.

Rather than using Austin's terminology of locutions, illocutions and perlocutions, Evans suggests his own. He is interested principally in the idea of "the performative force of language"<sup>7</sup> and suggests that some performatives have implications which are "'Indefeasible'; it makes no sense to disclaim what is implied"<sup>8</sup>. He is only able to make this assertion, however, because he has already ruled out any possible 'contamination'. Evans has already stated that his examples are being spoken "in any standard\* context"<sup>9</sup>. He does not exhaustively define this, but suggests in his footnote, with echoes of Austin; "that is, I am not acting in a play, testing a microphone, mimicking, etc.; and I am not speaking in an ironical tone of voice, giving the word 'commend' a meaning which contrasts with its ordinary, non-ironical meaning. In all subsequent analysis we shall ignore both sorts of exception."<sup>10</sup>

Thus he makes it clear that he is only considering the standard, ordinary, non-ironic meaning, which he imagines as being in accordance with what Derrida

---

<sup>4</sup> London, SCM Press Ltd, 1963.

<sup>5</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p28 footnote 1

<sup>6</sup> This is in fact a fairly common assumption among those using the idea of the illocution: see for example W P Alston, who notes "I follow current practice in using terms for speech in a broadened sense to cover any employment of language. Thus 'utterance' is to be taken to range over the production of any linguistic token, whether by speech, writing, or other means. And 'speaker of a language' is to be understood as 'user of a language'": *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca NY, 2000) footnote 1 p11, and again, in a discussion of Austin's phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts, "obviously, I can produce a sentence by writing rather than by making noise. But there too I will have done something on the same semantic level as making noises, viz., making marks. To avoid intolerable circumlocutions I will restrict myself to oral speech, leaving it to the reader to make the application to other modes of linguistic behaviour", footnote 5 p18.

<sup>7</sup> The title of his first chapter

<sup>8</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p47

<sup>9</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p46. I have added in the \* to denote Evans's footnote discussed immediately below.

<sup>10</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p46 footnote 2

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

would describe as a 'saturated context'<sup>11</sup>. Evans does not attempt to define this context exactly: presumably because he is aware that it is impossible to do so without remainder.

Evans thus assumes that meaning is the property of the sender and its successful 'transmission' is potentially assured, in the right context. The meaning of a phrase can be assumed to coincide with what its speaker or writer would assert to be their intention: meaning is thus begotten not created. He also, and for this reason, shares Austin's recognition that illocutions must therefore be divorced from their effects, a thesis he advances by suggesting that "performative force" is distinct from and unrelated to "causal power"<sup>12</sup>. For Evans, as for Austin, the meaning of an illocutionary or indefeasible speech act is not related to its effects, and there is thus a predictability of its success or effectiveness, in the right context, which gives it a degree of 'guaranteeability' or predictability.

This distinction is at the heart of the illocutionary-perlocutionary divide: without it, the distinction between them collapses, as does the assumption that meaning is begotten not created and is simply transmitted in an utterance or in revelation. Austin's attempts to establish this distinction, and the concept of uptake which he employs, are discussed in chapter five of this thesis, together with Evans's development of the distinction<sup>13</sup>.

Evans disagrees most interestingly with Austin however, in his attempt to apply a version of Speech Act theory to texts. Evans does not suggest that texts can be illocutionary, since he prefers the term performative. He does, though, move from discussing performative expressions which are entirely spoken, in part one of his work, entitled "Self-Involving elements in everyday language", to "Self-Involving elements in the Biblical Conception of Creation" (the title of part two) without any recognition that he is moving from a consideration of spoken utterances to a consideration of theological beliefs that are reflections of a written text.

He assumes that there is no important distinction between a spoken and written utterance, but does not defend this assumption, nor acknowledge that Austin would have denied it. Instead, he refers to "the biblical conception of Creation"<sup>14</sup> and "man's religious language"<sup>15</sup> as though they were themselves spoken performative utterances.

Evans recognizes that there are many hermeneutical and historical issues implicit in an assessment of, for example, "the biblical conception of

---

<sup>11</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p18.

<sup>12</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p70ff

<sup>13</sup> As will be noted later, this distinction also permeates a portion of Thiselton's work.

<sup>14</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p13

<sup>15</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p14

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Creation"<sup>16</sup>, but he does not address the difficulty of applying a theory about the meaning of spoken utterances, to utterances contained within a written text<sup>17</sup>. Instead, he treats the text of the Bible as though it were a collection of spoken utterances, an assumption necessitated because he is interested in how the texts are used as self-involving utterances. Evans does not discuss the Biblical text as a text or series of texts at all, but only in terms of how self-involving its language is, from the point of view of someone who seems sometimes to be a character within the text, sometimes a reader or theologian, and sometimes a 'speaker-aloud' of the text<sup>18</sup>.

He refers to the "biblical context"<sup>19</sup>: this is generally shorthand for the context of a Christian considering the Bible in a specific way: indeed Evans later defines it as "the biblical context which I am expounding"<sup>20</sup>. He suggests, for example, that "in the biblical context, to say, 'God is my Creator' is to acknowledge a subordinate status"<sup>21</sup>, but it is never made clear how this 'saying' relates to a reading, or to the fact that all of the biblical texts are the creations (to some degree or other) of human authors.

Evans recognises that

when Jones says, 'God is my Creator', his utterance is self-involving if it occurs in the biblical context. Whether or not it does occur in the biblical context depends on his decision; it depends on either his participation in an Occasional context (such as Christian worship) which involves this Traditional context, or his inner intention to speak within this Traditional context.<sup>22</sup>

This indicates not just the specific nature of Evans's context, but also the extent to which this context blurs the reading/speaking distinction to the point of collapse. This is not necessarily without merit in the believing context Evans imagines, but it requires identification, analysis, and most importantly the defence of its performative status against Austin's own denials. None of this is ever undertaken<sup>23</sup>.

---

<sup>16</sup> See page 18ff

<sup>17</sup> He notes "in this chapter and in subsequent chapters I shall not consider the historical reliability of the Exodus-story or the origin and growth of the story, for we are only interested in analysing the conception of Israel's creation which eventually emerged in the Old Testament" *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p 146

<sup>18</sup> For example, Evans notes that: "I have been saying that if the utterance, 'God is my Creator' occurs in the biblical context, it is self-involving in certain specific ways. When a man utters these words in some other context, his utterance may not be similarly self-involving", *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p160, and it seems clear that he imagines his biblical context here as spoken not read.

<sup>19</sup> For example *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p150

<sup>20</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p161

<sup>21</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p153

<sup>22</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p162

<sup>23</sup> As is also noted by J W Adams in his *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 448* (New York, T&T Clark, 2006) footnote 166 ps50-51, the book itself discussed later in this chapter.



It seems almost obvious to point out that texts are not self-involving unless they are read in a context that permits that effect. However, Evans, while he would not deny this, does not investigate the nature of reading context at all. He focuses entirely on the individual reader, and offers no description of their context beyond that, except that it must be “the biblical context” of self-involvement, in order for the text to be self-involving.

Indeed, it is not inaccurate to suggest, I think, that Evans is not interested in ‘the Bible’ as a text or a series of texts at all. Instead, he is here interested, in an almost Searlean sense, in discrete speech acts within Scripture that are appropriated into spoken discourse by the reader, and which have indefeasible theological implications. He aims to create or advocate a context in which particular – in-his-view-‘Biblical’ – speech acts can be appropriately performed, and beyond this interest in speech as a performance which he takes from Austin, Evans hardly offers a ‘speech act exegesis’ at all.

Perhaps his most lasting legacy is to prompt Anthony Thiselton’s interest in Austin and speech acts, the subject of the next section of this thesis, with his recognition that

when ‘*dabar Yahweh*’ means ‘word of the Lord’, the phrase may sometimes bring to the particular context some associations with the idea of the divine word as a *deed*. But the association is not a universal and distinctive feature of the Hebrew word ‘*dabar*’ as such ...; it reflects the biblical *conception* of the *divine* word, which is evident in the *English* translation<sup>24</sup>

and where for him “a central theme in biblical theology is the conception of the divine word as an act which *brings about* results”<sup>25</sup>.

### 3. Anthony Thiselton and Speech Act exegesis

Speech Act theory has played a significant role in the hermeneutical approach of Anthony Thiselton since his first foray into the topic in 1970, referring both to Austin and Donald Evans, in ‘The Parables as Language Event’<sup>26</sup>. In the collected works edition *Thiselton on Hermeneutics*, published in 2006<sup>27</sup>, “speech acts” and “speech act theory” still have one of the longest indexical entries<sup>28</sup>.

---

<sup>24</sup> Logic of Self-involvement p165. This point is also taken up and developed by Thiselton in his ‘The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings’, *Journal of Theological Studies NS* 25:2 (1974) p 289.

<sup>25</sup> Logic of Self-involvement p163.

<sup>26</sup> *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23:4 (1970) pp 437-468.

<sup>27</sup> *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: the collected works and new essays of Anthony Thiselton* (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on Religion. Collected works), (Aldershot UK, Ashgate Publishing Limited).

<sup>28</sup> *Thiselton on Hermeneutics* p824.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

In his first article, Thiselton reviews the hermeneutical assumptions of Ernst Fuchs, and uses Speech Act theory, together with input from Wittgenstein, Gadamer, and other linguistic philosophers, to reflect on the parables of Jesus as instances of language use which “force him [the hearer] to see horizons which he might otherwise not have chosen to see ... [and which grip] him at every level of attitude, thought, and emotion.”<sup>29</sup> As a part of this discussion, he mentions Evans and Austin, suggesting that “the logic of many parables is self-involving. They function *partly* as performatives” and specifically, in the case of the linguistic acts that Fuchs identifies, as “*illocutionary acts*”<sup>30</sup>.

He uses Austin’s ideas to suggest that Fuchs and his colleagues have been overly rigid in their views of assertions, and concludes by suggesting that “it remains to be seen what further light can be shed by the resources and techniques of linguistic philosophy, both on the parables and on other forms of biblical literature”<sup>31</sup>: a suggestion he pursues in his article ‘The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings’<sup>32</sup>, when he notes that one of the reasons for casting doubt on the assumption that words had a kind of magical aura in biblical cultures is the existence of illocutionary acts which, however, have “little or nothing to do with natural physical cause and effect”<sup>33</sup> but rather are dependent on the existence of social conventions<sup>34</sup>.

In all of these examples, Thiselton uses Speech Act theory in quite a limited way, to explain how it is that words or utterances are performative. He uses the idea of an illocution simply to illustrate the social conventionality underlying spoken performatives that have then been recorded in texts, and is able to explain how the words functioned satisfactorily, without any necessary recourse to the supposedly ‘primitive views’ of language held by ancient cultures.

Here, Thiselton is using speech act theory in a simply descriptive way. Speech Act theory serves to demonstrate the fallacy inherent in the view of language as ‘purely’ descriptive rather than as ‘contextually active’, and draws attention to aspects of the contextual situation of Biblical utterances, in which specific contexts they mean and act. In all of this, I entirely agree with Thiselton, and Speech Act theory seems up to a point helpful, as indeed it was – in this respect at least – for the literary theorists considered in the previous chapter.

My one caveat with this use of Speech Act theory, in both literary and specifically Biblical hermeneutics, concerns the usefulness of the specific

---

<sup>29</sup> ‘The Parables as Language Event’ p446.

<sup>30</sup> ‘The Parables as Language Event’ p462

<sup>31</sup> ‘The Parables as Language Event’ p468

<sup>32</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 25:2 (1974) pp283-299.

<sup>33</sup> ‘The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings’ p293

<sup>34</sup> But most assuredly not “on mistaken ideas about word-magic” p294.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

categories 'illocution' and 'perlocution' here. It does not seem entirely clear why these categories add anything at this point, since it would be perfectly possible to describe speech as 'performative', and to illustrate its contextual efficacy, and the ways in which meaning is contextually established, simply by referring to individual types of speech act, such as orders, promises, commands, and the like<sup>35</sup>. 'Illocution' and 'perlocution' seem to add an unnecessary layer of description without providing any further elucidation of the particular speech acts under consideration.

Of course, the reason why these categories are used is that they are inherited from Austin, who is using them to distinguish two fundamentally different generic sorts of speech act, one of which he describes as 'conventional', in relation to the other, which is much more 'fluid'. As I have already noted, this distinction is examined in chapter five of this thesis, together with the development of it by Evans and Thiselton, who I believe absorb far too uncritically the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction. To pre-empt the detail of that discussion, I should say here simply that I believe that the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction is fundamentally flawed, and exposes again some of the inherent weaknesses in Austin's linguistic assumptions. More importantly in this specific context, I don't see that it adds anything to what one might call 'speech act textual analysis'.

However, using Speech Act theory as way of describing what has occurred does seem to me to have a usefulness, albeit only in this descriptive and 'past tense' sort of analysis<sup>36</sup>. Where I believe more problems arise, is when as well as using the language of Speech Act theory in a descriptive sense, to understand what has happened, it also becomes used in a predictive sense, to describe what will or should happen, and how an utterance will be or should be taken. Problems here are only exacerbated by the fact that in the context of textual analysis, this additional use is generally directed towards the act of reading. I believe that Evans and Thiselton both stray too far into this territory.

I have already indicated that Evans's description of reading context is somewhat under-defined, and I believe that on occasion Thiselton is susceptible to the same accusation. In 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Some

---

<sup>35</sup> As we have seen, this is more or less how most literary theorists have used speech act theory. In this respect, I don't think Fish is really quite fair to accuse this approach of vacuity, since it is doing at least one helpful thing, which is identifying the fact that language is an activity not simply a 'neutral' observation, in all sorts of contexts, and that as Pratt notes, 'literature is a context'. This is the point of the word 'performativity' or its ilk - to indicate that language is contextual and meaning is contextual. Austin, however, was indeed trying to do far more than just demonstrate this: he was trying to categorize it, as Fish suggests.

<sup>36</sup> And only in a rather general, 'this is an order' kind of description.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Proposals for a More Creative Agenda'<sup>37</sup>, he notes, for example, that "by appropriating the praise and worship of the Psalmist and of Jesus and Paul, each new generation of believers joins in with the unfolding divine dialogue of loving promise, loving pledge, loving forgiveness, loving adoration and loving mutual acts of blessing"<sup>38</sup>, but does not outline what 'appropriating' means in a reading context.

It could be argued that I am simply being pedantic, in that it is doubtless clear that Thiselton is envisaging the same kind of (entirely authentic) believing context as was Evans. But it is helpful to make this clear, and possibly even to reflect on the nature of this specific context, because of the implications this has for the intimate, creative relationship 'context' has with 'meaning'<sup>39</sup>.

I have no quarrel with the theology or with the conclusions Thiselton advances when – for example – he suggests that, having acknowledged that we are living as justified and yet sinners on the basis of a theological 'already/not-yet', therefore in the same way we can say that

*I entrust my daily life to the consequences and commitments entailed in acts of promise, commission, appointment, address, directive and pledge of love spoken in the name of God or God in Christ in Scripture, even though the definitive corroboration of the validity of these linguistic acts awaits final confirmation at the last judgment. Just as sanctification entails a process of transformation into the image of Christ, although through justification I already am 'in Christ', clothed in his righteousness, even so interpretation and understanding of Scripture entails a process of grasping more fully the implications, entailments, nuances, and perhaps further commitments and promises that develop what has been appropriated in faith.<sup>40</sup>*

But here, I am – when I read – internalising spoken acts, and it is not clear what it means to 'appropriate' an '*illocution*' in this context. The relationship between illocutions and reading is not explicit: can the act of reading itself be illocutionary? How do illocutions apply in a reading context?

I can certainly say, on the basis of a 'prior-to' position; 'I am going to place myself in this position, and/or allow these words to move me'; also, one can simply be moved, emotionally, in a 'perlocutionary' way, by the words of Scripture (or other texts, of course). When Jesus is recorded as speaking in the Gospels, or when St Paul writes, we can insert ourselves into the audience (as it were), through an imaginative act<sup>41</sup>, and we can say, 'He is writing to or

<sup>37</sup> 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda' in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) pp 107-141.

<sup>38</sup> Op cit p131.

<sup>39</sup> See the discussion of Timothy Polk later on in this chapter.

<sup>40</sup> 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda' op cit p136-137

<sup>41</sup> Of a sort common in some readings of some literature

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

speaking to me - this is directly relevant to me. I will base my life around this hope. I will choose to accept the authority of the Triune God so revealed'. This is my choice: my perhaps inspired response to reading and studying scripture. But it is not an automatic response, nor the only possible one.

It would perhaps be possible to argue that *I make* the words I have read and accepted *into* an illocution by accepting them as an order, promise, command, or whatever, addressed directly to and for me, in an act of self-involved reading which is made possible because of, and from, my context. However, because this kind of self-involving reading requires understanding, this is not quite an illocution as Austin would have described one, since illocutions are – as will be demonstrated in chapter five – non-consequential for Austin, and are so in essence and of necessity.

Thus there are in a way two illocutions here (if illocutions there be at all): the one described in the text, and the one I through the prompting of the Spirit appropriate to myself. In either case, they become an illocution when they are recognised as such: illocutions are then in reading made, not begotten; and are therefore perversely not illocutions at all – they are at the most just speech acts that are recognised because I have already understood them to be such a thing. In this case, my reading context has already told me about Jesus, and I am not reading the book to be convinced, but rather to be further illuminated<sup>42</sup>.

#### 4. Richard Briggs's *Words in Action* and Speech Act exegesis

The unacknowledged blurring of the oral-written distinction that we have noted above is not just peculiar to Evans and Thiselton. For example, in the discussion of Donald Evans in Richard Briggs's *Words in Action*<sup>43</sup> it is clear that what is actually being described is not the action of reading, but that of speaking and 'owning' the words of a text<sup>44</sup>.

---

<sup>42</sup> If we are looking for an instance in which the text alone convinces a reader, we would have to imagine a situation in which, perhaps because all personal contact is forbidden, missionaries drop from a plane or secretly deposit on their land bibles or New Testaments for an uncontacted tribe. We would have to further assume that these Scriptures are in the tribe's language, or one they can read, and indeed that they have a concept of reading, writing and books, and, probably, that they are aware that there are other humans out there, and are prepared to examine the texts. If they then begin to read, it is not then impossible that they are transformed by what they read and decide to alter, amend or forsake their old lives to include a faith in Jesus or God. In this example, one might well feel able to speak of the illocutionary action of the text. But the readers are highly unlikely even in this scenario, to arrive at the Nicene Creed or 'our' understanding of justification. In this case we could say that the text alone has transformed them. But only in this kind of case, and even here we would probably want to say that their faith was lacking fullness, just as Paul did to those who had only received John's Baptism.

<sup>43</sup> *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> It's a kind of 'serious performance'.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Briggs believes that one can avoid “the way in which illocutions mark out self-involvement in a Wittgensteinian ‘logical’ sense” becoming “blurred with effective self-involvement in a perlocutionary sense”<sup>45</sup>, because of the illocutionary nature of texts which require only uptake and not a response. However, Briggs’s stance here presupposes a self-involvement which is not the *prima facie* response of a reader to a text<sup>46</sup>, but is a part of some illocutionary uptake-effect<sup>47</sup>. Briggs does not clarify it in relation to the act, or possibly the acts, of reading. He doesn’t discuss the transition from Speech acts to textual actions, instead he simply asserts, following his discussion of the Derrida-Searle debate, that “if speech act theory can apply to texts, the next step is to ask what has happened when this has been done”<sup>48</sup>.

There is a missing step in Briggs’s argument between – on the one hand – a discussion of Derrida and Searle and their argument about the nature of acts of communication; and on the other hand, the application to written texts of a theory identifying spoken utterances as performative<sup>49</sup> of the acts they ‘help make explicit’. In particular, the refinement or revision of the theory that identifies some performative acts as illocutionary and thus guaranteed, the aspect of the theory of most interest here, needs to be described in such a way as to make it applicable to texts rather than spoken utterances<sup>50</sup>.

It is not enough simply to demonstrate that Austin’s exclusions are self-serving or inadequate, as I agree that they are, because the plausibility of explicit performatives depends upon them. If Austin’s exclusion of various categories (including most writing) from his theory is to be ignored, the concept of the explicit performative needs to be re-thought to make allowance for the greater role of the audience in realizing and adapting conventions. This problem is not, however, addressed.

The application of Speech Act theory to texts also raises questions about whether the author or the characters is the speaker, and about the textually enclosed, narrative nature of written communication. Even assuming that the text is taken as the author’s utterance, many texts, particularly ‘books’, are of considerable length, and it is necessary to demonstrate that the entire text is a consistent utterance-action, or that it is several, and how the author ‘speaks’ in or through the text; through narrative, specific characters, authorial asides etcetera. In particular this is necessary in respect of the Bible, a series of texts

---

<sup>45</sup> *Words in Action* p165

<sup>46</sup> Or is not demonstrated to be such.

<sup>47</sup> The difference between understanding and uptake will be examined in more detail in chapter five, since it is integral to the illocutionary-perlocutionary divide.

<sup>48</sup> *Words in Action* p86

<sup>49</sup> (in some conditions)

<sup>50</sup> “Lanser’s and Pratt’s proposals will need to be appropriated after the necessary transpositions”, as D Patte suggests, without detailing what this work of transposition might involve: ‘Speech Act Theory and Biblical Exegesis’, *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p100.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

(or text) whose authorship is disputed (and which is perhaps both human and Divine), and which may be the product of many different authors with differing stances.

The variously-related questions of what sorts of action writing and reading are, and of how the action of a writer is 'uptaken', understood or recognized by a reader, need also to be considered. This last is particularly important for those who, unlike Derrida, insist on the possibility of a guaranteed, illocutionary, textual meaning. Derrida, of course, insists rather on the reverse; that speech is affected or perhaps infected by writing's absence of guarantee and absence of agent.

### **5. A brief description of a selection of Biblical Speech Act exegeses: Introduction**

As we saw in the previous chapters, and as I have again mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, there are at least two different ways in which Speech Act theory can be used in textual exegesis, and these two ways can be variously described and are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

On the one hand, Speech Act theory can be used to understand – in a descriptive sense – specific linguistic acts that have occurred in texts. Generally, in this case, the detail of the theory is of less importance, and may be lost or understated. Of principle concern is the fundamental 'speech act view of language': that language is 'performative': an activity, not a 'mere description'. Beyond that, specific acts occurring in the text are described.

On the other hand, Speech Act theory can be used to understand how it is that texts 'operate': how they are read and affect readers, or how their authors intend them to be read. Generally, in this case, more use is made of the illocutionary and perlocutionary distinctions, and Austin's linguistic categories are referred to and perhaps revised in more detail<sup>51</sup>.

Individual Speech Act exegeses can and sometimes do adopt both approaches at different times, or indeed adopt courses that steer between these poles (if that is what they are). In the following sections, I will offer a brief description of various Speech Act exegeses and their approach to Speech Act theory. However, it should be noted that I will not attempt a comprehensive description of the studies concerned, for a variety of reasons. In the first place, to describe a number of studies in detail would take up considerable time and space; more importantly, it would stray well beyond the subject of this thesis and the ability of this author to evaluate the detail of the exegetical arguments put forward.

---

<sup>51</sup> This is essentially the same distinction as that made by Briggs when he notes that Speech Act theory can be used within or outside the text : 'The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation', *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 9 (2001) p237

**Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

**5a. T M McNulty, 'Pauline Preaching: A Speech-Act Analysis'<sup>52</sup>**

T Michael McNulty announces that he intends, "by examining the role that preaching played in the experience that Paul had with the community at Corinth, to clarify that relationship and to illuminate the connection between this fundamental religious use of language and Christian life."<sup>53</sup> He determines that a consideration of preaching must take account both of "its self-involving character" and the "fact that it is fundamentally communication"<sup>54</sup>, and goes on to note that "it would be a mistake to divorce a linguistic event from the speaker-hearer context in which it occurs". He cites Austin as suggesting this fact with his description of the "*performative aspect*" of language, which describes for McNulty the way in which language is a doing of something which is "institutionalized in human society."<sup>55</sup>

Thus far, McNulty's approach sits quite lightly to the details of Austin's theory. However, he then goes on to outline briefly Austin's locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, and suggests that "we can best understand preaching if we look on the *proclamation* of the gospel as an illocutionary act"<sup>56</sup>. McNulty suggests that "proclamation is most plausibly thought of as implicit"<sup>57</sup>, and thus that it is an implicit illocutionary act, since it is not necessarily immediately obvious what the speaker intends, which may be the occasion for misfiring of the act, when the speaker's intention is not recognised.<sup>58</sup>

However, Paul's preaching at Corinth was successful because it was a simple demonstration of the actions of the Spirit through Paul's own weakness: this proclamation was a successful "event in which something is *done*": that something producing an "intended effect", and the "perlocutionary act accompanying the proclamation was the establishing of a Christian community among the Corinthians."<sup>59</sup>

McNulty then tries to analyse the specific illocutionary acts included in the one act of proclamation, and he suggests that "there is a sense in which the proclamation contains the life of the preacher as an essential part"<sup>60</sup>, a part which should be imitated by the hearers. The similarity with Polk's work on

---

<sup>52</sup> *Worship* 53 (1979) pp 207-14.

<sup>53</sup> Op cit p207.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Op cit p208

<sup>56</sup> Op cit p209

<sup>57</sup> Op cit p210

<sup>58</sup> He gives as an example Paul's preaching to the Athenians, which he suggests misfired because Paul uses "philosophical methods" which "made the proclamation seem something it was not: mere information."

<sup>59</sup> Op cit p210

<sup>60</sup> Op cit p211



Jeremiah, discussed in a succeeding section, is interesting because McNulty has reached it by such different means than does Polk. I am bound to say that while I don't disagree with McNulty's conclusion that proclamation has to involve the life of the preacher in order to be effective, I am entirely unconvinced by his Speech Act analysis.

However, from the point of view of this thesis, the appropriateness of his conclusions and the accuracy of his exegesis are immaterial. Instead what is of interest is the fact that McNulty is primarily describing a series of past events in terms of the acts that they were recognised as having been. He thus sits somewhat towards the 'descriptive' pole in terms of his use of Speech Act theory, despite his somewhat idiosyncratic use of Austin's specific categories, and his interest in the status of the reader. He does not suggest that the text has exactly illocutionary relations with the reader, but he does describe within the text acts that the text describes as illocutionary, and he also suggests that the reading of the text has implications for the reader; thus there is an inclination towards an interest in the text itself as an illocutionary act in relation to the reader.

#### **Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

**5b. D J A Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (JSOT Supplement Series 1).<sup>61</sup>**

This monograph is among the oldest of the various works considered in this section, and in some ways one of the easiest to evaluate for the purposes I have set out, since Clines himself notes that due to the inadequacies of the "conventional historical criticism" in respect of Isaiah 53, he proposes instead to use a "new hermeneutic" which "stresses that language can become event; that is, that language need not be mere talk *about* something, but that it can itself *do* something."<sup>62</sup> In this regard he mentions Austin and his "performative utterances"<sup>63</sup>, but then immediately goes on to note that "Austin of course is interested primarily in performative utterances in ordinary language ... while I am interested in this functional aspect of literary language in general, and of high poetry in particular."<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, for Clines, since he is interested in "the *way* in which the language of parable or poem can be event. Here Austin's interest must of course drop out of sight, since he has established simply that one conventional use of language is as deed, thus providing the basic and irrefutable foundation for the more sophisticated superstructure of hermeneutical theory."<sup>65</sup> This might

<sup>61</sup> JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1983.

<sup>62</sup> *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53*, p53

<sup>63</sup> As well as noting that he is "much indebted to my colleague A C Thiselton" and Thiselton's papers "The New Hermeneutic" and "The Parables as Language Event", in his footnote 1 on p53.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid* p54

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

indeed serve as a banner for much of the literary critical use of Speech Act theory we have already examined, and for quite a bit of the Biblical hermeneutics we will shortly consider, and identifies Clines as very much towards the 'specific descriptive' pole of Speech Act exegesis.

He is not in the least concerned by illocutions or by illocutionary reading events, rather he believes that "a literary text creates an alternative "world" ... which then confronts the reader" into which the reader must enter "to experience it, in order to understand it"<sup>66</sup>. Indeed, Clines himself takes a very 'post-modern' view of textual meaning, which is far from the idea of the illocution: he notes that "once it is recognised that the text does not exist as a carrier of information, but has a life of its own, it becomes impossible to talk of *the* meaning of a text, as if it had only *one* proper meaning"<sup>67</sup> and notes "the vast variety of meanings the text itself can create"<sup>68</sup>.

There is no recognition, in his brief and fascinating monograph, of the detail of Austin's theory, nor of – for example – Searle's revisions to it; and no recognition that Austin would have been unhappy – at least on the basis of *How to do things with Words* – about the alliance between Speech Act theory and a poetic text. This does not, however, affect his argument, since he is primarily interested in attacking the approach to Isaiah 53 taken by "historical-critical scholarship" which "is bound to mistreat a cryptic poetic text when it regards it as a puzzle to be solved, a code to be cracked" rather than having due regard to its own "unforthcomingness"<sup>69</sup>.

As the title of his pamphlet notes, Clines is proposing "a literary approach" to Isaiah 53, not a Speech Act one, and Speech Act theory is mentioned simply as an indication of the poverty and inadequacy of a view of language that would see it simply as descriptive. There a number of similarities in this respect, between Clines's work and Timothy Polk's examination of Jeremiah, discussed below, which is both of a similar date to Clines's piece on Isaiah, and included within the same Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series.

### **Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

**5c. T Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self* (JSOT Supplement Series 32).<sup>70</sup>**

Polk notes that in his book "our task will be to trace the picture drawn of the prophet by the first-person poetic, so-called autobiographical, passages and to

---

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p59

<sup>68</sup> Ibid p60

<sup>69</sup> Ibid p25

<sup>70</sup> JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1984.

describe the function this picture performs.”<sup>71</sup> Like Clines with regard to Isaiah 53, but more widely, Polk insists that the Bible should be viewed synchronically rather than diachronically; that is to say, as a literary whole rather than in terms of its historical evolution or as a kind of historical source book<sup>72</sup>. He also notes that “against any effort to equate meaning simply with an author’s intention, or to locate it as residing *in* the text, we want to maintain that meaning only transpires when the *articulated* thought of one person is *heard* by another\*. It is a process, in other words, something that happens *between* text and reader, and is incomplete in either an intention or a text taken by itself.”<sup>73</sup>

He suggests that “talking about intention is a way of talking about the patterned production of meaning”, and that intention is definitely not “something in the head, ... a mental process or datum of consciousness, ... as if having an intention required having an awareness of it.” He concludes that connecting the idea of intention with those of “consciousness and causality” is a “misleading, and pervasive, habit of thought”<sup>74</sup>, somewhat echoing Austin himself: this area is pursued in more detail in chapter four of this thesis, although I should note that Polk here demonstrates a sophisticated approach with which I agree.

His approach allows Polk to make sense of phrases such as ‘the text intends’, which is in his terms a kind of

shorthand way of saying that one reading is to be preferred to another on the basis of what is perceived as the texts’ comprehensive structure, thematic concerns, point(s) of view, tone, diction, and whatever other internal, literary features are deemed as relevant and recognised as impelling text and reader to ‘the point’. In

---

<sup>71</sup> *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self* (JSOT Supplement Series 32) (JSOT Press, Sheffield, 1984), p8.

<sup>72</sup> Op cit p14

<sup>73</sup> Op cit p16, where the \* refers to his footnote 28, contained on ps177-179, where he gives significant detail about his view of reading, including the assertion, with which I largely agree, that “*all* meanings are ‘given’ to the text by its readers, for meaning is a reader-dependent concept. ... (Now, the concept ‘Scripture’, unlike ‘text’, already includes analytically the notion of a readership, of having been and being read, namely by the communities who regard the biblical text as somehow normative for faith and practice. Thus to speak of ‘meaning in Scripture’ is to refer to the meaning(s) that take(s) place in the process of a special kind of reading.)” p178. This however should be read in conjunction with his earlier footnote 24, on p176, which notes that “it is by no means implied here that the world of the text has no conventions or areas of overlap with the real world, however ‘real’ is to be conceived. The trick is in recognizing how the text itself regulates the way the connections occur, function, and are to be interpreted.” As he then goes on to note in the main body of the text, “it might be noted at the outset that one of the things the text does *qua* religious literature is to fashion and train reader expectations and competencies in particular ways”: p16. This very much echoes Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of meaning, described in chapter seven of this thesis.

<sup>74</sup> Op cit p17.

the present case the point is a depiction of the prophet that evokes a set of insights into God's purpose and a set of responses to his call.<sup>75</sup>

From here, Polk's work explores aspects of the 'persona'<sup>76</sup> of Jeremiah as developed in various sections of the Biblical text of the eponymous book, to enable him to make some conclusions about the relationship between the person of Jeremiah depicted through the text's first person and poetic utterances, the revelation of God's message, and the responses and the personality the Divine message requires of the hearer or reader<sup>77</sup>.

He concludes with observations that are particularly informative and interesting in the light of Evans's ideas of self-involvement and – I suggest – provide a much-needed development of those ideas, rooting them in descriptions of reading and of meaning in context. Polk notes that the language he has studied could all be described as 'language of the heart', and that for the persona of Jeremiah, this "first-order" religious language is language of action: it is language in which Jeremiah the persona expresses his feelings in a way that is "performative" of them<sup>78</sup>.

This, however, is as close to Speech Act theory as Polk gets. He goes on to note that

the use of such language, it has been argued, entails powers and capacities that are constitutive of human being. Further, using the language appropriately (i.e. when it fits the circumstances) exercises the capacities and develops the powers so that, in turn, one knows the circumstances better. ... Thus, a responsible language of the heart, and the exercise of the capacities entailed therein, give the self form and

---

<sup>75</sup> Op cit p18

<sup>76</sup> Polk uses the term 'persona to describe "the prophet as depicted in the text. Regarding this depicted Jeremiah as to some extent a literary-theological construct, we shall, to avoid confusion, refer to him as the prophetic 'persona'." This helps to distinguish him from the 'real' Jeremiah, who doubtless existed, but who has a disputed relationship with the literary figure or persona depicted in the Book of Jeremiah: p10.

<sup>77</sup> For example, on page 47 he compares the people's failure to lament in 4:8 with Jeremiah's lamentation for them in 4:19, noting that "it may be observed here that the text, in rendering these words in just this way, is at once rendering an identity description (that is, characterizing the persona Jeremiah) while showing how identity happens, how a self comes to be, achieves form and definition, indeed constitutes itself. Specifically, it shows the self to be the achievement of the responsible, first-person use of the language of the heart." Likewise, on p56: "Jeremiah's words constitute him and enact his prophetic identity as one in sympathy with God. And as one in sympathy with God, he cannot keep from speaking God's response to 'wickedness'." And on p97: "the prophet's self has become part of his message, which is to say, a part of the divine message. Person and office have fully merged. Jeremiah constitutes himself, becomes who he truly is, precisely as he performs the office, however unbearable the tension." Finally he concludes that "it is evident from the previous chapter that Jeremiah's Confessions manifest the same qualities and bear upon the same range of topics that have occupied our attention throughout this study. Poetic form, metaphor, the language of the heart, self-constituting behavior, the representation of a paradigm – all are closely interwoven there, just as in the other first-person speeches of the prophet", p163.

<sup>78</sup> Op cit p167

definition, depth and breadth. So it is with the prophetic persona's primary religious discourse. In it, we have seen, Jeremiah is engaged in the process of self-constitution. Through it he also manifests a profound concept of himself, though it is a working, not a theoretical, concept.<sup>79</sup>

What is true of the persona, is meant also to be true for the reader, Polk argues. In his view, the Book of Jeremiah can be viewed as a cumulative poetic description of the self-constitution of a prophet who embodies God's word, and who can be taken as a template for the believing reader. Thus he firstly notes that "if one concedes that imagination was required in the writing of the text, one must concede that it is also essential to its reading"<sup>80</sup>, and then goes on to suggest that "in an imaginative *religious* work, ... which either assumes or seeks to create a context of faith, the paradigm is presented in a drama within which the believer is requested to see him/herself as a participant."<sup>81</sup>

Thus, while I do not believe that Polk has anything more to say about Speech Act theory than does Clines, he does cast some helpful light on self-involvement, in which he illuminates precisely how much it is a contextual, reader-responsive activity. He notes that

the concern here is ... with the reading process and the responses that belong to the logic of the literature *qua* work, i.e. as something written *and read*; the responses are part of, and help establish, the work's meaning. ... The working hypothesis here has been that meaning does not in any definitive fashion reside *in* the text itself, but issues from the dynamic interaction of text and reader and belongs to the realm of reader experience.<sup>82</sup>

If the reader voluntarily regards the Book as Scripture, then the account of the persona Jeremiah's self-constitution under God becomes not merely a 'third-person' account, but a challenge of self-identity to the reader:

The text, instead of merely proposing possible ways of construing world and self, and beyond simply entertaining the reader with a sense of 'having lived another life', is now viewed as having a claim upon oneself. Its ultimate meaning, what it finally intends, is something that is only completed in the reader's living. How s/he responds to the summons and pursues the intended transformation becomes part of the work's scope.<sup>83</sup>

Polk is clear that this is a response that arises from an interplay between reader and text in a specific context, but there is no suggestion that any of the terms of Speech Act theory are helpful here. Much like Clines, his work is not really in any sense a Speech Act exegesis, and Speech Act theory is of even less significance than it was for Clines.

---

<sup>79</sup> Op cit p168

<sup>80</sup> Op cit p167.

<sup>81</sup> Op cit p172

<sup>82</sup> Op cit p172

<sup>83</sup> Op cit p174

It is not really possible to relate Polk to the 'poles' of Speech Act exegesis previously and tentatively described, but as with Clines, this does not in any way detract from the value of Polk's arguments. These arguments nonetheless have an implication for Evans's and Thiselton's work, by making explicit the particular contexts a 'self-involving' reading requires, and thus casting some doubt on the illocutionary nature of such a reading, because these readings require the dynamic participation and co-creation of the reader, in a way that is incompatible with the illocution.

### **Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

#### **5d. J G du Plessis: two articles in *Neotestamentica*<sup>84</sup>**

Much like McNulty, du Plessis in both his first ('Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23') and second ('Why did Peter ask his question and how did Jesus answer him? Or: Implicature in Luke 12:35-48') articles is also concerned to utilise some of the specifics of Speech Act theory, which he notes that he is drawing from the work of G N Leech<sup>85</sup>. According to du Plessis, Leech distinguishes between two forces which identify the pragmatic meaning<sup>86</sup> of an utterance, which are the "motivation" or "illocutionary goal" or the utterance's "illocutionary force", and the "social goals" or "rhetorical force"<sup>87</sup>.

He analyses these latter in some detail in his first article, and consequently rather less detail in his second, using Grice's co-operative principle and his idea of conversational "maxims", and additions to Grice's theory by Leech, and concludes that "stripped of all terminology Leech's (and Grice's) contribution boils down to a new awareness of the social goals of conversation. ... Meaning, in fact, comes into being in the relation between addresser and addressee."<sup>88</sup>

In his first article, du Plessis then outlines the relationships between concrete author and addressee, abstract author, implied reader, and the characters in the literary work and the narrated world within that<sup>89</sup>. In both, he provides an

---

<sup>84</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23', *Neotestamentica* 21 (1987) 33-56; and 'Why did Peter ask his question and how did Jesus answer him? Or: Implicature in Luke 12:35-48', *Neotestamentica* 22 (1988) 311-324.

<sup>85</sup> He refers to G N Leech, *Principles of pragmatics (Longman Linguistics Library 30)*, (London, Longman, 1983).

<sup>86</sup> This du Plessis defines as "the purpose and effect" of the utterance, in distinction to "meaning as "sense"", which he defines as its "literal or verbal meaning", 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23', p33. The distinction he is aiming at seems to be that between 'dictionary' meaning and 'meaning-in-use' explored in chapter six of this thesis.

<sup>87</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23' p34; 'Why did Peter ask his question and how did Jesus answer him?' p311-313.

<sup>88</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23' p37. He also notes that "the various principles are all culturally conditioned"; 'Why did Peter ask his question and how did Jesus answer him?' p313

<sup>89</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23', ps37-38.

analysis of the excerpt<sup>90</sup> in terms of the adapted Gricean principles he has outlined<sup>91</sup>. He suggests that the obscurity of which the disciples complain in Matthew's Gospel produces in verse 12<sup>92</sup> a response that "is in effect a promise to the disciples even as it is an indirect warning to the others. The disciples are assured of the eventual fruition of the proclamation of the kingdom in their lives. These are the illocutionary forces of the adage"<sup>93</sup>, while in his second article he suggests that "the illocutionary goal of the [first] parable seems also to be perspicuous: the disciples are encouraged to await the return of the *kyrios*"<sup>94</sup>.

Thus, "the illocutionary force of the conversation [between Jesus and the disciples] is ... *convivial* to the social goal"<sup>95</sup>, and Jesus is Himself analogous to the figure of the sower. Indeed, du Plessis suggests that "the parables are used to reveal to man his lack of possibilities and to persuade him to focus on the one from whom possible guidance can come"<sup>96</sup>.

Meanwhile, the implied reader is "drawn into the intimate circle to which the disciples belonged"<sup>97</sup>, or "has become privy to the knowledge of God's will, which is given to the disciples by Jesus. He has therefore become a member of the privileged group who has received much. If he uses this information to live with caring concern towards other followers of Jesus, he will be included in the promised benediction."<sup>98</sup> Thus, as in the previous exegeses, once again "the reader is being challenged in the same privileged way as the disciples had been. The reader has got to decide for himself whether he is part of the good soil or not."<sup>99</sup>

As the preceding brief description indicates, du Plessis is in many respects similar to McNulty in his approach to Speech Act theory, although the variety of Speech Act theory he uses is very different. Just like McNulty, and unlike Polk and Clines, he not only regards the concept of 'performativity' as useful,

---

<sup>90</sup> Which in Matthew is 'the parable of the sower', and in Luke is 'the faithful and wise steward'.

<sup>91</sup> Which principles, I might add, I find in general, and here also, to be entirely unhelpful. As I have already noted, while mentioning Grice himself in chapter one of this thesis, I don't believe that the principles describe actual behaviour, or that they in any way have any 'predictive' usefulness.

<sup>92</sup> "<13:12> For to him who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." RSV

<sup>93</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23' p43.

<sup>94</sup> 'Why did Peter ask his question and how did Jesus answer him?' p316, referring to Luke 12:39-40 .

<sup>95</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23' p45.

<sup>96</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23' p48

<sup>97</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23' p49

<sup>98</sup> 'Why did Peter ask his question and how did Jesus answer him?' p321.

<sup>99</sup> 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23' p51

but attempts to identify illocutionary speech acts within the text<sup>100</sup>. Moreover, while he does not ascribe illocutionary attributes to the reader-text relationship, he too does, like all other exegetes thus far described, suggest that the text challenges the reader.

### **Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

#### **5e. J Eugene Botha: two articles in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, and a book.<sup>101</sup>**

J E Botha produced two complementary articles in the same volume of *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* (issue 47:2), and a book (*Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42*) covering much of the same ground in more detail, all in 1991. With regard to the book, he notes in the preface that “as the title of the book suggests, this study deals for the greater part with a speech act reading of a passage in the Gospel of John. This reading is not merely done to enhance the exegesis of the passage, but serves a very specific aim: It is done to discover something of the style of the Fourth Gospel.”<sup>102</sup>

He further elaborates: “It is my belief that this approach to language which deals with the notion of speech as doing something with words, is so comprehensive in describing these speech acts, that most of the factors pertaining to style are accommodated in these descriptions.”<sup>103</sup> Here, he is thus using speech act theory in its rather looser sense, as we have seen with other scholars previously<sup>104</sup>.

Botha goes on to analyse what is meant by style, and as part of that discussion he refers to Austin’s three types of speech act, noting that the locutionary act is “where a recognizable grammatical sentence is produced and an object is referred to”; that an illocutionary act is “is performed”, such as “questioning, praising, commanding”; and a perlocutionary act can “sometimes” be

---

<sup>100</sup> For example, du Plessis suggests that Jesus’ explanation of the parable in Matthew (which he terms “the application”) has an assertive illocutionary force, asserting a relationship “between the parable world and the disciple’s circumstances” (‘Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23’ p52) so that “the promise and assurance which are the illocutionary forces of the parable can now be fully realized by the disciples.” (Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23’ p53).

<sup>101</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* (*Supplements to Novum Testamentum Volume 65*), (Leiden, E J Brill, 1991); ‘The potential of speech act theory for New Testament Exegesis’, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47:2 (1991) 277-293; ‘Speech act theory and New Testament Exegesis’, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47:2 (1991) 294-303.

<sup>102</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* op cit p ix.

<sup>103</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p x

<sup>104</sup> As he later notes, “Speech act theory is basically directed against the traditional view that sentences can be analyzed adequately in isolation from the context and circumstances of the utterance, and the view that the standard sentence is a type of utterance that can only be judged either true or false.” Op cit p47



performed as well, “dealing with the impact or implication”<sup>105</sup> of an utterance.

Botha defines style as having to do

with the *choices* available to users of language, and since these choices are determined by specific needs and circumstances, style is a *contextually determined* phenomenon. Because of this, style in effect deals with the *successful communication* of texts in context. Every aspect of language which facilitates this process of communication, therefore, has to do with the style of the text. This, however, does not mean that a general description of all the innumerable linguistic and literary features in a text, will amount to a description of the style of a text. Far from it. Only those features which facilitate the specific communication in that specific circumstance can be considered of stylistic value in this paradigm. The features in a text which facilitate this process should not be limited, and can vary according to the specific needs of a specific text or context.<sup>106</sup>

However, this leads him to acknowledge that “the Gospel of John is not an isolated text, but is designed as a religious text to function within a *specific* community and socio-cultural context. The specific linguistic choices made must be related to the specifics of the text and context presupposed in the text of John itself.”<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, given the stress laid by other scholars on the effects of the Biblical text on readers, Botha quotes an Afrikaans article by W S Vorster<sup>108</sup>, which he translates as pointing out that the pragmatic effects of the New Testament are a vital part of its language, and that the texts were not written to be factually informative, but to be persuasive and to achieve effects in the reader (in this emphasis he mirrors Clines and Volk particularly).

He describes an ideal “text theory”<sup>109</sup> for use in interpretation, which he believes should be pragmatic rather than semantic in nature, and I note in particular that one of the required characteristics of the pragmatic theory he believes desirable is that whereas in semantics “the rules of grammar are fundamentally conventional; the principles of general pragmatics are fundamentally non-conventional i.e. motivated in terms of conversational goals.”<sup>110</sup>

This seems particularly significant because a few pages later he concludes that

---

<sup>105</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p48

<sup>106</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p53. There does seem a slight danger of circularity here – that style deals with specific successful communication, and only those aspects relevant to success are relevant matters of style.

<sup>107</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p57

<sup>108</sup> W S Vorster, ‘Op weg na ‘n post-kritiese Nuwe-Testamentiese wetenskap’, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 43 (1987) 374-394.

<sup>109</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p58

<sup>110</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p59

Speech act theory deals with *utterances* and not *sentences*. Sentences are the object of the study of formal grammar and also of semantics, where they are perceived as abstract semantic and syntactical structures – abstracted from the real or pragmatic contexts in which they are uttered. Syntax deals with the grammar (in a narrow sense the syntactical structures) of the language, where sentences are seen as abstract entities assigned syntactic structure semantic content [sic]. Semantics deals with the meanings of these structures, or rather, possible or potential meanings, but again usually somewhat separated from a specific pragmatic context. Speech acts are much more related to the pragmatics of language – that is, utterances made in a specific context have a specific ‘force’, not necessarily related to the form of the utterance, but certainly distinguishable from it.<sup>111</sup>

I certainly agree with his stress on the pragmatic importance of meaning, but am not entirely convinced that Speech Act theory in an ‘Austinian’ or ‘Searlean’ sense is ‘fundamentally non-conventional’ and ‘conversational’ – certainly this does not seem to be the case for illocutions.

Botha then returns to the detail of Speech Act theory and notes that an illocutionary act is “the act of producing an utterance with a certain illocutionary force, such as greeting, warning, ordering, requesting, and so on”<sup>112</sup>. There is, as will be noted, nothing in this description about conventions, nor is there any recognition that there is an element of circularity here, in the sense that an illocutionary act is defined as an act which has illocutionary force. This does however rather accentuate the suggestion I made in my comments earlier in this chapter on the work of Anthony Thiselton, that the additional category of illocution adds nothing helpful to definitions of specific acts such as ordering, promising, etc.

Botha then goes on to note that a perlocutionary act is “the act by which the speaker achieves certain intended effects in his/her hearer, in addition to those achieved by the illocutionary act”<sup>113</sup>, which seems to be fundamentally incorrect as a definition, and the confusion here is exacerbated by the fact that by the end of this paragraph, Botha is again referring to intention in illocutions, in a paragraph which began as a consideration of the “intended” as against the “real” perlocution.

Like du Plessis, Botha then goes on to introduce the Gricean concepts of the co-operative principle, the maxims, and implicature which, as with du Plessis, he has taken from Grice through the work of G N Leech<sup>114</sup>. He also, again like

---

<sup>111</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p64. This argument is largely repeated in the first of his articles, ‘The potential of speech act theory for New Testament Exegesis’, *Herormde Teologiese Studies* 47:2 (1991) p280

<sup>112</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p65; ‘The potential of speech act theory for New Testament Exegesis’ p280-281

<sup>113</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p66

<sup>114</sup> He, like du Plessis, refers to Leech’s *Principles of Pragmatics* (London, Longman); Botha also refers to G N Leech, ‘Stylistics’, in Van Dijk, T A, (ed.) *Discourse and Literature*, (Amsterdam,

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

du Plessis, outlines some of the various relationships of the literary “communicative situation”<sup>115</sup> that distinguish the literary variety of speech acts from the spoken variety<sup>116</sup>.

He concludes that Speech Act theory has many advantages as a Biblical hermeneutic tool<sup>117</sup>; these advantages include the assertion that “one of the key elements in speech act theory is the postulation that all language communication is governed by rules”<sup>118</sup>, an assertion which is accurate, but perhaps does not distinguish between rules and conventions<sup>119</sup> and is susceptible to the criticism that Hancher makes of Pratt<sup>120</sup> (whom, interestingly, Botha has just cited himself). Botha then goes on to establish the principles he will adopt for his examination of the Gospel of John.

Within this discussion he notes that

Regarding the sort of speech acts involved on both levels of communication [i.e. of characters, and of implied readers], it should be noted that it is the contention of this thesis that *locution, illocution and perlocution* are involved here, on the level of the characters and especially on the level of the communication between implied author and readers. This is important because one of the presuppositions of this book is that religious texts have some purpose, that is, that it has pragmatic implications and thus is not only or chiefly interested in being an illocutionary act, *id est*, having some sort of intention or expressing some sort of intention, but it is chiefly a perlocutionary act, that is, it is meant to achieve some pragmatic aim with regard to its *readers*. Here the focus is on the readers in the text and not on the illocution of the text, and thus the text in itself.<sup>121</sup>

There are two related points to make here: one is that Botha seems to be making an assumption that the effects of a speech act are perlocutionary, and that the intention is illocutionary, and thus that the category of illocutionary effects is dissolved. The second is that as a consequence of this Botha, like Pratt and some of the other literary critics, describes literature as a perlocutionary act, but in his case quite explicitly so.

This again gives the impression that Botha has somewhat modified Austin’s conception of the illocution, and that in particular a de-emphasis on the uniquely conventional nature of illocutions has led to blurring and confusion between them and perlocutions, and thus to the conclusion that illocutions are

John Benjamins) 39-57; see *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p70; and also ‘The potential of speech act theory for New Testament Exegesis’ p281ff.

<sup>115</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p74

<sup>116</sup> See also ‘The potential of speech act theory for New Testament Exegesis’ p286ff.

<sup>117</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p76ff

<sup>118</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p77

<sup>119</sup> Although I grant that this is by no means an easy or clear distinction; nonetheless, given the conventional nature of illocutions, it seems necessary.

<sup>120</sup> See the previous chapter of this thesis

<sup>121</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p83

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

equivalent to the author's bit of the act (intention), while perlocutions are equivalent to the readers bit (the context, and the effects). As he goes on to note: "We can thus conclude that John 4, as a *religious text*, is an example where something is being done with words. ... It is therefore pragmatic in aim, and of a nature other than the illocutionary acts Austin describes"<sup>122</sup>.

Thereafter, Botha analyses, over the next eighty pages, his chosen section of John's Gospel. He divides the entire story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman up into various sections, and for each section, gives a detailed analysis of the speech acts involved, itemising the types of illocution and perlocution present in each verse or utterance<sup>123</sup>. It is an interesting and exhaustive survey, in which the majority of the illocutions are constative, and there are perlocutionary acts performed both by the characters in the story towards one another (Jesus and the Samaritan woman primarily) and by the author towards the reader.

On occasion, the characters perform acts that function on one level in the story (as for example, when Jesus performs "*predictives* and *assertives*" in the story) while functioning as another sort of act (here "*confirmatives*") on the level of the implied reader/author<sup>124</sup>. Overall, the impression is given that this story is a complex and crafted literary speech act.

Botha concludes by suggesting that "while speech act theory is not exactly equal to 'style', it embraces many of the concepts necessary to specifically practice intrinsic, explanatory, stylistics. Because speech act theory allows for a number of perspectives in its approach to language, it means that these concepts, such as reception theory, are also available to us, and can be incorporated in our understanding of the text."<sup>125</sup> He is thus using quite a broad understanding of Speech Act theory to describe what is happening in a text.

Speech act theory in this broad sense has provided a useful umbrella within which he has offered detailed analysis of the text as a communicative act, paying attention to various literary strategies adopted by the author. One of the things that Botha does provide, then, is that defence of the application of Speech Act theory to written texts that has been lacking elsewhere, in his analysis of texts as acts<sup>126</sup>. He doesn't directly address Austin or Searle, but he does acknowledge the context of written texts, and establishes that there are

---

<sup>122</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p83

<sup>123</sup> Somewhat in the manner Fish has predicted!

<sup>124</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p152

<sup>125</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p189

<sup>126</sup> In both *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* and in 'Speech act theory and New Testament Exegesis' especially pages 299-300.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

both distinctions and similarities with verbal texts<sup>127</sup>. It is important to note that he is able to do this, because he believes that literary acts are perlocutionary, and he is thus not committed to defending an illocutionary view of texts in their relationship to the reader.

However, his use of the more detailed Austinian terminology of illocutions and perlocutions is not without its flaws, as evidenced again in his conclusion, when he seems to suggest that “intentionality”<sup>128</sup> is the same as illocutionary force. More fundamentally, his continued insistence that he is using Speech Act theory, together with an emphasis on reception theories, to provide a pragmatic rather than a semantic-grammatical analysis, sits uneasily with the kind of Speech Act theory depicted by Searle<sup>129</sup> and Austin.

The same tension between Botha and Austin/Searle is present when Botha suggests, explicitly in the second of his articles but implicitly elsewhere, that “the concepts of illocutionary acts and, especially, perlocutionary acts make the theory very suitable for the pretexts and principles of reception theory”<sup>130</sup>, since “in speech act theory the perlocutionary act is also designed to achieve a certain purpose with the hearer, that is, it is goal-directed. This means that speech act theory is thus also susceptible to the precepts of reception theory.”<sup>131</sup> This also seems to raise unanswered questions about intention, meaning, and the illocution.

Botha’s analysis, with his detailed description of the various illocutions in the text, and the intended or possible perlocutions both in the story and from author to reader, all seem useful and stimulating. He offers both a descriptive analysis of actions in the text, and an interesting defence of the idea of the reader-response direction as perlocutionary.

However, aside from concerns over the accuracy of his understanding of the illocution-perlocution distinction, and the fact that I believe that the distinction itself is untenable, it does seem that if his exegesis were, as it were, ‘rendered down’ to remove all mention of illocutions and perlocutions, this would not in fact alter the ‘meat’ of his analysis: we would simply be left with a description of various kinds of speech acts occurring in and through the text, and on the readers. The analysis would still be as useful as it was before, and some of the flaws would disappear.

---

<sup>127</sup> See for example ‘Speech act theory and New Testament Exegesis’ p295ff. I should clarify that I have no problem with applying Speech Act theory to texts in principle, I merely believe that it should not be done without a specific consideration of reading contexts.

<sup>128</sup> *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* p198

<sup>129</sup> Who is nowhere mentioned

<sup>130</sup> ‘Speech act theory and New Testament Exegesis’, *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47:2 (1991) p297

<sup>131</sup> ‘Speech act theory and New Testament Exegesis’, p298.

**Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

**5f. W Houston; 'What did the Prophets think they were doing? Speech Acts and Prophetic Discourse in the Old Testament'<sup>132</sup>**

Houston begins by noting that he intends to use Speech Act theory, "according to which every utterance is interpreted as an intentional act of one or another kind in a particular situation"<sup>133</sup>, in order to approach the question of whether or not the prophets' "pronouncements of doom were intended to evoke repentance and lead to reform"<sup>134</sup>. He briefly mentions some criticism of Speech Act theory, and in particular alludes to the Derrida-Searle debate, from which he concludes that "however textual a text may be, every sentence in it is a speech act of some kind and implies a situation" or more than one, and therefore that "since one situation frequently implied is that of the prophet addressing hearers, there is no reason why we should not assume it".<sup>135</sup>

He recounts the history of interpretations of the nature of prophetic language, and in particular a previous scholarly assumption that the original writers of the prophetic books saw some words as being somehow magically powerful, a thesis which he notes that Thiselton has used Speech Act theory to attack, and he concludes that Austin has demonstrated that "the power of words is located in the social conventions which surround our own use of language"<sup>136</sup>. He notes the distinction between illocutions; which he apparently follows Leech in regarding as pertaining to the meaning of what you do by saying something in a specific situation – and perlocutions; which pertain to the causal effects of what was said. He insists that "one can still promise and not keep one's promise" and thus that "illocutionary force and perlocutionary effect must be distinguished"<sup>137</sup>.

While being unconvinced by the ease with which this distinction is made, I nonetheless agree with Houston that Leech's and Searle's attempts to place declarations in a separate extra-linguistic category are not consistent: in particular he notes that many declarations are merely "relational"<sup>138</sup> rather than specifically ritualistic, and thus exist on a "spectrum of illocutionary forces"<sup>139</sup>. He then proceeds to examine prophetic utterances as illocutions, by way of a discussion of *When Prophecy Failed* by Robert Carroll, who has apparently adopted the same initial speech act approach.

---

<sup>132</sup> *Biblical Interpretation* 1, 2 (1993) 167-188

<sup>133</sup> Op cit p167

<sup>134</sup> Ibid

<sup>135</sup> Op cit p168

<sup>136</sup> Op cit p171

<sup>137</sup> Op cit p172

<sup>138</sup> Op cit p174

<sup>139</sup> Op cit p175

Houston criticises Carroll for apparently suggesting that the word of many of the prophets failed, because they were not regarded as prophets by many of those who heard them. Houston objects firstly that some people did regard even apparently unsuccessful prophets such as Jeremiah as genuinely prophetic, otherwise their words would not have been preserved<sup>140</sup>, and then goes on to suggest that

even if this were not so, the successful performance of an illocutionary act does not in general depend on the appropriate response of the hearers. It is necessary to distinguish ... between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary effects of an utterance. For example, if an officer gives an order to a mutinous army, the order may or may not be obeyed, but there can be no question that he has given an order.<sup>141</sup>

Houston thus agrees with Searle that the only relevant sort of illocutionary effect is that of understanding, and that “as long as the prophets’ hearers understood that they were warning them, calling for repentance or whatever the particular speech act might be, and understood the content of the warning or whatever it might be, the prophets had *done* what they set out to do, even if they had not achieved the effect they had hoped for.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, on Houston’s account (and that of others, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters), a warning can warn, even though no-one was warned, and a warning can be understood, even though no-one was warned!

I will discuss the question of the illocutionary effect of an order that wasn’t obeyed in more detail in sections three and four of chapter five of this thesis, as part of a more detailed analysis of the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction, and the question of ‘uptake’ and ‘understanding’ which (in Austin) are different. I do not want to pre-empt that discussion here, so will limit myself for now to observing that it seems to me incoherent to suggest either that one can perform an order that no-one obeys, or that a warning has been spoken and understood, but no-one was warned. Quite what ‘understanding’ entails in this account, is not clear to me, and I find it highly unsatisfactory.

Houston suggests that “there cannot be any reasonable doubt that such understanding was achieved, if even we, 2500 years later, and reading their words in an imperfectly understood foreign language, can understand at least some of what they said”<sup>143</sup>, but here he makes the fundamental mistake of not realising that when we read the prophets’ words, we already know that they were prophets, whereas for their contemporaries, they did not, and the possibility that they were false prophets was open to them. When Houston suggests that “it is ‘knowing that they have a prophet among them’ which

---

<sup>140</sup> Op cit p177

<sup>141</sup> Ibid

<sup>142</sup> Ibid

<sup>143</sup> Ibid

constitutes the success of illocutionary prophetic acts"<sup>144</sup>, he ignores completely the fact that in order to know that a speaker *is* a prophet, one must have understood their words to be from God. For there to be a "shared understanding of what the prophet was doing"<sup>145</sup>, both sides have by definition to agree that the speaker is a prophet, but it is precisely this extra-linguistic fact that is in question.

For a prophet to be a prophet, the crucial fact that counts, is that they have been sent by God to proclaim a word. Anyone can claim to have been sent, and there are many Biblical instances of people both being deceived, and seeking to deceive others, as to their genuine prophetic credentials. The genuine prophets whom we revere are those whom we and some of their contemporaries recognise as having been sent by God: if no-one had ever recognised their claims, they would have vanished into total obscurity, known only to God. We could not speak of them as prophets, because we would not speak of them at all. Equally, it is possible that God has sent, and is even now sending, prophets whom we do not recognise, but for them to be prophets, someone at some time must call them prophets, otherwise the term has no meaning or reality.

It may be that the prophetic status of some prophets will only be recognised on the Last Day when all things revealed. If that is the case, it will only then be possible to acknowledge them as prophets. It may also be that on that day, the prophetic authority of some is irrevocably denied. But for someone to be a prophet, they must be recognised as such: if not, they are a false prophet, which is a rather different matter, as the sparring between Micaiah, Zedekiah, and King Ahab illustrates<sup>146</sup>.

Houston acknowledges this problem himself, when he accepts that "if people's refusal to listen to a prophet means their failure or refusal to recognize divine authority in what they say, then on one essential point there is no shared understanding of the force of their words"<sup>147</sup>. He seeks to avoid the import of this realisation by suggesting first that the fact that the prophets were heard suggests that there was a shared understanding, but that in any case for an action to count as an action "what is necessary is that the agent should on performing it acquire the rights and responsibilities associated with the latter", whether or not they or anyone else recognize this fact<sup>148</sup>. He accepts that it is possible that a prophet may be mistaken, but simply then asserts blithely that "the validity of the prophetic claim to divine authority is a theological question which is quite independent of the issues being

---

<sup>144</sup> Op cit p178

<sup>145</sup> *ibid*

<sup>146</sup> 1 Kings chapter 22

<sup>147</sup> 'What did the Prophets think they were doing?' op cit p178

<sup>148</sup> Op cit p179



discussed here” and that accordingly the theological question must be “bypassed”<sup>149</sup>.

However this is entirely unsatisfactory. It will not do to suggest on the one hand that for the illocutionary activity of prophecy to be effective, the speaker must be understood to have been a prophet, but that the question of whether or not they were prophets sent by God is immaterial. If this is true, there could be no illocutionary difference between a false and a true prophet, and this would make prophecy impossible. Houston simply suggests that the prophet’s claim must be “pragmatically” accepted, but this is only a plausible approach because the discernment has already been performed. The words of the prophets that we are reading, are known to be true, because only the true words have been preserved (so we believe). There is nothing pragmatic about it, 2500 years down the line: there is no Book of Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah.

The only effective question that determines if a genuinely prophetic act has been performed is to ask “did God send them, and what did He mean them to do?” This is the more so, since Houston goes on to assert that prophetic discourse is characteristically declarative: a judicial ‘announcement of coming doom’ and of the passing of God’s sentence<sup>150</sup> – rather than directive: calling for repentance. Of course, an utterance that passes sentence can only be performed by someone who has authority: the image of the man carrying a sandwich board announcing the coming of the end used to be a stock comic character: what makes such an utterance effective is that, as the prophet Jonah knew, the announcement is regarded as authoritative.

It is also interesting that while Houston uses Speech Act theory to support a view of prophetic discourse as declarative, Karl Möller takes a different line, arguing on Speech Act and rhetorical grounds that in at least the case of the Book of Amos, what look on a literal level like declarations of Divine judgement, should be seen as attempts to “shatter the people’s world view by painting a picture of an alternative world”<sup>151</sup> and thereby force the people to acknowledge their guilt and seek repentance.

While not wanting to enter too deeply into this particular debate, it should be noted that the illocutionary-perlocutionary confusion that I will elucidate in subsequent chapters can already be discerned here when, having laboriously spelt out the differences, Houston talks about “declarative effects” and then has to note that “although I have here used the word “effect”, I am still

---

<sup>149</sup> Op cit p179

<sup>150</sup> Op cit p180.

<sup>151</sup> K Möller, ‘Words of (In-)evitable Certitude? Reflections on the Interpretation of Prophetic Oracles of Judgement’, in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) p375

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

talking in illocutionary rather than perlocutionary terms”<sup>152</sup>, and thus that the term ‘declarative effect’ is on his own admission meaningless. It is simply not coherent to try to distinguish between the “actual response”, which is not relevant, and also “that there was a recognized state of affairs brought into being by these words – recognized, that is, by those who recognized their authority.”<sup>153</sup>

I would suggest that in terms of the poles of uses of Speech Act theory, Houston is ‘a bit of both’. His interest in Speech Act theory is detailed and specific, and he is aware of and makes use of the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction (which I do not believe is consistent, but that is an argument for another chapter). He is not aiming simply to use Speech Act theory in a general descriptive sense; however, he is not much interested in the relationship between the reader and the text, but more in, as the title suggests, ‘what the prophets and their contemporaries thought they were doing’.

I don’t find his arguments convincing, but this is not particularly because I disagree with his views on what the prophets thought they were doing (although I do incline towards Möller in this respect), but because I think Houston’s approach simply highlights a number of major flaws in Speech Act theory, which I will address in more detail in this thesis in due course.

**Biblical Speech Act exegeses:****5g. D Neufeld; a book and an article**<sup>154</sup>

To describe the aim and assumptions of Neufeld’s book, one can do no better than to quote his own words from the preface. He notes that he is using Speech Act theory because of a recognition that

language is a form of action and power. Discourse becomes responsible for creating reality and not merely reflecting it. The aim of the writer of 1 John is to bring about, not simply describe, the state of affairs his *kerygma* represents. Such a use of language leaves neither the author nor the audience unchanged or uninvolved. These words are not empty, because the author of 1 John expects that both he and his audience will act in accordance with them. The force of the text is such that those whose behaviour is incompatible with the speech acts outlined by the author will be excluded from *koinonia*. What the author of 1 John wishes to proclaim to his readers and hearers is not merely descriptive of a personal stance in response to opponents, but it is a portrayal of a state of affairs “to which the author stakes his or her personal signature. The writer *stands behind* the words giving a pledge and personal backing that he or she is prepared to undertake commitments and responsibilities that are entailed in the extra-linguistic terms by the proposition which is asserted” [quoting A C Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI:

<sup>152</sup> Op cit p181

<sup>153</sup> Op cit p182

<sup>154</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An Analysis of 1 John* (Biblical Interpretation Series volume 7) (Leiden, E J Brill, 1994); ‘Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11’, *Biblical Interpretation* 8:4 (2000) 375-399.

Zondervan Publishing House, 1992) 617]. Thus, the language of 1 John is also self-involving or constitutive of the self.<sup>155</sup>

Neufeld explicitly acknowledges the influence here of Thiselton and Evans and refers also to Botha's study. Interestingly, in the light of Vanhoozer's concern to root Speech Act theory in questions of authorship, Neufeld is interested in getting away from being bogged down in historical analysis of the situation of writing, very much in the manner of Clines and Polk<sup>156</sup>. For Neufeld, what is important is "Austin's fundamental observation that all linguistic sequences, rather than describing actions, are themselves action. This theory opens the possibility of an approach to language and text unencumbered with metaphysical and existentialist concerns."<sup>157</sup>

Chapter two surveys various historical reconstructions of the context of 1 John and finds them wanting. Neufeld argues that there is not enough evidence about the actual and intended audience of 1 John for us to be sure of who the author was addressing. He suggests that if we limit the author's meaning to those specific times we are placing undue limits on his work. He goes on to object to what he considers to be the associated problem that a view of the text that is interested primarily in its historic context tends to view the work as "discursive or propositional"<sup>158</sup>, and thus as not doing justice to other registers of language.

Neufeld is also explicit about the fact that he doesn't view differences between text and speech as significant for his purposes. He acknowledges "that language is not the only modality of social life. For the purposes of this dissertation, however, I shall view language as socio-communicative event and therefore constituent of social reality where written texts are but one example of a specialized form of socio-communicative interaction"<sup>159</sup>.

Thus he restates his thesis as being that

'text' may be understood as a *communicative event* or *act* between the writer and his/her audience. The language of the text has the power to perform acts. The Christological confessions and ethical exhortations may be viewed as *written effective acts* intended to change the content of the readers' confessions in order to bring about a proper alignment of speech and conduct.<sup>160</sup>

Despite the fact that he intends to view text as merely an aspect of communication, however, he also cites the work of Ricoeur to support the idea that a text

---

<sup>155</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p vii-viii.

<sup>156</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 2

<sup>157</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p3

<sup>158</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 38

<sup>159</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p41, footnote 25

<sup>160</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p41

once written, becomes autonomous and remains so both in regard to the author and the audience. He [Ricoeur] defines 'text' as "written discourse,"<sup>161</sup> or as something said to someone about something. Though it is "discourse fixed in writing,"<sup>162</sup> he insists that the text assumes a life of its own and thereby formalizes and intensifies the characteristics which it displays in speaking.<sup>163</sup>

There does seem to be a certain inevitable tension, not fully explored here, between stressing the universality of the "communicative events" of "embodied communication"<sup>164</sup>, and the fact that the 'semantic autonomy of a written text' entails that "the specific connection of speech with hearer is lost, whereas the audience of a written text is potentially universal. The implications of textual autonomy is that [*sic*] what the text means now matters more than what the author may have meant when he wrote the text."<sup>165</sup>

I am not necessarily criticising the idea of textual autonomy, nor the idea that speech and writing are sometimes usefully conjoined and blurred, but the fact that 'textual autonomy' seems primarily a phenomenon of writing, while Speech Act theory was introduced explicitly in relation to speech alone, is more significant than Neufeld acknowledges, particularly if illocutions are in view. Textual autonomy precisely entails that it is not clear who is communicating through a text, in a way distinctively different from the face-to-face communication Speech Act theory assumes. In particular, if one is viewing a text as a 'written effective act' of a particular writer addressed with specific intent to a particular readership, this does not sit easily with the idea of the autonomy of the text.

The assumption, for example, that 1 John is a letter of encouragement and admonition, gives it a greater degree of particular 'embodiedness' than might be accorded a poem, or narrative tale. It is interesting that in his article 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11'<sup>166</sup>, Neufeld seems more open to the specific epistolary contexts of first century letter-writing, although of course in this instance the identity of author and recipients is less opaque.

In his book, Neufeld simply asserts that "if text is therefore something said to someone, my first task is to explore Austin's speech-act theory and his conclusion that language is used to perform acts that have effects"<sup>167</sup>. Neufeld

---

<sup>161</sup> The Model of the text: Meaningful action considered as text" in *Hermeneutics and the human sciences* (CUP 1981) p201ff

<sup>162</sup> The Model of the text: Meaningful action considered as text" in *Hermeneutics and the human sciences* (CUP 1981) p145

<sup>163</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p43

<sup>164</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p41

<sup>165</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p43 footnote 38

<sup>166</sup> *Biblical Interpretation* 8:4 (2000) 375-399.

<sup>167</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 43 – this rather abrupt segue has echoes of Briggs "if speech act theory can apply to texts, the next step is to ask what has

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

quotes Evans and acknowledges Thiselton, but does not discuss Austin's explicit focus on speech alone<sup>168</sup>. He outlines the detail of Austin's theory; however, despite noting his citation of Austin's definition<sup>169</sup>, I entirely disagree with Neufeld that Austin suggests that 'all utterances were the product of an illocutionary act'. For Austin, some utterances are illocutionary acts, but not all, and utterances are as much the bearers of those acts, as they are the product of them.

Neufeld, though, then goes on to suggest that

the *illocutionary force* of a speech act represented the attempt on the part of the writer to accomplish some purpose, such as, promising, informing, warning, putting forward as hypothesis, arguing, predicting, etc. For instance, the statement, "if anyone were to say that we do not have sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1:8), could be spoken as a warning, a prediction, an assertion, or an hypothetical remark, that is, as speech acts with different illocutionary forces. Furthermore, the attempt to accomplish some purpose in a speech act might also have a result. This Austin designated as the *perlocutionary force*. A speech act with the illocutionary force of a warning, e.g., "get out of the building," might effect a response of alarm, anger, or curiosity, depending on the specific nature of the warning.<sup>170</sup>

There are a number of problems with this account. In the first place, in line with the confusion between utterances and illocutions referred to above, there seems to be a confusion here between speech acts and illocutions.

Secondly, the question of the 'illocutionary force' of 'an attempt' is a vexed one, that Austin himself was unsure about, but to speak of illocutionary force representing 'the attempt of a writer' rather than a successful act, seems to import back in that metaphysical baggage that both Austin and Neufeld were keen to abandon, and therefore to render the concept of 'success' unclear<sup>171</sup>. On this account, illocutionary force seems to equal intention. (It is also noteworthy that Neufeld refers to 'a speech act attempted by a writer'; although he has already defended this blurring, 'speech act' in this context seems the wrong phrase.)

Neufeld is subsequently quite clear that Austin defended both the idea that language was an action not a description, and that utterances are successful or

---

happened when this has been done", as discussed in section 4 of this chapter (see *Words in Action* op cit p86), and is equally insufficient.

<sup>168</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p43. He does, however, reference the work of Pratt, Lanser, Ohmann and Hancher in footnotes on p42, and the *Semeia* edition on Speech Act theory.

<sup>169</sup> "According to Austin all utterances were the product of an *illocutionary act*, that is, "the performance of an act in saying something as opposed to the performance of an act of saying something"" *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p44, quoting *How To* p 100.

<sup>170</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p44

<sup>171</sup> See the discussion of intention in the next chapter of the thesis.

not depending on the circumstances of their utterance<sup>172</sup>. He notes Austin's discussion of the various infelicities that can arise and suggests that "the rules that Austin isolated determined whether an act of speech had come off properly, i.e., whether its uptake had been successful"<sup>173</sup>. The concept of uptake, which is not expanded upon by Neufeld, is discussed in detail in chapter five of this thesis, being central to the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction<sup>174</sup>.

Neufeld notes Austin's other conditions for illocutionary success, and he concludes from this that it is not possible to say 'I am in the light, but I hate my brother' "because no established convention would permit such a claim to be successful"<sup>175</sup>. Or, you cannot say "we have fellowship with him" (1 John 6) if you "walk in darkness" because there is "no evidence of a circumstance or convention that legitimately sanctioned such a wide gulf in speech and conduct"<sup>176</sup>.

However, Neufeld also notes that "the social and religious milieu of the confessions and ethical assertions are not apparent enough to determine their success on the basis of convention and circumstance"<sup>177</sup>, but nonetheless he remains confident that

even though the social horizon escapes us in 1 John, it is possible to re-contextualize the confessions within the immediate linguistic world of a potential speech act circumstance that the author of 1 John creates. The success or failure of the confessions and ethical exhortations depends upon this speech act circumstance and its conventions (the immediate linguistic context). The purpose is to transform the speech and conduct of the readers.<sup>178</sup>

Again, there does seem to be a tension between a recognition of the importance of context for illocutionary or speech act success, and the stress on the importance of the literary text against the historic context of its setting. Neufeld argues that the inadequacy of our contextual historical knowledge both requires and allows us to simply (in Thiselton's words) 'appropriate' or 'make our own' the text, without thereby worrying that the illocution of the

---

<sup>172</sup> "Utterances are appropriate or inappropriate relative to the conditions of the utterance rather than true or false in relation to a reality that underlies all conditions. Performative language, he [Austin] said, was related to these conditions of appropriateness and inappropriateness where the circumstance of the utterance made clear whether it had been successfully performed. In the utterance of something, certain conditions or rules must be true in order for a performative to be successful." *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 47, though I am not sure that 'true' is quite the right word here. See also 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11' p390.

<sup>173</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 47

<sup>174</sup> Neufeld also refers to uptake without further explanation in 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11' p392.

<sup>175</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 48

<sup>176</sup> Ibid

<sup>177</sup> Ibid

<sup>178</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 49

author is lost or refashioned. To divorce the speech act circumstances that the author of 1 John creates in the reader, from his own social and historic circumstances within which he created the text, looks rather like having one's cake and eating it.

Neufeld is aware of this problem. He has already noted that "a major problem to overcome, however, is the lack of a discernable social horizon in 1 John to help ascertain the force of the confessions"<sup>179</sup>. His solution is to refer to "the constitutive function of "religious Language""<sup>180</sup>. He suggests that

in texts where non-referential speech acts are predominant, the meaning of the passages escapes the closed system of conceptual semantics. In 1 John the governing semantic horizon is determined by the self-involving character of the illocutionary force of the speech act. These speech acts lie at a deeper self-involving level, where meaning is not derived from the reconstructed historical realities of the text, but from the illocutionary force of the word that is constitutive of the person of faith.<sup>181</sup>

His point here is that although we don't know enough to talk about the conventions and circumstances that make the acts of 1 John effective in their original context, nonetheless these acts operate at a "deeper self-involving level", of personal essence, and this can be addressed as a universal. So, by virtue of the religious and illocutionary language in use here there is a sort of universal human illocution going on.

He defends and develops this position further by discussing first Derrida and then Evans. With regard to Derrida he asserts that "what is important for our purpose in this discussion is not Derrida's insistence that language is autonomous and independent of the subject or that illocutionary force stems from the constitutive function of language itself, but that language and the act of writing dialectically interact to constitute the writing subject."<sup>182</sup> This seems to be an inadequate summation: it is more the case that Derrida denies the existence of illocutionary force at all, because it is for him far too redolent of the 'metaphysical lure of conscious intention'<sup>183</sup>, and that the writing subject is effaced. Certainly, Neufeld doesn't demonstrate that his view of Derrida is accurate; he simply asserts it.

Likewise, I don't agree that for Austin the self is constituted by illocutionary force, as he appears to suggest, again without adequate demonstration: Neufeld simply claims that Derrida's insight

permits the perception of text as language and at the same time to recognize the act of writing as constitutive. The significant debate between speech act theorists

---

<sup>179</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 49

<sup>180</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 49

<sup>181</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 50.

<sup>182</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p51

<sup>183</sup> See the detailed discussion of Derrida's view of Austin and intention in the next chapter.

and Derrida regarding intentionality, conventions and the constitutive function of language has demonstrated that speech acts should be considered as operating on two levels; at a social level, e.g., in some narrative texts whose existence is given, and at a deeper constituting level, e.g., in certain non-narrative texts where the illocutionary force constitutes the self. For my purpose and because of my interest in speech act circumstance and convention and implicature, the iterability of writing must give consideration not only to the repeatability of linguistic elements but also to the repeatability of the 'rules' which govern any linguistic system whether spoken or written.<sup>184</sup>

He doesn't however, explain how the Derrida-Searle debate (discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis), or other similar debates, demonstrate this two-tiered nature of speech acts, nor is the nature of the speech acts proposed clear to me. There is no explanation of how speech acts operate at a social level in some narrative texts, nor what it means to say that the existence of such texts is a given: one must ask, 'given in what sense, or compared with what?' Neither is there an explanation of how illocutionary force constitutes the self in deeper level, non-narrative texts, nor any suggestion of which texts this involves. Presumably, reading is involved in some way, but this is not at this point made clear.

Lastly, the repeatability of the 'rules which govern any linguistic system' is not expounded upon, except by reference to John Searle's response to Derrida. Neufeld's reference to Searle here suggests that he, like Seale, might not have fully grasped the implications of Derrida's notion of 'iterability' which, as a concept, expresses a view of the fundamentally 'un-tethered' nature of writing and language: textual autonomy expanded! Derrida argues that linguistic elements are infinitely (or indeterminately) repeatable, and that no rules can fully govern this<sup>185</sup>. The nature of the 'rules' which govern a linguistic system, and the extent to which they may or may not be repeatable, is not clear cut: as Austin himself noted, it is necessary that rules be flexible, and thus it may be better to think of them as guidelines, or as conventions, or in some other fashion entirely<sup>186</sup>.

Neufeld then moves on to Evans, and his idea of the self-involving nature of religious language to which we have already referred. Having accepted Evans's idea he concludes in respect of 1 John that

speech act theory underscores that the propositional content and meaning of each of the passages may also be determined on the basis of their illocutionary force. Derrida's conclusion that the act of writing is constitutive of the writing subject is important and when linked with Evans's theory of religious language makes it possible to talk about the self-involving character of such language.

---

<sup>184</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p52

<sup>185</sup> See the previous chapter of this thesis

<sup>186</sup> Austin referred to the necessity of allowing for agents "getting away with things" [*How To* p30] when new conventions are initiated. Indeed he notes that "in ordinary life, a certain laxness in procedure is permitted – otherwise no university business would ever get done!" *How To* p37.



Speech acts with the illocutionary force of a *commissive*, an *expressive*, a *representative*, and a *directive* and their implicature play a primary role in making explicit intention and attitude. Austin's two conditions of an appropriate circumstance and linguistic convention help to determine the kinds of speech acts possible within the limits of certain speech circumstances. These insights open a new way of analyzing and setting out the performative aspects of the language of 1 John.<sup>187</sup>

One of the odd points to note here, though, is the fact that the speaker is *always* involved in some way in the utterance, such that the same words could, depending on our estimation of the speaker's stance, mean all sorts of different things. In this sense *any* speech act is self-involving, whether it is perlocutionary, illocutionary, or whatever, and the manner in which we take it to involve the utterer depends on the context: is this ironic, sincere, heartfelt, dangerous, sarcastic, a performance, or some other form of act?

Religious speech acts are (or may/ought to be – one can of course be insincere) self-involving in a particular way, but it is not obvious that this has any special relationship to the existence of illocutions, nor does Neufeld demonstrate this. 'Illocutions' will certainly be infelicitous or unsuccessful or whatever, if the utterer appears to undermine them by his or her own attitudes, such as the example of a bridegroom leering at the bridesmaids, but the consequences of that will vary depending on the specific act involved<sup>188</sup>, and this requirement is not unique to 'illocutions'. Being involved is not the same as being constituted by an act, but in all cases this is a question of reception: of how the act was taken, and of what we (the 'audience') think you (the utterer) were doing.

There is also a distinction between speakers/hearers, and writer/readers, in this sense of self-involvement, simply because of the different ways in which each are present in the utterance. Although Botha has considered this, Neufeld does not examine the question of presence at all. The 'expressive' that is uttered by a person in a context in which we are present, has a different 'force' (or, possibly, 'meaning'), from the same words written in a text, even if in both cases the words are identical.

It may well be, that we hear the person say "he who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still"<sup>189</sup>, and agree; and that we read the writing, and agree; and that in each or either case we also commit ourselves to a view or a 'side' in a dispute, or to a way of life. But the way in which we are involved differs depending on, for example, the kind of context presumed. If we read the text aloud, or if we hear the text read aloud in a public gathering, our agreement or disagreement will be constitutive of our self (as seen by

---

<sup>187</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p56

<sup>188</sup> Which is why the words 'infelicitous' and 'unhappy' are so hazy and unspecific: a leering bridegroom may be infelicitous, but still married if he says the right words, for example.

<sup>189</sup> 1 John 2:9

others and possibly ourselves) in different ways from a private reading or reading-aloud in our own room, where our response is a rather more private matter.

Religious language is *potentially* self-involving, but this depends on the context: we may simply be attending a gathering or reading a text without being or feeling ourselves to be 'members', for example<sup>190</sup>. There is indeed a sense in which it is our *taking of* the language as self-involving that makes it religious. If we heard or understood the language as being the deluded ranting of a marginalised or heretical figure, they would not be self-involving in the same profound 'religious' way, although there would still be an element of self-involvement: we would hear and condemn.

The specific kind of self-involvement that Neufeld imagines, in which words 'strike home' into the heart of the hearer or reader, is merely one particular type of religious response, which is the product of, and a factor in producing, one particular religious reading context. Neufeld himself acknowledges this in his article 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11', where he discusses the possibility that the congregation at Corinth will not respond to Paul's utterances in the way Paul asserts to be appropriate<sup>191</sup>.

To re-iterate, I am not necessarily quarrelling with his description either of the possible effects of 1 John, nor of this as a description of the author's intention. However, other readings of this are possible in other contexts, and it is also important to ask, 'if this is a 'language game' of confession, why isn't that 'all' that it is? Why is it necessary to introduce the additional category of 'illocutions'?' Aside from the difficulty of encapsulating this kind of language within a definition of illocutions that enables them to be distinguished from perlocutions, it simply appears unnecessary to try at all, when a concept of language games of confession, or simply, of particular kinds of speech act, would do equally well.

Neufeld also fails to ask how it is that these transforming effects are produced. As I suggested above, the language-game is a factor, not primarily of the text that is read, but of the *context* in which the text is read, and which firstly proclaims the text to be Scripture, and secondly reads the text in this 'personalized', individualized way (the point being that not merely is this a Christian context, but it is a *particular* Christian reading; one of many possible ones). Neufeld does not appear to consider the nuances from the reader's point of view. In a somewhat absolutist manner he asserts that

---

<sup>190</sup> I.e. we do not imagine ourselves to be being addressed here – we are not the 'implied reader', as it were.

<sup>191</sup> 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11' p391-2

hearing or reading the text is a transactional event that entails acceptance, commitment, and a redescription of the hearers/readers religious and ethical orientation. The experience of hearing (and reading) the text of 1 John produces in the hearers/readers a related life stance and attitude that leads to belief, imagination and effective involvement in the states of affairs to which the author has committed himself. In other words, it invites the addressees to join the author in contemplating what has been written, evaluating it, and then responding to it.

In summary, the act of writing constitutes the self and is homologous to Austin's illocutionary act (the act performed in saying something), and that [sic] the written text (homologous to Austin's locutionary act) becomes the communicative transaction (text as language or the written medium). ... It is possible to isolate the illocutionary force of the Word upon which is founded the self of the person of faith. The author uses these speech acts to make plain his religious and ethical orientation.<sup>192</sup>

It does seem highly problematic to assert so confidently that the act of writing is an illocutionary act 'piggy-backing' on a locutionary one. The 'religious' act of taking the text as an order, a command, etc, is perfectly common and coherent, but what is less clear is why this one possible response allows or requires us to describe the act of writing as an illocutionary act.

The 'force' of an illocutionary act (taking Austin's terms without quibble for the moment) 'transforms' the locutionary abstraction into a speech act with specific meaning in a context, based on various conditions. There thus appears to be a parallel with the understanding of a text. But it is not clear what makes this an illocutionary act, rather than either a perlocutionary one, or simply the act of writing as normally conceived<sup>193</sup>.

Neufeld begins his fourth chapter with a commentary on 1 John. Here, he asserts that

the language of the *incipit* [verses 1-4] with its profusion of sensory verbs shifts the focus away from the task of defining the specific content of the message proclaimed to determining the illocutionary forces involved in the act of proclaiming the message. The different illocutionary forces present in the act of proclamation make plain the thrust and content of the message. A specifically defined community, either of supporters or of adversaries, is not required to make sense of this message.<sup>194</sup>

Neufeld appears to be imagining that 'proclamation', as a specifically religious kind of illocution, transcends context. What seems clear here is the assumption that this kind of illocution exists in the intention of the speaker.

---

<sup>192</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p59

<sup>193</sup> One could for example make a convincing association between the textual locution and E D Hirsch's idea of 'meaning', and the illocution and Hirsch's idea of 'significance' – see chapter six.

<sup>194</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p65-66

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

This question concerning the nature of illocutions, and the point at which they can be said to exist, is one of the most important questions that will be addressed in the next two chapters of this thesis. It is a confusion that exists in Austin's own work. Can we talk about an illocution at the point when it is uttered, or only after it has been heard, recognised, and/or complied with? Neufeld's 'proclamation illocution' is clearly one that only needs uttering to exist, but he is also aware of the need for illocutions to be contextually appropriate, and these two assumptions appears to be slightly contradictory. Is the Gospel proclaimed if no-one hears or understands, or if they take the proclaimer to be a madman?

It ought also to be noted that in this quote, recognising the illocution is a question of 'making sense of' the message, and thus that illocutionary force here is equivalent to meaning<sup>195</sup>. It is not clear whether this 'making sense of' is a precursor to or simultaneous with 'being constituted by'.

The sense that Neufeld is actually describing perlocutionary acts rather than illocutionary ones is reinforced when Neufeld refers, as he regularly does, to the author's convincing the readers<sup>196</sup>, which seems to be a perlocution: one could say, 'I was convinced', but not 'I am convincing you'<sup>197</sup>. He also notes that what the hearers have heard from the author "has forced upon them a perception of Christology and ethics about which they must make a conscious decision – the perlocutionary effect: by warning and encouragement he may persuade them to accept his views."<sup>198</sup> This seems to be an accurate assessment of the entire letter as a coherent whole: as, if you like, a text-act. It takes serious account of the whole text as a finished, intended whole. However, what as a description it fails to do, is demonstrate the usefulness or applicability of Austin's speech act categories, or their coherent application.

Given this, there is an irony in Neufeld's reference, in 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11', to "a potential confusion between illocutions and perlocutions in rhetorical approaches"<sup>199</sup>. Here he follows Wolterstorff's suggestion in *Divine Discourse*<sup>200</sup> that

---

<sup>195</sup> See also p93: "the illocutionary forces of the antithetical slogans reveal that they represent the views of the author and not the opponents he is trying to correct" and "the illocutionary forces also reveal that it is the author's desire to turn the readers away from potentially false views of God", for more examples of the equation of force and meaning.

<sup>196</sup> See for example p93: "Since it is impossible to escape the dire consequences of acts of speech spoken in the domain of darkness, the readers are convinced to adhere to views about God, light, love and sin which cohere with God's realm of light", or p126: "Right confession in the context of orthodoxy versus heresy takes a secondary place to the author's primary intention of convincing the readers to confess, deny, and believe what he himself confesses, believes, and denies".

<sup>197</sup> See chapter one of this thesis, pages 23-24.

<sup>198</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p129

<sup>199</sup> 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11' p395

<sup>200</sup> N Wolterstorff, *Divine discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995).

“persuasion is not an illocutionary act but the effect or consequence of that act. ... Acts of community persuasion, when brought about by illocutionary acts, are perlocutionary acts”<sup>201</sup>.

This both illustrates the confusion between the two sorts of act, and the confusion over the point at which an illocution can be said to exist; and also suggests very much that Neufeld ought on his own account to regard 1 John as a perlocution not an illocution. At the very least, it ought to be the case that the self-involving effects that are the aim of the authors’ speech acts ought to be recognised as perlocutionary rather than illocutionary acts<sup>202</sup>.

Neufeld concludes his work by outlining what he has attempted to achieve. He suggests that

new definitions of textuality permit interpreting a text in terms not only of its historical roots but also in terms of its rhetorical power to transform the readers’ expectations, speech and conduct. Such an understanding of textuality does not divorce the text from the historical moment that gave it life, but the potential meaning of a text is more than the sum-total of that historical moment. A text continues to give life long after its birth, and that life-giving quality is inherent to the text in what I have suggested is the text’s power to create reality rather than reflect it. The ‘boasts’, ‘denials’, and ‘confessions’, although written discourse, nevertheless represent significant speech acts that constitute the self of the speaker.

Written texts functioning as speech acts, however, usually require a clearly defined historical context to determine their force. ... Here I looked to the text itself to provide clues to the way in which the ‘boasts’, ‘denials’, and ‘confessions’ were to be taken. I believe that the author in an imaginative and creative outburst created a linguistic context of an apocalyptic kind in which the boasts, confessions and denials make sense. In a clear and forthright manner the readers are familiarized with a type of speech that is totally unacceptable from the author’s point of view. So while some may have tossed about unacceptable confessions, the speech acts inform the readers of what these people, and also the readers for that matter, might become if they were to continue to speak inappropriately. The readers would become alienated from God and walk in the darkness as antichrists and false prophets. The readers are warned not to utter Christological nonsense, because speech is important in the formation of the reader’s self and this in turn will effect changes in their religious and ethical orientation.<sup>203</sup>

This description of the text as an artefact of religious language, or as viewed in a religious language-game, is interesting and suggestive. There are, though, significant problems in allying this to the kind of detailed speech act interpretation Neufeld also attempts.

---

<sup>201</sup> ‘Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11’ p395

<sup>202</sup> As Neufeld himself notes, “Paul used speech acts of admonition and rebuke with the illocutionary force of the *directive* and *expressive* to provoke a transformation of conduct”, but this transformation must be a perlocutionary effect - ‘Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11’ p398-399.

<sup>203</sup> *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p133-134

In terms of the two poles of use I described earlier, Neufeld is involved in both: he describes the text as a speech act containing illocutions, and as part of this description, also depicts the speech acts the text ought to or intends to have on the reader<sup>204</sup>. Of all the texts thus far considered, Neufeld's book is the most heavily Speech Act influenced. However, the nature of 1 John as an address rather than a narrative alters the kind of speech act analysis it sustains: it is one act, rather than a narrative containing potentially many layers of action, and while it therefore lends itself more easily to a reader-response angle, this does not combine easily with a somewhat inconsistent use of illocutions and perlocutions.

**Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

**5h. B Gilfillan Upton, *Hearing Mark's Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory (Biblical Interpretation Series Volume 79)***<sup>205</sup>

Gilfillan Upton announces in her Introduction that

my overall purpose is to argue that popular texts of late antiquity were designed to be read aloud to a listening audience, something more often assumed than argued, and that some forms of literary analysis, especially speech act theory, might be appropriate to exploring texts on the interface of oral and written language. I argue that speech act theory, which is based on the ordinary language philosophy of J.L. Austin (1962), because of its emphasis on language as a performance, is a potentially fruitful method to apply to the Gospel of Mark, typified by the various endings known to be present in different early Christian communities.<sup>206</sup>

Given this, she argues that it is necessary to consider the role of the "lector" as well as that of the author and reader. She cites the work of Grice, Pratt and Petrey, and asks questions about the extent of literacy, and the degree of aloud compared with silent reading in the first century, and the nature of the "'authorial audience'"<sup>207</sup>. She concludes that "a major component of my hypothesis then, is that reading, and indeed writing, in antiquity was aimed at the ear rather than at the eye. I am arguing this case in opposition to many modern studies on the phenomenology of reading, which concentrate on reading as a private, visual process."<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> As he concludes: "The power of the written word to transform the orientation of the reader does not lie in carefully argued theological propositions, but in acts of speech with the power to change the self of the speaker. Specific speech acts of the *directive, representative, commissive, and expressive* kind shift the critical task from determining the meaning of the statements to understanding what they do. The language of these statements is a form of power and action that stresses the constitutive and self-involving character of the act of reading." *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An analysis of 1 John*, p 134. I'm not sure of the difference between 'meaning' and 'understanding what a statement does', though.

<sup>205</sup> (Leiden, Brill, 2006)

<sup>206</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* op cit page xv.

<sup>207</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p16

<sup>208</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p47

She then turns, by way of a comparison, to Xenophon of Ephesus's *An Ephesian Tale*, and having examined a section of that work, she concludes that

I have shown that the figures and mechanisms used by the author find a natural home in the rhetorical languages of late antiquity. This does not mean to say that the work was written as a speech; rather that it makes most sense and impression in an environment in which it would be read aloud to a listening audience, an audience which would be helped rather than hindered by the kinds of repetition that are found here. Recapitulations, oracles and their fulfilment and frequent reminders of the complex plot all have their place in a work intended to be heard rather than read in a modern, silent, individual way.<sup>209</sup>

Having demonstrated this in a 'control' work, she then examines Mark 15:40-16:8 for evidence of the same tropes, not on the assumption that the two texts share a style, but simply that they are both intended to be read aloud. She concludes that "enough has been discovered ... to show cumulatively that the very features in both texts that make them look clumsy and ill-structured to the modern silent reader's eye may well be those which rendered it intelligible to an ancient audience composed of 'listening ears'"<sup>210</sup>.

Having demonstrated the 'orality' of Mark's Gospel, she then explores some hermeneutical approaches which take this spoken-ness seriously. She makes the interesting and significant point that one of the benefits of Speech Act theory is that "it takes conventions at the time of production and first reception as seriously as those of a modern readership or audience. This seems particularly relevant in a situation in which much of the uptake of these narratives has been, and continues to be, aural, because of the ecclesiastical/liturgical context of their dominant use."<sup>211</sup>

Her conclusion is that she is interested in Speech Act theory because it provides

a model which will help connect, by means of communication theory, the experience of an original audience construct (the implied audience), with its emphasis on aurality and rhetoric, and those experiences of a modern audience which resonate with this approach. From this view-point, it seems that a development of speech act theory, combined with some insights from narrative theory and ancient rhetoric, may be of value. There is, of course, a need to modify certain of the original insights of speech act theory, which was an ordinary language model, to apply to written texts; given the nature of the popular text in antiquity, however, I believe that the pros outweigh the cons, and by taking seriously the conventions of production as well as consumption, historical context as well as the modern reader, fresh light might be shed on the endings of Mark along with other ancient popular texts.<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>209</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p64

<sup>210</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p78

<sup>211</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p85

<sup>212</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p88-89

She is thus interested in Speech Act theory as one tool among several, specifically because of the 'aurality' of the work in question. In this respect, she circumvents some of the questions about the applicability of speech acts and illocutions in a textual context, which I have raised elsewhere.

In her discussion of Speech Act theory, Gilfillan Upton refers to Pratt, Petrey and Botha, and introduces Austin's three classic speech acts, the locution: "the act of producing a coherent and acceptable grammatical utterance"<sup>213</sup>; the illocution, which "represents the act of producing a force which is a combination of language and social practice i.e. what the speaker does by uttering a particular locution"<sup>214</sup>; and the

so-called perlocutionary act, by which, ideally, the speaker achieves certain intended effects on his or her audience [and which] is, I believe, of particular interest to those who study religious texts. Those who read or listen to canonical writings do so from within a particular community with its own conventions and context, and experience or anticipate some reaction which may or may not bear much relation to the perlocution intended by the original text or performance.<sup>215</sup>

Interestingly, she here implies a perlocutionary nature for texts, and equates that to the religious context, although there are some difficulties with the idea that the perlocution concerns intended effects. Indeed, she goes on to note the flexibility of perlocutions and the potentially unintended nature of the possible effects of speech acts<sup>216</sup>.

Gilfillan Upton then embarks on a speech act reading of Xenophon of Ephesus, using in addition Grice's maxims, and in the following chapter provides a similar speech act reading of Mark 16:1-8. A speech act reading of the longer ending (16:9-20) follows in the succeeding chapter, and a reading of the 'shorter ending' after that. In these analyses, she examines the speech acts that occur in the narrative, as others have in work we have previously surveyed. Making various salient points, she describes speech acts within the narrative in speech act terms, and also extends the applicability of speech act forces to the readers, again as others have for other texts.

The idea of reading-aloud producing illocutions is an interesting one, which could perhaps do with some more fleshing out: it would depend on the hearer recognising the authority of the speaker, and accepting the speech act as directed at themselves, in the way that St Antony the Great is said to have done. According to tradition, he heard read during the Liturgy the story of Jesus and the young man in Matthew's Gospel, and took as a command to himself Jesus' advice to the young man "if you would be perfect, go, sell what

---

<sup>213</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p92

<sup>214</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p92

<sup>215</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p92-93

<sup>216</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p93



## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."<sup>217</sup> In this case, Antony responded to Jesus' textual 'illocutionary' command, and there are from Christian tradition other similar examples<sup>218</sup>.

However, their rarity is part of the point: most people who heard the same Gospel reading as Antony did not respond in the same way, either then or since. It should also be noted, of course, that Antony heard the Gospel read aloud liturgically, in a specifically Christian worship context, as a believer. This is a different reading-aloud from the reading aloud of the Gospel to a group who have gathered to hear the Gospel read by appointment, as something new or interesting, or again from the crowd who might gather around an itinerant preacher or story-teller in the public market.

Even in the case of St Antony, and certainly in the case of other hearers, it is not clear what if anything makes the response to hearing the Gospel a response to an *illocutionary* act. The very fact that it was taken as a command by one person, reminds us that it was not taken so literally, or personally, by most. This militates against an easy ascription of illocutionary status to the words of Jesus read aloud: can an act be an illocution for someone, but not for others? It is also not clear in most of these discussions about speech acts and biblical hermeneutics, whether a command needs to be obeyed for it to be a command, and what effect this has on the nature of illocutions: this is to wonder again about the relationship between illocutions, illocutionary effects, and perlocutions which is discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters<sup>219</sup>.

It is certainly possible to imagine the "stark choice of response" being presented to hearers hearing the short ending of Mark's Gospel for the first time, and their being left with a kind of "perlocutionary shock"<sup>220</sup>. This, though, is due to the (possibly) perlocutionary nature of the speech act of 'reading aloud'. Importantly, the situation will be different when the hearer hears the Gospel read for a second time<sup>221</sup>.

The idea, mentioned by Gilfillan Upton, that saying 'amen' is an illocutionary act is intriguing, but it is confusing to suggest that doing so at the end of the Gospel also amounts to bringing about "the desired perlocutionary effect ... of

---

<sup>217</sup> Matthew 19:21 RSV

<sup>218</sup> St Augustine is said to have recognised an illocutionary command in the children's chant "take and eat", though this is not a Scriptural phrase, for example.

<sup>219</sup> Gilfillan Upton notes that Jesus commands "both the disciples and the implied audience" (*Hearing Mark's Endings* p165). By this she means that the author's intention is to issue a command to the hearers they anticipate will hear the Gospel. The difficulty is that this is only an illocution, given the nature of illocutions, if we accept Jesus' authority, which the text is trying to propose, so that the text is of necessity both a perlocution and an illocution.

<sup>220</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p152

<sup>221</sup> The important fact of re-reading as a context is referred to in chapter seven of this thesis.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

declaring the narrative to be both finished and in some sense true"<sup>222</sup>. In fact, as is the case with many of other works considered in this section, the interesting approach taken does not for the most part depend on, or use entirely consistently, the illocutionary and perlocutionary concepts.

As with several other scholars, Gilfillan Upton has also quite extensively used Gricean maxims and implicatures, and although I do not find them helpful, it would stray beyond the confines of this thesis to discuss them. However, in terms of the poles of use I proposed at the start of this section she is interested in both: in describing illocutions and other speech acts in the text, and in describing their actions upon the hearers. The fact that she is imagining an aural context makes this relationship in some ways more straightforward, but in the end inconsistencies in her use of speech act terms render those details rather un-illuminating.

**Biblical Speech Act exegeses:**

**5i. J W Adams, *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55*. (*Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 448*)<sup>223</sup>**

Adams begins his study by suggesting that "certain utterances include an illocutionary force or forces that personally involve a speaker and/or hearer in extralinguistic actions prescribed in the propositional content that brings about a state of affairs in the world"<sup>224</sup>. He notes that meaning involves more than simply propositional content, but also involves speech acts in situations of communicative action.

In a manner similar to that of other scholars we have considered, but perhaps more explicitly, he suggests that

certain types of communicative action draw in the reader as a self-involved participant with the text. In some instances the reader is the recipient of a promise, or a warning, or is commissioned to a task. In other cases, the reader becomes the speaker who confesses, prays, laments and so on. Such self-involvement includes extralinguistic action expressed in the propositional content of the utterance. Prescribed entailed action extends beyond the world of the text and thus has transforming implications for the reader/speaker and reality. As a self-involved participant in the text, the reader becomes an essential and indispensable factor in the process of interpretation.<sup>225</sup>

As a description of the implied aim of religious texts, perhaps, or of the author's assumed intention, this appears plausible: as we have noted before, however, this is a description of one particular reading context.

Adams also notes that

---

<sup>222</sup> *Hearing Mark's Endings* p170

<sup>223</sup> (New York, T&T Clark, 2006)

<sup>224</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p1.

<sup>225</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p3

Regarding the transferability of speech act theory to biblical interpretation, much work has already been done to demonstrate that the notions of speech act theory can be applied to written texts. For speech act theorists, the relationship between the performative utterances of a speaker/hearer and the writer/reader is a natural one. As Richard S Briggs correctly concludes, "Broadly speaking, speech-act theory is well suited to any communicative action" ['The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation', *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 9 (2001) p 236]. Briggs has most recently re-examined the now-famous debate between the philosopher/literary critic Jacques Derrida and speech act theorist John R Searle - whether a theory that focuses on speech acts between a speaker and hearer can in turn be applied to communicative acts embodied in texts which pass from writer to reader - and further demonstrates that the discipline legitimately and logically applies to texts. [citing *Word in Action* p73-86 and 'The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation', *op cit* p236-238]<sup>226</sup>

This account doesn't seem entirely accurate: it is certainly not true that for Austin or Searle "the relationship between the performative utterance of a speaker/hearer and the writer/reader is a natural one"! Moreover, neither the Derrida-Searle debate, to which others have already referred, nor Briggs's own description of it, in any way demonstrate that 'speech act theory can apply to texts'. More work is required to demonstrate this than simply this reference and assertion.

Adams also refers to the *Semeia* article on Speech Act theory and notes that the majority of the contributions were theoretical not practical and concerned with the rethinking not just the refinement of exegesis. He notes that he is interested in the latter, rather than the former, and thus in terms of my two transient 'poles', he is presumably particularly interested in describing speech acts within a text.

He views the particular usefulness and contribution of Speech Act theory as manifested when it is

used to identify performative utterances or strong illocutionary acts that include linguistic and/or non-linguistic convention, self-involving extralinguistic stance and/or action, and entail transformative effects in the world. In contrast, it has been argued that speech act theory aligns with the concepts and goals of rhetorical criticism. Theorists include in their discussion on speech acts the aspect of perlocutionary effects; however, the central feature of speech act theory is the illocutionary act. Further, perlocutionary effects are dependent upon illocutionary acts, not vice versa. According to speech act theorists, meaning is found in the linguistic illocutionary act whereas the perlocution occurs outside of language and concerns the non-linguistic psychological effects of illocutionary acts transpiring within the listener/reader. Hence, the actual study of meaning centers on illocutions, not perlocutions. Attempting to determine the intended perlocutionary effects of an utterance can provide insight for interpretation, but such analysis occurs primarily through an examination of the illocutionary acts employed in

---

<sup>226</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p3-4

language. Consequently, when utilizing speech act theory solely to identify the persuasive dimension of a text the central notions of speech act theory are actually disregarded. Exploring the performative nature and specifically the various illocutionary acts within a biblical text extends well beyond identifying persuasive aspects in speech or texts.<sup>227</sup>

This is a very interesting description of Adams's assumptions about Speech Act theory, particularly in the light of the conclusions we have drawn about some other approaches. However, it rather simplifies the relationship between 'perlocutionary effects' and 'illocutionary acts', and between 'illocutionary acts' and 'meaning', as discussed at considerable length in chapter five of this thesis.

It also implies that perlocutions are non-linguistic, and while this may be true for some, it is not true for all, by any means. Certainly for Austin perlocutionary acts can be 'intended' not merely 'possible'<sup>228</sup>. One can certainly talk of the illocutionary power of acts that have already been described in the text, and that have therefore 'happened'. However, to talk of illocutions in the text-reader relationship is far more problematic.

Adams illustrates here the implicit assumption, not unique to him, that the meaning of an utterance or phrase is begotten, and could be in practice found in a dictionary<sup>229</sup>, while what actually happened (which he terms 'the perlocutionary effect', and which is the actual meaning of what was in fact uttered or occurred) is less important! Meaning here is equivalent to intention, and this has at least two problems: the first is the question of how we discern intention – the answer is that it is only distinguishable from simple meaning if there appears to be a discrepancy which the audience recognises as such; intention is therefore a descriptive not predictive concept<sup>230</sup>; and the second is that Austin himself is trying to eliminate this concept of 'inward intention' right at the beginning of his linguistic theory.

However, as Adams's own work will illustrate, the 'dictionary meaning' only gives you a place to start. It doesn't tell you what a phrase (or act) actually meant in that past conversation or text, nor can it predict what it will mean in a conversation about to happen, or a text about to be written.

Adams then considers various approaches to Isaiah 40-55, reflecting on the nature of real authorship. He concludes that "despite the difficulties raised by the final form of Isa 40-55, interpreting the material as it presently stands remains more profitable and deals more concretely with the text itself. Thus,

---

<sup>227</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p7-8

<sup>228</sup> See for example *How To 2* p118.

<sup>229</sup> Although it will become apparent later on that he does not necessarily hold this view: he refers to the reader involving themselves with the text, "whereby meaning is determined" – p61.

<sup>230</sup> See the next chapter of this thesis.

this study understands the contents of these chapters as arranged deliberately and orderly ... producing an overarching intentional message."<sup>231</sup>

Moreover, Adams intends to consider this material not just 'as it is', but as a performative utterance. He explains

Performative utterances occur within the world of the text between speakers and hearers and, in other instances, the text itself addresses the reader and invites self-involvement.

Much of the language of Isa 40-55 can be seen as performative as it contains various types of illocutionary acts and elicits the self-involvement of the hearer/reader. This being so, the notions expressed within speech act theory become an important and crucial way to gain further insight into Isa 40-55. As mentioned above, the dominant use of speech act theory has focused on the perlocutionary effects or persuasive consequences of language. In contrast, speech act theorists claim that meaning is found in the illocutionary act while perlocutions derive from such utterances. I will focus on the performative dimension of chs. 40-55 and specifically on the illocutionary acts, their intended perlocutionary effects, and the self-involving nature of the text.<sup>232</sup>

Adams is aware of the difference in Austinian terms between an illocution and a perlocution, and is consistent in his attempts to distinguish them, although as I have noted, the categories themselves are in fact dubious, as will be demonstrated later in this thesis.

In particular, the divorce between perlocutions and meaning is problematic, as is the identification between meaning and force that Adams assumes: after all, if meaning is simply the same as force, why is it necessary to use the concepts of 'force' and 'illocution' at all? As L J Cohen notes,

if it makes sense to discuss the meanings of English sentences, as grammarians, lexicographers and logicians often do, then it looks as though any individual utterance of 'it is raining' may be ascribed both a meaning, derived immediately from the meaning of the English sentence 'it is raining', and also an illocutionary force, depending on such variable factors as the intonation with which the sentence has been uttered. But on a stricter phonetic analysis here we have not just one sentence of spoken English, but at least two... The difference between a rising and a falling intonation has as much right to affect the classification of individual utterances into English sentences as has the difference of sound between 'raining' and 'hailing'.<sup>233</sup>

If force is subsumed into meaning, it also becomes clearer that 'force' is a quality that can only be described of an act that has happened, not predicted of acts that have yet to occur.

The other area of importance to address, as again we have already noted, is the nature of illocutions that are self-involving for the audience, in a written

---

<sup>231</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p14

<sup>232</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p16

<sup>233</sup> 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) p126

context. Some description of how read (not simply read-aloud) illocutions operate, and the conventional basis on which they do so, will be required<sup>234</sup>.

Adams suggests that

The central illocution of Isa 40-55 is Yahweh's illocutionary act of the Cyrus event which is referred to throughout chs. 40-48. This section contains various persuasive appeals to the addressees as well as readers, but the primary focus of these arguments is grounded in and derives from Yahweh's illocution. In other words, Yahweh's speech act actually creates and substantiates his perlocutionary appeals. The central perlocutionary intention of Yahweh's illocutionary act aims at the audience's confession of Yahweh alone. Isaiah 40-55 envisions the people of God comprised of a confessional community. Individuals witnessing to Yahweh's supreme power actualize their becoming part of the people of God through their confession of him alone.<sup>235</sup>

The idea of Yahweh's illocutions is an interesting one, as Wolterstorff has also noted, but it requires one to identify various questions. For example, one must ask, which audience is Yahweh addressing, and how is he addressing them? Is He addressing the readers of the text, or the community addressed within the text (or both)? Alternatively, is the "illocutionary act of the Cyrus event" addressed to Cyrus (who does not know Yahweh), and if so, can an illocution be 'felicitous' if the addressed audience remain ignorant that they are in fact being commanded? If Cyrus carries out Yahweh's wishes without realising that this is what he is doing, is this an illocution<sup>236</sup>?

Related to this, are we to take the words of Yahweh as directly His, or as mediated through a writer: is it Yahweh speaking, or speaking through someone else's speech, or through someone else's writing, and is that someone creatively involved in the message, or are we to take them as a cipher?<sup>237</sup>

---

<sup>234</sup> It may be that read, and read-aloud, illocutions operate on the same conventional basis, but a description of that would be helpful.

<sup>235</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p16

<sup>236</sup> The text suggests that Cyrus might be ignorant of his own status, and that it is others who are as much the aim of this explanation. Cyrus may only become aware of his status once he has become God's agent: another post-facto realisation! "Thus says the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and ungird the loins of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed: "I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut asunder the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and the hoards in secret places, that you may know that it is I, the LORD, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I gird you, though you do not know me, that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other." Isaiah 45:1-6, RSV.

<sup>237</sup> This is part of Wolterstorff's debate in his book *Divine Discourse*. Adams seems to assume that Yahweh is the direct author of Deutero-Isaiah, and he ignores the question of mediation, as in for example his observation that "Yahweh makes this explicitly clear by using conventional prophetic terminology .." p103, or " .. the intended perlocutionary effect of

It may be that we decide that this does not matter, but depending on how we decided these questions, this will affect the 'illocutionary' nature of the text acts, because these could quite well be perlocutions, attempting to persuade us that in these acts we hear the words of Yahweh. Their illocutionary status is not immediately obvious, and this therefore weakens their standing as illocutions, since illocutions are of course conventional. They exist on the basis of social conventions: if these do not exist, there can be no illocutions.

Adams's mention of "a confessional community" is also highly significant, in the sense of establishing the existence of conventions without which the illocution cannot operate – and it is consistent to see a response as enfolding one into a community, although once again this illustrates the illocution's contextual dependence. But an invitation to subscribe does not seem like an illocution, and certainly is only be half-complete until it is accepted<sup>238</sup>.

A reader presumably witnesses to Yahweh by a confession of faith, by an acceptance of these words as Yahweh's, and an acceptance of them as true. However, it is not clear what it means for a reader to "actualize their becoming part of the people of God"? Again, this slight confusion about 'success', 'felicity' and 'uptake' indicates a problem with Austin's categories here, and clouds over the central issue of how reading is an self-involving act that changes one. To 'actualize my becoming part of the people of God' suggests that I was already implicitly part of the people of God, but needed to engage with it: it has shades of the need to be 'born-again' in the Spirit. Given the original context of the text, one must also ask whether such an opportunity was intended then to be open to gentiles and the uncircumcised<sup>239</sup>.

Adams answers some of the questions by suggesting that ambiguities in the text create

an openness appears that naturally draws in the addressees/readers and invites them to identify with and become self-involved with it. Such openness especially arises with the servant passages and in particular the final three. These units not only contain illocutionary utterances, but also include the dimension of self-involvement. Engaging with these servant passages, the addressees/readers involve themselves and become the speaker who utters and confesses illocutionary acts that thereby commits them to certain extralinguistic entailments and obligations. In short, the Cyrus event intends to

---

Yahweh's declaration of the Cyrus event ..." p102. It could well be that the whole text of Deutero-Isaiah, can be taken as Yahweh's speech act, in a creative, poetic, or novelistic way (which on the face of it could not therefore be illocutionary). However, this text, or much of it, appears to be in dialogue form. This leads one to ask can illocutions be dialogic?

<sup>238</sup> Which leads us again into the difference between attempt and achievement discussed in chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>239</sup> 'Actualization' crops up repeatedly in Adams's work, see pages 155, 198, 205 and 213, for example.

prompt the addressees to confess Yahweh alone and thereby adopt the role of his servant and become Israel, the people of God.<sup>240</sup>

It is thus the case that for Adams, readers are 'invited in' by the text to take on a specific role with various obligations and expectations. The difficulty is that even assuming that Adams is absolutely correct in his description of how the text is intended to – and often does – work, there is no certainty here, and no comeback if it does not happen with a particular reader. An illocution, in the right context, will simply work: it doesn't depend on your state of mind or 'pretended internal acts', merely on what you do: this is part of the definition. With the kind of reading Adams assumes, there is significantly greater uncertainty about the effects, which may be different for the same reader on different occasions, depending on their reading context, and which do not seem to be anything like as securely based on observable, describable conventions.

Adams distinguishes his ideas from those of Clines on the basis that "the notion of self-involvement nuances Clines's concept as the addressee/reader *involves* the *self* in the text by uttering speech acts and thereby adopting prescribed stances and entailments, not simply identifying with personae."<sup>241</sup> The difference between identifying with a persona and identifying with and becoming self-involved with the servant does not seem substantial, however: there seems to be an overlap with Adams's suggestion that "the central message of these chapters is a *call to return or turn to Yahweh*. The way the text describes the nature of this return is for the addressee *to forsake sin, acknowledge and confess Yahweh as God alone, and embrace the role of his servant*."<sup>242</sup> It isn't clear why one is more illocutionary than the other<sup>243</sup>.

Likewise, when Adams asserts that

while Yahweh addresses and taunts the idol-gods, Jacob-Israel, the nations, and the readers are *listening*. Every listener includes him/herself among the ambiguous and open "we/us/our" witnesses and becomes challenged by Yahweh's claim that he declared the Cyrus event. The perlocutionary effect, though, remains contingent upon each witness' evaluation of Yahweh's assertion,<sup>244</sup>

it would appear that 'being challenged' isn't an obvious illocution, and could equally be a perlocutionary effect. Not everyone who hears will automatically be challenged; some might just shrug their shoulders, while others are already committed<sup>245</sup>.

---

<sup>240</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p17

<sup>241</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p89

<sup>242</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p91

<sup>243</sup> And Clines of course isn't claiming that 'his' act is an illocution

<sup>244</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p141

<sup>245</sup> In the same way, Adams notes on page 153 that: "Yahweh's declarative operates through the extralinguistic institutional authority of Yahweh himself as the creator of Israel that also



Adams provides a fairly comprehensive survey of various approaches to speech act theory, and the idea of self-involvement in Evans, Thiselton and Briggs, identifying some of the problems with speech act theory that this thesis has also noted. He concludes that “the term ‘speech act’ properly functions as the governing concept that every utterance to one degree or another constitutes the performance of an action.”<sup>246</sup> For him, the crucial phrase is that utterances ‘count as doing’ something. All performatives are utterances (or “communicative actions”) that count as doing something, but in particular, for Adams, there is a distinctive performative category of linguistic utterances “that may or may not involve non-linguistic conventions”<sup>247</sup>.

Following Briggs, Adams suggests that speech acts operate on spectrum, with weak ones such as locutions and constatives on one end, which are more-or-less ‘purely’ linguistic, and strong ones at the other, where the linguistic and non-linguistic are in play together. “The self-involvement of the speaker comprises the central characteristic of illocutionary acts as utterances place to one degree or another the speaker under certain public and social obligations and commitments.”<sup>248</sup> These speech acts can be distinguished from perlocutions, because “when an illocution is uttered with desired perlocutionary effects it seems best to describe these effects as *triggered* or *intended* by the illocution. The effect lies outside language proper and is left up to the decision making processes within the hearer whether or not to respond appropriately.”<sup>249</sup>

It is not clear, though, what distinguishes an effect that lies ‘outside language proper’ from the non-linguistic element of strong illocutions. In particular, the suggestion that speech acts are ‘counted as’ actions seems to be dubious on a number of levels<sup>250</sup>. It assumes that the act exists before it is recognised for what it is, and that the recognition is a confirmation of an act and a meaning that pre-existed this recognition. It also describes incorrectly the process itself: in general terms we don’t ‘count as’, we simply recognise.

As Wittgenstein noted, we don’t take a fork as a fork, we simply say ‘this is a fork’<sup>251</sup>. In the same way, we don’t count something as something, we either

---

presupposes the brute fact that he is God. Through Yahweh’s supernatural institutional utterance, the confessors create the state of affairs that they *constitute* his servant and Israel.” I dispute the notion that Yahweh’s being God is a brute fact – aside from whether or not these exist, I would suggest that ascriptions of divinity are highly institutional – and again note that readers involve themselves by adopting a stance.

<sup>246</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p45

<sup>247</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p45

<sup>248</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p45

<sup>249</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p44

<sup>250</sup> As Adams notes, the idea of ‘counting as’ does not originate with him.

<sup>251</sup> *Phil Inv* Ixi p195, referring actually to cutlery generally!

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

recognise it as something (which that act of recognition makes it), or we are uncertain. To suggest that we 'count' it *as*, implies that this is a conscious and 'secondary' process, rather than part of our inherited pre-linguistic culture (which is itself deeply linguistically formed). For the same reason, the idea that some utterances are not 'conventional' in anything other than a linguistic sense also seems highly suspect<sup>252</sup>.

The apparently simply linguistic 'illocutionary' utterance "I promise" depends on a social concept of 'promising', and the assumption that people will keep not break their word. It is perfectly possible for there to be societies in which this assumption does not hold, at least for different castes or groups addressing one another, so that if someone from one caste or group says to someone from a different one "I promise", both sides will nonetheless typically take this as simple politeness, with no expectation that any commitment is involved. Thus even the simple linguistic promise is also non-linguistic.

Equally, to say "that is a horse", is not a purely linguistic act, as I note in chapter seven of this thesis. Commonplace objects and commonplace observations are only 'ordinary' in the right context; they can be extraordinary in different contexts. Moreover, the concept of language itself – that these sounds 'mean' this – is highly conventional. Language itself is a complex non-linguistic phenomenon, or at least it is a phenomenon of culture and society as well as of phonemes!

It is interesting that Adams also notes that 'self-involvement' is a characteristic of speech act theory more generally. He also notes, having discussed the work of Briggs, Thiselton and Evans, that

certain self-involving utterances that do not necessarily contain any other illocutionary markers or non-linguistic conventions can *count as* strong communicative action. This correlates with the above conclusions that certain utterances can be classified as performatives or as strong illocutionary acts because of clear extra-linguistic, self-involved stances or actions expressed or assumed in the linguistic content.<sup>253</sup>

The difficulty here, aside from a certain circularity<sup>254</sup>, is that if we can count anything that looks self-involving as an illocution, why do we need both categories? Can't we simply talk about utterances that are in a particular context recognised, or 'usually' or 'properly' recognised, as being self-involving? The category of 'utterances that we recognise as being self-involving of the speaker' is one that, like the concept of 'meaning' itself, is based on a dialogic response between utterer and audience, and it doesn't

<sup>252</sup> This point is made again in chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>253</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p62

<sup>254</sup> Acts that imply self-involvement are illocutions; illocutions are acts that require you to be self-involved. Ostensive definition is sometimes necessary and helpful, but perhaps not here.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

seem to require the conceptual apparatus of ‘illocutions’. If we recognise an utterance as being self-involving, then that is what it is, we don’t really need to call it an illocution as well, and doing so doesn’t appear to add anything to our analysis.

The superfluity of this kind of ostensive definition is again illustrated when Adams suggests, in his more detailed textual analysis later on<sup>255</sup> that the

illocution here is a multidimensional declarative-directive-expressive-commissive expressed through a personal confession. This illocution may be the strongest type of speech act one could possibly utter, as it combines naturally strong illocutions (declarative, directive, and commissive); yet spoken through a personal confession, the utterance becomes even stronger. Although this utterance is a single confession, it contains the expressions of two different speakers. This phenomenon has not been discussed in detail, if at all, by speech act theorists. What occurs here is a type of single interdependent speech act.<sup>256</sup>

Here again it would seem easier and simpler to abandon the attempt to fit everything into a distinctive category which needs continual refashioning to include what must be included and exclude what doesn’t fit.

Indeed, on this subject of exclusion and distinction, Adams’s attempts to distinguish illocutions and perlocutions are also ultimately unconvincing. The “social and public obligations” of a self-involving illocution do not necessarily seem distinguishable from perlocutionary effects which lie “outside language proper” (whatever that means), particularly since it is surely in both cases up to the hearers to decide whether to respond “appropriately”.

Later on Adams will aver that the verse he is assessing

expresses an interdependent self-involved illocutionary act uttered by Yahweh and the speaker. Both speakers mutually adopt a particular stance and commit themselves to certain entailments. In order for the utterance to operate successfully, each speaker must fulfill the obligations and responsibilities of the illocution. If one of the speakers fails in his speech act, then the utterance is infelicitous. This phenomenon is highlighted by Patrick’s notion of *performative transactions*. In order for the speakers actually to experience the force of Yahweh’s illocutionary act, they must first take a step of faith by embracing the call of the servant. This step puts the onus on Yahweh to fulfill his speech act. The public domain becomes the arena wherein the interdependent self-involved utterance is demonstrated and tested.<sup>257</sup>

Aside from the question as to what the successful operation of an utterance involves – this appears to be another euphemism like infelicitous, used to avoid specifying the point at which meaning is created – the impression is clear that illocutions do require that some consequences be ‘fulfilled’.

---

<sup>255</sup> Specifically here concerning 49:3

<sup>256</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p152

<sup>257</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p153-154

However, to suggest that an utterance becomes infelicitous if obligations are not fulfilled, does seem to come dangerously close to asserting that an utterance depends on 'inward intention', and therefore to come close to contradicting Austin's own insistence that utterances cannot be 'posthumously overturned'<sup>258</sup>, since an illocution depends on the circumstances that were apparently in place when it was uttered, not on hindsight.

Once again, I have no difficulty with Adams's identification of various illocutionary actions within the texts (although I might not agree with the classification scheme or with every example that he cites)<sup>259</sup>, but I am not convinced that he has successfully shown how the relationship between text and reader is illocutionary.

Like all the similar suggestions of self-involvement we have discussed in this section, I accept without reservation that it is possible to read religious (and possibly other) texts in this self-involved way, or that to read these texts in this way is to make them religiously significant, but this highlights the difficulty. To describe the texts as self-involving in the manner of Adams, puts the onus on the text, and suggests that because the text is a certain sort of text, it can, should be, and is read in this way. But this is to put the relationship the wrong way round (the cart very much before the horse). It is in fact the case, that texts are self-involving not because some, uniquely, demand this, but because I demand it of them in my reading context. The illocutionary category works from the wrong end, as it were.

---

<sup>258</sup> "for he *does* promise: the promise here is not even *void*, though it is given *in bad faith*. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement. At most we might make out a case for saying that it implies or insinuates a falsehood or a misstatement (to the effect that he does intend to do something): but that is a very different matter" *How To* p11. Alternatively, one could introduce a kind of timescale, distinguishing between immediate obligations, and more distant ones, which is more or less what Austin does – see chapter five of this thesis.

<sup>259</sup> Adams suggests that "in conjunction with these forces, Yahweh implicitly utters directives to the addressees", p130, and I am not sure about the possibility of *implicit* illocutions. On the same page he states that "Yahweh utters a directive illocution to the idol-gods to substantiate the claim of divinity". Here, I wonder whether or not the idol-gods actually exist, and whether or not Yahweh believes that they do. If they do exist, does Yahweh have the 'conventional' authority to direct them? If they are not real, can they be directed? Who needs to exist for this to be an illocution – can I direct Noddy to appear before me, and is this simply a question of my authority, or does the unreality of Noddy matter at all? This is part of the same debate about illocutionary consequences – can you issue an order if there is no-one to whom it relates? It also again begs the question of the textuality of illocutions. An order can be textual – it can be 'signed and sealed'. Can it be directed to 'a reader'? If I were handed an order from the Major-General of the local militia, would I obey it? If I did not, would it still be an order? He also suggests that "the perlocutionary effect of the successful speech act challenge consists in providing clear evidence that the idol-gods are indeed divine", pages 132-133: I disagree: surely the challenge proves that the gods do not exist?

This can be demonstrated when, for example, Adams notes that

the speaker is transformed by Yahweh's illocutionary act and, as his servant, the speaker has the assignment of operating as his illocution. The commissive dimension is expressed by both Yahweh and the speaker. For Yahweh, the speaker is "my servant, my light, my salvation." For the speaker, the force obligates her/him to fulfill Yahweh's directive. As Yahweh's light and salvation, the speaker transforms the world by embracing the declarative-directive dimensions of his illocution. The speaker is Yahweh's speech act! Yahweh's commissive-declarative-directive illocution is also an interdependent self-involved utterance that *transactionally* depends upon both Yahweh and the speaker to bring about its actualization.<sup>260</sup>

Here, Adams both wants to retain the author-centred, begotten not created aspect of the illocution, while at the same time recognizing that the self-involving and transactional nature of the speech act requires actualization, a word the oddity of which I have noted before, and which here represents the acknowledgement that no speech act that is an 'interdependent transaction' requiring such co-creative 'actualisation', can also be an illocution. No reader can be automatically, or even 'conventionally', 'obligated' to become an illocution (whatever that means), unless they are reading from a context that allows or expects this, and in which they have already recognised the text as 'religious'.

Likewise, when Adams notes that

each speaker who self-involvingly adopts the open call of Yahweh's servant is now under the obligation to operate as Yahweh's light and salvation. The confessor will accomplish this by functioning in the roles of both prophet and king. As a prophet, the speaker brings light to those who are blind and in darkness. As a king, the speaker brings justice to those who are oppressed. Specifically, the speaker is to point to Yahweh, the true light (60:1-3, 19-20), the true God, and to his Torah. The speaker is to direct people to Yahweh, the only real savior (45:21-22),<sup>261</sup>

I wonder whether this is a Jewish-specific illocution? The saviour to whom the speaker is 'illocutionarily obliged' to direct people is Yahweh, but are we to imagine that this is Yahweh as giver of the Law and covenantor with Israel, or Yahweh as Father of the 'new Israel' which 'is' the Church worshipping the messiah Jesus? Who can incarnate Israel? A Christian would doubtless say 'I can'. Would the author of this text - if human - agree? And does that matter? Whose illocution is this?

The question of whose illocution this is comes again to the fore when Adams suggests that, in relation to verse 53:1,

---

<sup>260</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p155

<sup>261</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p155-156

the declarative dimension builds upon his previous illocutions that the speaker *constitutes* his servant and Israel, his light and salvation. In this poem the suffering and death of Yahweh's arm/servant *constitutes* his salvation and light. The servant who embraces this assignment will simultaneously fulfill the directive and declarative dimensions. The extralinguistic actualization of Yahweh's illocutionary act will bring about a transformation in the world. The servant is Yahweh's illocutionary act. The servant *constitutes* Yahweh's promise of salvation! This promise is realized through the interdependent self-involved utterances spoken by Yahweh and his servant. Upon the fulfilment of this vision the servant will realize to the fullest extent Yahweh's promise that he will wipe away transgressions and remember them no more (43:25).<sup>262</sup>

Here, it does seem as though the embodied illocutionary act has in fact become incarnate in one particular person, a figure traditionally seen as associated with the servant in Christian apologetics. Possible, and Divinely-intended, associations between the crucified messiah and the suffering servant are perfectly legitimate in a Christian context, but can it be the case that a particular person represents this illocution uniquely, and in what sense then is this, and this person, an illocutionary act?<sup>263</sup>

The creeping sense of illocutionary uniqueness (which surely undermines the entire illocutionary act concept) is evident also when Adams discusses the idea of the servant as  $\text{אָשָׁם}$ , which is transliterated as *a-sham* or guilt-offering. This seems to have in mind a very particular historical event, to which it is quite possible the passages do indeed refer, but this is of course heavily disputed, and depends very much upon one's reading context and assumptions. When read aloud in the Liturgy of Good Friday, these passages are very different in meaning to their presence in a Jewish commentary. The Liturgical reading of these texts in conjunction with the remembrance of the crucifixion of Jesus 'actualizes' the text in a very different way to the way in which they might be actualized if read at Yad Vashem<sup>264</sup>.

---

<sup>262</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p198

<sup>263</sup> Given that "the Word became flesh", there are all sorts of suggestive parallels and associations to be made in identifying Jesus as an illocution, but the idea that it is one particular reader who 'actualises' this text has slightly 'magical' overtones.

<sup>264</sup> On page 205 Adams notes that "in speech act terms, the servant's death is an  $\text{אָשָׁם}$  [*a-sham*: guilt-offering] which operates through the extralinguistic convention of the sacrificial legislation. But the sacrifice performs its intended expiatory purpose only when accompanied with the linguistic confession of sin. Thus, the institutionally required confession in conjunction with a  $\text{אָשָׁם}$  creates the states of affairs that the speaker is *counted as* forgiven. The servant's death as  $\text{אָשָׁם}$  is the provision of forgiveness, but the accompanied speech act of confession transforms the speaker as forgiven. Through the self-involved confession of sin speakers separate themselves from sinful acts and receive forgiveness of that sin. Following Briggs' discussion on forgiveness, through this speech act Yahweh removes the institutional fact of sin, which also changes the brute facts. Thus, the identity of the sinful person is *refigured*. In other words, the confessor's identity as *rebellious* is changed to *forgiven*. As a result, the sickly condition of the confessor has been transformed into health and vitality. Yahweh has not been persuaded to forgive nor are confessors merely convinced of their forgiveness. Rather, Yahweh's servant has actualized their illocutionary act that brings about

Adams notes this; he recognizes that these texts are differently self-involving for the Jewish community and given their history<sup>265</sup>. However, his reading of these 'servant-texts' becomes so very specific that, while I as a Christian have no problems with the reading, I do have difficulty with the idea that his reading has identified illocutions. (I should also note that while Adams describes sin as an institutional fact, he also seems to imply that it has 'brute' consequences of sickness. Aside from the question of the stability of the categories of brute and institutional<sup>266</sup>, this seems uncertain.)

The illocutionary act that the servant has actualized to transform the confessor is presumably that of atonement. But the rather convoluted series of events in which the confessor's illocutionary act of confession together with the servant's *a-sham* equate to a transformation in the confessor and the world, seems designed to guard against any suggestion that substitutionary atonement is in fact a perlocutionary act.

The perlocutionary nature of substitutionary atonement has a plausibility since, if Yahweh's position towards us has not changed, a change in our attitude to Him (i.e. a perlocution: we have been persuaded that we are forgiven) seems the most straightforward alternative. Undoubtedly, such a 'perlocutionary' description seems to seriously underestimate the historically-rooted, paradigm-changing universality of atonement. To describe a 'once-for-all' sacrifice as an illocution, however, stretches both concepts significantly, and whatever the true nature of Christ's atonement, the suggestion that we are dealing here with an illocution serves primarily to make the text harder to understand rather than easier.

In his conclusion, Adams notes that

I have suggested that the prophetic strategy of these chapters is a *call to return to Yahweh*. This occurs by *forsaking sin, acknowledging and confessing Yahweh as God alone, and embracing the role of his servant*. The way that the addressee/reader engages with this prophetic strategy is by closely following the text's literary structure and performative nature. Self-involved addressees/readers of Isa 40-55 utter speech acts whereby they adopt particular stances and obligate themselves to specific entailments. This is especially seen in the servant passages. One of the unique outcomes of this study is the notion of a single interdependent illocutionary act spoken by two different speakers. In certain instances, Yahweh and a speaker utter the same illocutions and thereby place themselves under particular obligations to fulfill that utterance. By uttering the illocution the addressee/reader *constitutes* Yahweh's illocutionary act. If either Yahweh or the speaker fails in the actualization of the illocution, it becomes infelicitous. Speech act theory has

---

a transformation in the world whereby one can become transformed as forgiven and restored through personal confession of sin and the servant's  $\text{D}\text{W}\text{X}$  sacrifice."

<sup>265</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p214

<sup>266</sup> Which are discussed in a footnote relating to Anscombe's article in chapter five of this thesis

also shed further light on why the servant's sacrifice in ch. 53 is identified as an *a-sham*. This special type of sacrifice requires a confessional component which is exactly what the addressee/reader is implored to do in vv. 1-11aa. Another important discovery is the self-involving nature of rhetorical questions. Speech act theorists have discussed the illocutionary dimension of both real and rhetorical questions but not from the perspective of self-involvement or evaluating their force along a spectrum of strengths. With a strong self-involving rhetorical question the speaker typically expresses an assertive-expressive-directive illocution that naturally also includes a commissive dimension. The hearer either co-expresses that illocution through self-involvement or offers a contrasting assertion with both including non-linguistic stances and entailments.

The self-involving nature of the Biblical text, however, is not a new phenomenon as countless generations of readers have recognised this dynamic dimension in one way or another.<sup>267</sup>

However, several questions remain unanswered satisfactorily in his study. Although I find valuable Adams's stress on the importance of the ambiguities of the text and the effect they have on the reader, I don't believe that Adams has conclusively identified the nature of the relationship between the prophet/author, Yahweh, a reader such as you or I, and the one who is the servant. The illocutionary obligations imposed by the text are not depicted coherently as illocutionary effects rather than perlocutionary ones, nor is the distinction between reading and speaking the texts adequately addressed<sup>268</sup>.

It is not clear here, as in the other texts considered, why the category of illocutions is a helpful linguistic superstructure, particularly since Adam's rigorous attempts to distinguish perlocutions from illocutions serve primarily to make explanations of the 'readerly' speech acts he identifies more complicated and tortuous than they might otherwise have needed to be. Also, his description of the servant and the speaker as Yahweh's illocution, while suggestive, is hard to equate with the concept of the illocution as a conventional linguistic act, and requires more exploration than it receives.

The language of actualization (not unique to Adams), like that of felicity and unhappiness, becomes a way of evading serious consideration of what it is for an illocution to exist, and the suggestion that Yahweh's illocution might fail, while interesting, also needs more consideration, both theologically<sup>269</sup> and linguistically.

---

<sup>267</sup> *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55* p213-214

<sup>268</sup> There are many different types of reading in different contexts, and Adams too easily slips into a reading-aloud context, as in this passage, where the *reader utters* any number of acts. This is a perfectly legitimate context, but it is only one!

<sup>269</sup> See indeed Isaiah 55:10-11: "For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it." RSV

I am in sympathy with the suggestion that in the act of creation God made Himself open to misunderstanding and vulnerability, but I don't think Adams has expressed this adequately



That the language of the Bible is performative I in no way wish to deny. Nor do I dispute the depiction of speech acts within the texts, though I am unconvinced that Austin's speech act categories add much to the debate. However, the attempt to describe the 'reader-text relationship' in illocutionary terms, while interesting, is ultimately a failure, because it ignores the contextual element to the illocution, and is unaware of significant flaws in the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction itself.

## 6. Conclusion

As I noted in the previous chapter of this thesis, Stanley Fish observed that Speech Act textual analysis "will always be possible, it will also be trivial, (a mere list of the occurrence or distribution of kinds of acts)"<sup>270</sup>. Fish suggested that this was because most texts (unlike *Coriolanus*) were not about the conditions of speech. The examination of various Biblical Speech Act criticisms has illustrated his perception, to a degree.

It is quite possible, and sometimes helpful and revealing, to identify speech acts occurring in Biblical texts. These can sometimes identify subtleties of story and meaning that might otherwise elude the reader. But this is always to describe completed acts – things that have already been recognized and have happened. This kind of analysis can be an accompaniment to other sorts of criticism, focusing on aspects of Biblical style and narration.

However, several of the Biblical hermeneuts under consideration in this chapter have not limited themselves to this kind of descriptive elucidation. Rather, they have sought to use Speech Act theory to describe how it is that the reader and text interact. The nature of this relationship makes this kind of criticism inevitably predictive, since it is describing current and future relationships, not merely those depicted in the past. In straying into this territory, Speech Act theory becomes very much less helpful, because as a theory it carries in some inadequate assumptions about how meaning is created, and its 'predictability'.

This discussion of Speech Act theory and Biblical hermeneutics has illustrated the variety and sophistication of the approaches on offer. This very variety however illustrates one of the problems, particularly with the 'predictive', reader-involved end of hermeneutics. The confidence with which some scholars equate texts with perlocutions and others with illocutions suggests

---

in theological terms, and it is one with which, I think, Vanhoozer would disagree, while adopting a Speech Act perspective – see his *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012)

<sup>270</sup> 'How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism', *MLN* 91:5 (October 1976) p1025.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

both a certain inherent confusion in the terms themselves, and also the superfluity of them as descriptors and predictors. Particularly in the reader end of hermeneutics, but also in the more descriptive 'textual' end, it can be questioned whether or not the detailed categories of Speech Act theory in fact add anything at all to the analysis. The extra layer of concepts seems prone to cause more confusion, special pleading and disagreement as to terms and scope. It does not seem to add anything to call an order, confession, or command, an 'illocution' as well.

The conceptual uniqueness that illocutions do supposedly possess lies largely in their conventionality, used here to mean both their predictability and their 'existence-through-convention'. But the assumption of predictability relies firstly on the assumption of a saturated context of convention, which is a circular assumption and therefore of no predictive merit whatever; and secondly on the assumption that meaning exists before the utterance is recognised. Meaning must therefore exist intangibly prior to the production of the utterance. The illocution cannot be divorced from these assumptions: if it is, it becomes indistinguishable from a perlocution.

Thus the fundamental flaw within Speech Act theory that lies hidden beneath Austin's desire to exclude "parasitic" uses of language from his theory has, in fact, a very significant impact on Speech Act theory's attractiveness as a Biblical hermeneutic, and its coherence as a linguistic model. This flaw concerns the question of intention.

The illocution as a concept distinct from the perlocution assumes inevitably that meaning is begotten not created. This meaning could only reside in conventions if these could be guaranteed to work to produce 'successful' illocutions every time: if the context were always saturated. Given the impossibility of this, the only other repository for 'begotten' meaning is authorial intention, which Austin has specifically excluded from his theory, but which in Austin and his successors creeps back in as a consequence of the 'begotten-ness' of meaning in the concept of the illocution. The next chapter therefore demonstrates that the question of intention is a fundamental contradiction within Speech Act theory that renders it inconsistent, and ultimately incoherent.

Thereafter, chapter five discusses the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction, and the foundations on which this distinction rests. Here it is demonstrated that this distinction, too, cannot withstand detailed scrutiny. Speech Act theory is shown to be inadequate not just as a hermeneutic, but as a theory of language. It cannot be coherently used to defend an idea of meaning and revelation, and should be abandoned as a tool. This does not however mean that revelation and meaning are forsaken concepts: they simply need re-appraisal, as will be indicated in due course.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INCOHERENCIES IN INTENTION IN SPEECH ACT THEORY

### 1. Introduction.

The previous chapter examined some of the ways in which Speech Act theory has been used as a Biblical hermeneutic. In addition to some doubts about the way in which Speech Act theory is used as a hermeneutic tool, during the discussion of its use it became increasingly clear that at least two issues were raised of more fundamental significance in respect of Speech Act theory.

These were, firstly the difference between the illocution and the perlocution, which Austin himself suggested “seems likeliest to give trouble”<sup>1</sup>, a prediction not generally born out in subsequent work, and also to a degree the question of intention and Speech acts, and in particular the point at which an act might be said to exist, and hence the point at which it has meaning. This of course is a return to the original doubt raised about Speech Act theory: that it uncritically adopts a view of meaning as begotten not created: it assumes a sender view of meaning.

Before continuing with an assessment of Speech Act theory and hermeneutics it is necessary to consider these two particular aspects of Speech Act theory: the relationship between the illocution and the perlocution, and the question of intention. Both examinations will demonstrate inherent and basic flaws in the theory, which have not generally been adequately appreciated by adherents since Austin, although in both cases Austin himself seems to have had at least an inkling of potential problems. The second area examined, in the following chapter, is the question of Austin’s distinction between illocutions and perlocutions. The first area to be dealt with is that concerning intention, to which the rest of this chapter is devoted.

As I have already noted in chapter one of this thesis, other theorists have proposed versions of Speech Act theory, in addition to or in development of that first suggested by Austin, in particular Paul Grice, William Alston and Francois Recanati. If Searle has become the Elisha to Austin’s Elijah, each of these theorists has developed a divergent take on the basic idea that speech is not, or not primarily, descriptive, but is performative<sup>2</sup>. To this extent, I agree with them all. However, the question of intention and the illocution is an area where they all fail to be consistent. There are various different approaches to

---

<sup>1</sup> *How To* p109. As I also mentioned in chapter one of this thesis, P N Campbell, in his ‘A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Acts’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) 284-296, notes the fact that for the most part Austin’s prediction has not been borne out in subsequent studies.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps they are the Sons of the Prophets?

the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction, but the question of intention remains a persistent thorn.

In this chapter, reference is made to the work of Kevin Vanhoozer, one of those users of Speech Act theory as a Biblical hermeneutic whose interest is in the possibility that the concept of the illocution assumes that its meaning is predetermined by the speaker, and guaranteed by its 'operating conventions'. For Vanhoozer, and others, this idea then provides a theoretical basis for a view of Scripture as God's self-authored revelation, in which God conveys His own meaning through the text, without contamination or mediation. In an illocution, it would appear that intention is enacted as meaning without mistake or misunderstanding.

However, the position in Austin's own exploration of the theory in *How To* is rather more complex than this. At the start of *How To* Austin discusses the idea of intention and actions, and he acknowledges that intention is only visible in what is realized as being done. This is to recognize, at least implicitly, the part played by the audience, hearer or reader, in the existence of the act, and indicates that Austin would disagree with the suggestion that intention can be conveyed without the need for the creative participation of the reader/listener. Austin does not, however, maintain this position subsequently, for reasons which will be outlined.

## 2. Intention in Austin: the Theory.

Austin alludes to the meaning of intention early in *How To*, but in a somewhat elliptic manner, as was often his fashion. That his line of thought at this point is not clear or consistent is evidenced in one direction by Derrida's discussion of *How To*, and in another by the way in which Austin and others discuss intention and meaning subsequently.

Derrida discusses Austin's view of intention in *Sec*<sup>3</sup>, and subjects it to some searching and often well-founded criticism. As already noted in chapter two of this thesis, I agree with Derrida's accusation that one of the "essential elements - and not one among others" in Austin's vision of "the total context" of a speech act, is "consciousness, the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act. As a result, performative communication becomes once more the communication of an intentional meaning"<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Limited Inc* (Evanston IL, Northwestern University Press, 1988): *Sec* p13ff

<sup>4</sup> *Limited Inc* (*Sec*) p14. See also W Cerf, 'Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969). Cerf, correctly I think, implies that Austin's use of the phrase 'performing an act' is itself an example of this 'metaphysical smuggling in' of the Aristotelian and Cartesian "metaphysical pigmentation" (p367) of "the Cartesian *cogito*" (p366).

However, I do not agree with Derrida that Austin intends this result. I agree that this is part of the mechanism of explicit performatives and of illocutions in particular, as they will unfold in Austin's discussion. However, in his first lecture Austin has attempted, albeit rather opaquely, to dismiss this very suggestion<sup>5</sup>.

Nonetheless, Austin is unable to maintain the definition of intention he has obliquely proposed, but in subsequent lectures slides back into the views Derrida attributes to him. Thus, my re-readings of *How To* have identified an 'intention' made evident in Austin's text (although admittedly opaquely evident), which is thereafter implicitly subverted. However, my readings have identified no explicit rejection of the initial theory, but only subsequent suggestions and proposals that are inimical to it, and thus I understand *How To* as a series of texts in which Austin sets out (and hence 'intends' to state) a position on intention that becomes untenable without being explicitly<sup>6</sup> repudiated. My readings therefore identify an unfulfilled intention in *How To*. Whether or not this intention actually exists in *How To*, or is 'simply' the product of an eccentric reading, remains to be determined<sup>7</sup>.

Returning to Austin's description of intention, Derrida is not quite fair to Austin<sup>8</sup>. As part of his suggestion that Austin assumes the necessity of "the conscious presence of speakers or receivers [9] participating in the accomplishment of a performative, their conscious and intentional presence in

---

<sup>5</sup> Before elaborating this point, but in tandem with this discussion, I should acknowledge my own use of the word 'intends' in this paragraph. It could be argued that the use of this word here, at the beginning of an argument about the meaning of the word and its usage, is either lazy or foolhardy or both. I use it 'deliberately': after deliberation, and with the acknowledged intention that it be noticed. My readings of *How To* have brought me to the view that Austin does not proceed on the basis of an unspoken assumption affirming the existence of 'the conscious presence of the intention of the speaking subject in the totality of his speech act', as Derrida suggests. Rather, Austin acknowledges and dismisses a concept of intention based on 'the intention of the speaking subject', insofar as that requires that "communication becomes once more the communication of an intentional meaning": Limited Inc (*Sec*) p14.

<sup>6</sup> and therefore I could write 'consciously'

<sup>7</sup> It may never be finally and authoritatively decided, but a scholarly or readerly consensus may emerge, which is the closest we can get, while itself not static or final. Certainly Jonathan Culler agrees with my interpretation of Austin: "in order to arrest or control this process [whereby it can be demonstrated that for an illocution to be effective is context-and-hearer-dependent], which threatens the possibility of a successful theory of speech acts, Austin is led to reintroduce the notion, previously rejected, that the meaning of an utterance depends on the presence of a signifying intention in the consciousness of the speaker": J Culler, 'Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) p23.

<sup>8</sup> As R Rorty also suggests, 'Deconstruction and Circumvention', *Critical Inquiry* 11:1 (September 1984) footnote 3, reference made on p2, expanded on p21.

<sup>9</sup> This is a noteworthy word. It is of course one chosen by the translators of this essay, Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, but it implies a curiously passive relationship between the speaker and the hearer. From the context, it is Derrida's description of Austin's assumption about the relationship between hearer and utterance. In this case, it is interestingly accurate, as will be explored subsequently.

the totality of the operation, [which] implies teleologically that no *residue* escapes the present totalization"<sup>10</sup>, Derrida quotes half a paragraph of Austin's first lecture, from pages eight and nine of *How To*.

Derrida then locates in Austin the values of "an exhaustively definable context, of a free consciousness present to the totality of the operation, and of absolutely meaningful speech master of itself: the teleological jurisdiction of an entire field whose organizing center remains *intention*"<sup>11</sup>, for which he refers<sup>12</sup> to pages ten to fifteen of *How To*, which comprise the concluding part of the first lecture and the beginning of the second<sup>13</sup>. Derrida, however, omits any mention of the rest of the conclusion to Austin's first lecture, on pages nine, ten and eleven of *How To*, and does not continue his exploration of the paragraph whose beginning he has previously quoted.

In this paragraph Austin agrees<sup>14</sup> that it is necessary for the successful performance of an utterance-act that we should be "serious"<sup>15</sup>, but he does not agree with the corollary suggestion<sup>16</sup> that the spoken words are merely "the outward and visible sign ... of an inward and spiritual act"<sup>17</sup>. He suggests, in respect of utterance-acts, that

we are apt to have a feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe or to assume without realizing that for many purposes the outward

---

<sup>10</sup> Limited Inc (Sec) p14

<sup>11</sup> Limited Inc (Sec) p15

<sup>12</sup> in his footnote 8 p22

<sup>13</sup> Although Derrida appears to include all of this under the heading of Austin's Second Lecture – see the last sentence on page 14 of *Limited Inc*. It is interesting to compare Derrida's description of this totalizing context with Dorothea Franck's objection to the analysis of speech acts, previously cited: "if we talk about the speech acts which we, the analyzers, mean to be represented by the sentence, isn't there a danger of circularity? If, in our imaginary speech situation which surrounds the uttering of the sentence, we imagine exactly those conditions as given which define the sort of speech act that we want to get at, then the claim is trivial. Or rather, we are not making an empirical, but rather an analytical claim": D Franck, 'Speaking about Speech Acts', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) p88.

<sup>14</sup> With whom? Perhaps with his hearers as he imagines them or sees them before him as he speaks? We must again note the context of the lectures, which were addressed to an audience, but also we should note that the concept of 'addressivity' is important in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, and is used with Bakhtin's work by Oliver Davies in his *A Theology of Compassion*, (SCM Press, London, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> He agrees that "this is, though vague, true enough in general – it is an important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking for example, nor writing a poem": *How To* p9

<sup>16</sup> Which he is presumably implying or imagining that his hearers would initially want to make – or that they would usually imagine as existing? Which is to say that the ordinary usage is wrong or unthinking in this respect at least!

<sup>17</sup> *How To* p9, referring without any acknowledgment to the definition of a sacrament found in the Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England, as "an outward and visible of sign of an inward and spiritual grace...".

utterance is a description, *true or false*, of the occurrence of the inward performance,<sup>18</sup>

a series of feelings, beliefs and assumptions he, by implication, does not share. Austin goes on to quote and translate Hippolytus: "my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not\*"<sup>19</sup>, and concludes that "it is gratifying to observe in this very example how excess of profundity, or rather solemnity, at once paves the way for immodality."<sup>20</sup> Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*.<sup>21</sup>

Thus for Austin the meaning and effect of what is uttered reside simply in what is uttered; in the 'face value' of the words, not in an 'inward intention' giving them effect, or of which they are 'merely outward signs'. Irrespective of later developments, at this stage in *How To* Austin advocates the view that the act (of speaking) is performed on the basis of what appears to have been performed - what one has done - rather than what one might claim (subsequently to the act having been performed) to have done<sup>22</sup>.

'Intention', if the concept relates to assumptions about the mental state of the speaker and the like (assumptions which, as Derrida observes, are notoriously

---

<sup>18</sup> *How To* p9

<sup>19</sup> *How To* p9-10. The \* indicates Austin's footnote 1 on p10, which is of considerable interest, which will be referred to repeatedly hereafter, and which reads "But I do not mean to rule out all the offstage performers - the lights men, the stage manager, even the prompter; I am objecting only to certain officious understudies". The second edition of *How To* adds a further clause to the end of this footnote: "who would duplicate the play" (p10).

<sup>20</sup> Fish, using the 1962 first publication of *How To* quotes this word as "immorality", in 'How to do things with Austin and Searle', p986. This may make more sense, and the likelihood that the 1970 edition of *How To* (reprinted in 1963 and 1965) and the Second Edition of 1975, are in error here is increased by the fact that the 1980 impression of the Second Edition also has "immorality": which is an unacknowledged change from 1963/5 and 1975 presumably included as one of "a number of small corrections": (see the "note to the 1980 impression" page v). However, PN Campbell, using apparently the 1962 edition, quotes "immodality". (See: - Fish, 'How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism', *MLN* 91:5 (October 1976): and - P N Campbell, 'A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) p295.) It is tempting to wonder whether this is what Fish means by different readers reading different texts, and if not, where the difference lies! Is it possible for one reader to point out a mistake, as opposed to a different reading, or do they have to be in the same community first (and if so, is there one that includes Fish, Campbell and myself)?

<sup>21</sup> *How To* p10. The comparison with Wittgenstein is striking here: "We say "The expression in his voice was *genuine*". If it was spurious we think as it were of another one behind it. - *This* is the face he shews the world, inwardly he has another one. - But this does not mean that when his expression is *genuine* he has two the same": *Phil Inv* I §606 (p157).

<sup>22</sup> Again, cf Wittgenstein: "an intention is embedded in its situation, in human customs and institutions" *Phil Inv* op cit §337 p108. See also E Stenius, 'Mood and Language-game', *Synthese* 17 (1967) 254-274: "A linguistic utterance is not as such a symptom of any particular (mental) state of the speaker or anything preceding it - in so far as it is, it is against the background of those conventional rules of language which prevail in the linguistic community." p262.

unreliable and variable, and are prone to the vagaries of hindsight<sup>23</sup>), is irrelevant to the question of what act has actually been performed. 'Fictitious inward acts' are fictitious not because they are necessarily untrue or inaccurate as descriptions, but because they are irrelevant to the question of the identity of the act, and can only be surmised on the basis of what is already recognized as having been done<sup>24</sup>. They are thus the creation of the 'audience', based on their assessment of the action. Meaning is ascribed by the 'audience' on the basis of what they recognize as having been done; intention is ascribed by the audience to actors/actions that they recognize as having been, in outcome, different from that intended by the actor.

Indeed, as Austin himself notes, if intention is only detectable in the 'outward and visible signs' of a speech act, and provided that the act is performed properly, without sniggering or eye-rolling or whatever, there is no necessity for an 'inward and spiritual' "backstage artiste"<sup>25</sup> or for "certain officious understudies"<sup>26</sup> to be imagined. Speculation as to the hidden 'inward state' of the speaker (which 'duplicates the play') is simply, Austin implies, to imagine "fictitious inward acts"<sup>27</sup>. The limited number of "offstage performers"<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> It is, for example, possible to ask all the following of oneself: 'what do I really mean - what is my subconscious doing to my conscious - do I say I mean this, when all I am doing is trying unconsciously to impress my attractive neighbour or companion?' etcetera.

<sup>24</sup> Thus, neither Austin nor I would want to assert that it is impossible to have 'hidden intentions'. We can certainly imagine situations in which an agent has plans or motives in doing something, that are not apparent to the audience, or only to some of them, (see for example K Bach, 'Communicative Intentions, Plan Recognition, and Pragmatics: Comments on Thomason and on Litman and Allen,' in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992) p390). However, these ulterior motives which, if planned, we can think of as hidden or private intentions, prove only that Knapp and Michaels ('Against Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer 1982) 723-742 and 'Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction', *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Autumn 1987) 49-68) are wrong, and that intention is therefore distinct from meaning. Moreover, while these hidden motives are real, we must notice that they have the same existence as stories that have never been written, private fantasies, and dreams: all of these things may affect what we do and could, in principle, be identified by others, but may not be identified (even by ourselves), and unless they are publicly recognised, they do not have an actual existence (as opposed to a theoretical or imaginative existence, similar to the dictionary-meaning of words, or to Austin's locution). This is one of the problems with Austin's terms, in fact: they do not address the similarities and differences between 'to pretend' and 'to perform', and the point is that the difference may never be apparent, even to the actor, and if not apparent, it has no existence. Intention is only present if it is identified (even if only to oneself): hence Thomason is right to suggest (in 'Accommodation, Meaning, and Implicature: Interdisciplinary Foundations for Pragmatics', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)) that 'hidden intention' involves 'having a plan', even if it is very ill-defined - it is this having a plan that allows me to recognise an intention (as opposed to some kind of conscious or unconscious motive). By public recognition here, I mean that these motives are incorporated into the stories we tell about and to ourselves by virtue of which we establish and affirm meaning - see chapter 8 of this thesis.

<sup>25</sup> *How To* p10

<sup>26</sup> *How To* footnote 1 p10, already referred to.

<sup>27</sup> *How To* p10

<sup>28</sup> *How To* footnote 1 p10



## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

whom Austin admits as admissible elements of the speech act - "the lights men, the stage manager, even the prompter"<sup>29</sup> - are I suggest visible or verbal signs such as eye-rolling, blushing, gesturing, etcetera, all of which are potentially observable, and which go towards establishing that 'intention' which we can observe on the basis of what we recognize was done<sup>30</sup>. In this context, Austin's reference to 'seriousness' as a requirement<sup>31</sup> is also a reference to a phenomena that is 'outward'. Seriousness, like intention, is detected on the basis of what is said and how it was said, rather than by reference to the speaker's hidden interior feelings at the time.

Derrida is correct to accuse Austin of subsequently employing the concept of seriousness as a kind of organising and excluding principle in relation to types of speech act in context<sup>32</sup>. However, the fact that Austin does so, is not a function of the potential 'outwardness' of the concept of seriousness, but because, as Derrida alleges, Austin is ultimately unwilling to abandon the "philosophical 'ideal' - [of] the presence to self of a total context, the transparency of intentions, the presence of meaning ... to the absolutely singular uniqueness of a speech act"<sup>33</sup>.

Austin thus requires "an exhaustively definable context"<sup>34</sup>, which would be undermined by the consideration of "parasitic"<sup>35</sup> forms of discourse, and the implicit recognition of their admissibility. It is this search for a begotten existence of utterance meaning that Derrida criticises, and which leads to the undermining of Austin's initial attempt to banish the concept of 'interior', authorising intention.

---

<sup>29</sup> *How To* footnote 1 p10

<sup>30</sup> Again, the similarity with Wittgenstein is striking: "the most explicit expression of intention is by itself insufficient evidence of intention" *Phil Inv* I §641 (p165), and "Meaning is as little an experience as intending...For the contents (images for instance) which accompany and illustrate them are not the meaning or intending.

The intention *with which* one acts does not 'accompany' the action any more than the thought 'accompanies' speech. Thought and intention are neither 'articulated' nor 'non-articulated'; to be compared neither with a single note which sounds during the acting or speaking, nor with a tune." *Phil Inv* Iixi p217.

<sup>31</sup> *How To* p9

<sup>32</sup> *Limited Inc* ('Sec') p17ff

<sup>33</sup> *Limited Inc* ('Sec') p17. Searle, too, is unwilling to abandon this concept: "in serious literal speech the sentences are precisely the realizations of the intentions: there need be no *gulf* at all between the illocutionary intention and its expression. The sentences are, so to speak, fungible intentions": 'Reiterating the Differences: A reply to Derrida', *Glyph* 1 (1977) p202. My dictionary defines 'fungible' as "(often plural) moveable perishable goods of a sort that may be estimated by number or weight", derived from the Latin *fungi* - to perform (Collins English Dictionary, Complete and Unabridged, (Glasgow, HarperCollins, 2004)): I assume Searle is intending to refer to intentions as moveable or performed, rather than as perishable or as the subject of an estimate.

<sup>34</sup> *Limited Inc* ('Sec') p15

<sup>35</sup> *How To* p22 and p104

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

In Austin's initial lecture, however, it is not obvious, *pace* Derrida, that his explorations of performative speech will 'go down this route'. In fact, at the end of his first lecture<sup>36</sup>, Austin notes that, having initially excluded the category of "fictitious inward acts" such as the interior, hidden state of mind<sup>37</sup>, those things which nonetheless are "normally required to accompany an utterance such as 'I promise that ...' or 'I do (take this woman ...)'", things such as not leering at the bridesmaids or being drunk, do not in fact describe the utterance, and thus do not by their absence make it false, "but rather that [in such a case] the utterance - or rather the *act*\*, e.g. the promise - was void, or given in bad faith, or not implemented, or the like."<sup>38</sup>

Thus a performative speech act has still occurred; an act has been performed. Even a promise, which seems, as Austin suggests, to be of all performative acts the most susceptible to being merely an 'outward sign' of an 'inward state', is not false if it is performed insincerely, if by false it is meant that no promise was made:

for he *does* promise: the promise here is not even *void*, though it is given *in bad faith*. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement. At most we might make out a case for saying that it implies or insinuates a falsehood or a misstatement (to the effect that he does intend to do something): but that is a very different matter.<sup>39</sup>

Thus performative utterances can be said to be the effective performance of actions by virtue of the conventions in and through which they are effective, rather than because of the interior intentions that they reveal or describe. Performative acts themselves must be recognized based on 'outward signs' and on words uttered, not on surmises about "fictitious inward acts"<sup>40</sup>. This does not, however, necessarily imply that they are in any sense 'guaranteeable'. It is always possible that, in any specific case, the conventions do not operate, because the audience recognises something amiss. Just because an insincere promise remains a promise, it does not automatically follow that all instances of saying "I promise" are promises<sup>41</sup>.

It is thus the case that for Austin here, meaning and intention overlap but are not identical. Meaning is what we recognize as being the identity and description of the act: 'what was done'. Intention is what we identify as being the aim of the actor, distinguishable from the meaning of the act if we agree that there is an apparent discrepancy, and otherwise generally assumed to be

---

<sup>36</sup> *How To* p10

<sup>37</sup> "who would duplicate the play": *How To* 2 p10.

<sup>38</sup> *How To* p11. Austin also notes at \* (in footnote 1) that "we shall avoid distinguishing these precisely because the distinction is not in point", an observation which he further discusses subsequently, while seeking to confirm the homogeneity of utterance and act.

<sup>39</sup> *How To* p11

<sup>40</sup> *How To* p10

<sup>41</sup> As J Schleusener notes: "A promise is only a promise, after all, until it becomes absurd or unkind to say so": 'Convention and the Context of Reading', *Critical Inquiry* 6:4 (1980) 678.

identical to the meaning of the act<sup>42</sup>. Both are recognized as part of our ongoing communicatory dialogue, and neither is absolutely fixed. 'What is done' depends on what is recognized as having been done (and 'what was intended' also depends on being recognized).

However, having established that intentions are only visible in what is recognized as having been done, Austin subsequently undermines this idea in many places, such as when he discusses sincerity and the 'gamma conditions'<sup>43</sup>, or "polite phrases"<sup>44</sup>. These discrepancies are discussed in more detail in the subsequent sections, because they lie at the heart of the failure of Speech Act theory as a project: its view of intention and action is inherently inconsistent, which makes it incapable of defending the exclusive role of authorial intention in meaning on which ideas of revelation are often implicitly based.

### 3. Intention in Austin: Some discrepancies in practice.

#### 3a: The Problem of Sincerity

This particular problem occurs when Austin begins to explore the exact nature of the status of 'botched' acts. He is clear in his second lecture that various external circumstances are necessary for the 'happy' or 'felicitous' completion of an explicit performative, the concept that effectively predates the illocutionary act. These are "the existence of "an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect" (condition A.1); that "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked" (A.2); that "the procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly (B.1) and completely (B.2)" and that if the procedure is "designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then [the participant] ... must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves,\* (Γ 1)", and finally that the participants "must actually so conduct themselves subsequently" (Γ 2)<sup>45</sup>.

However, already at this stage there are a number of indications of things 'not quite right', which will later lead to a variety of difficulties. The first problem

---

<sup>42</sup> Thus I think that Austin disagrees, correctly, with Fish when he in passing suggests that "the meaning and the intention ... of the utterance" "are the same thing": 'With the Compliments of the Author', in H A Veaser (ed.), *The Stanley Fish Reader*, (Blackwell, Malden MA, 1999) p57.

<sup>43</sup> *How To* p15

<sup>44</sup> *How To* p81

<sup>45</sup> *How To* p14-15. The asterisk in the quote above indicates footnote 1, in which Austin notes that "It will be explained later why the having of these thoughts, feelings, and intentions is not included as just one among the other 'circumstances' already dealt with in (A)", and this explanation is presumably contained on pages fifteen and sixteen.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

is the extent to which the “accepted conventional procedure”<sup>46</sup> is a ‘totalizing context’ in Derrida’s phrase; the extent to which it is an objective form which has a guaranteed effect on any particular speech act. What, for example, does Austin mean by “having a certain conventional effect”<sup>47</sup>? My reading identifies ‘certain’ here as synonymous in this instance with ‘particular’. It could, however, be regarded as synonymous with ‘guaranteed’, which would give the condition a different flavour.

The question of the fixity of conventions themselves is also open to question: Austin is aware of the possibility of “getting away with things”<sup>48</sup> and thus of the fluidity of conventions and that they may sometimes be broken or amended. However, he gives the impression on occasions that the existence of conventions guarantees a result, on the assumption that there is no such fluidity.

Austin then suggests that a breach of his A and B conditions means that “the act in question ... is not successfully performed at all, does not come off, is not achieved. Whereas in the two  $\Gamma$  cases the act *is* achieved, although to achieve it in such circumstances, as when we are, say, insincere, is an abuse of the procedure.”<sup>49</sup> The breaches of the A and B conditions, where there is no successful completion of the act, are described by Austin as “MISFIRES”: the breaches of the  $\Gamma$  conditions, where the act is done ‘immorally’, are described as “ABUSES”. ‘Misfires’ result in procedures that are described by Austin as disallowed or botched; and acts that are described as “void or without effect”<sup>50</sup>, “purported” or merely ‘attempted’. ‘Abuses’ result in acts that are described as “‘professed’ or ‘hollow’ rather than purported or empty, and as not implemented, or not consummated, rather than as void or without effect”<sup>51</sup>.

Thus the A and B conditions, if broken, do not produce acts, while the  $\Gamma$  conditions do produce acts, but ones which seem to Austin to be flawed. (It is necessary to note that Austin’s description of “Misfires” is not necessarily as clear cut as this in practice, as L J Cohen suggests<sup>52</sup>.) Moreover, what Austin here calls a ‘purported’ or ‘attempted’ act could be described simply as an unintended act<sup>53</sup>.

---

<sup>46</sup> *How To* p14

<sup>47</sup> *How To* p14.

<sup>48</sup> *How To* p30

<sup>49</sup> *How To* p16

<sup>50</sup> *How To* p16

<sup>51</sup> *How To* p16

<sup>52</sup> ‘Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?’ *The Philosophical Quarterly* Volume 14 Issue 55 (April 1964) p118-137.

<sup>53</sup> See the discussion of the difference between attempt and achievement in Chapter five of this thesis.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

However, the  $\Gamma$  conditions seem to echo Austin's previous suggestion that we must 'be serious' in our utterance<sup>54</sup>. This in turn suggests that it must be the case that sincerity, just like intention or seriousness, can only be assessed on the basis of the appearance and assessment by the audience of the speaker's performance of the act, in its context<sup>55</sup>. 'Sincerity' can no more be a question of "fictitious inward acts" or conditions, than can 'intention' or 'seriousness'. Austin's description of the  $\Gamma$  conditions, therefore, contradicts his previous suggestions with regard to intention and the 'fictitious' nature of inward acts.

Whether or not Austin's condition  $\Gamma$  1 has been breached<sup>56</sup> is unlikely to be known until later (if ever). This condition can only be invoked either if the act has been performed in a manner suggesting that something is wrong, in which case the extent to which it has actually been felicitously performed will be contemporaneously debatable and debated; or if the act is later being challenged, probably as a result of hindsight. In this latter case, the act was performed successfully at the time when it was performed, just like the 'insincere' promise Austin has previously discussed.

Therefore the condition ought to be amended to read 'participants must in fact appear to have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must give the appearance of intending so to conduct themselves'. A fictitious inward act of intending to do something is not necessary<sup>57</sup>, all that is necessary is to do (or say) it: it may turn out that you were not sincere, but this cannot be asserted except on the basis of what you do.

Meanwhile  $\Gamma$  2<sup>58</sup> is rendered useless as a guide to the sincerity of the act as it was performed, rather than as it is subsequently (and contingently) to be interpreted, because hindsight is a re-interpretation or a revision of the past – like all memory it is not an absolute statement of 'how things were'. Writing about language in the essay 'Other Minds', Austin suggests that

if we have made sure it's a goldfinch, and a real goldfinch, and then in the future it does something outrageous (explodes, quotes Mrs Woolf, or what not), we don't say we were wrong to say it was a goldfinch, *we don't know what to say*. Words literally fail us: ... When I have made sure it's a real goldfinch (not stuffed, corroborated by the disinterested, &c.) then I am *not* 'predicting' in saying it's a real goldfinch, and in a very good sense I can't be proved wrong

---

<sup>54</sup> *How To* p9

<sup>55</sup> As in the previous example of a groom who spends the marriage ceremony leering at or propositioning the bridesmaids, or someone obviously too drunk to promise or assent to anything.

<sup>56</sup> Which was that if the procedure is "designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then [the participant] ... must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves": *How To* p15

<sup>57</sup> This amounts to the 'officious understudy who would duplicate the play': *How To* 2 p10 note 1

<sup>58</sup> That the participants "must actually so conduct themselves subsequently" *How To* p15

whatever happens. It seems a serious mistake to suppose that language (or most language ...) is 'predictive' in such a way that the future can always prove it wrong. What the future *can* always do, is to make us *revise our ideas* about goldfinches or real goldfinches or anything else.<sup>59</sup>

The non-predictability of language that Austin identifies here extends to our recognition of acts and to the identification of "abuses", (and is again very closely paralleled in Wittgenstein's later work<sup>60</sup>). Sincerity is an attribute that is only in question if its absence is felt, asserted or implied (in the context of dialogue and debate, the context which, as has already been noted, permeates Austin's lectures). In that event, the sincerity of an agent becomes something which is not fixed or unequivocally resolvable; it becomes something about which a judgment has to be made, which is then itself potentially open 'to appeal'<sup>61</sup>.

As Austin suggests, if to say 'I promise' is an act not a description, it is not true or false as a description of an inward state, but is itself the act of promising, or of 'making explicit' the act of promising implicit in saying 'I shall be there'. The strong parallels here with the traditional "catholic" view of the effectiveness of sacramental rituals, which also rely on observable and contextual factors for their efficacy, not on the 'inward' condition of the participants, have already been noted<sup>62</sup>. The  $\Gamma$  conditions as Austin outlines them fundamentally undermine the concept of intention he has previously expressed, because they imply a reversion to a view of 'fictitious inward acts' determining meaning. Either an act is determined by what is observed, or we need to revert to the idea of "fictitious inward acts" previously condemned.

### **Intention in Austin: Some discrepancies in practice.**

#### **3b: 'Polite Phrases.'**

This example of Austin's failure to retain a consistent view of intention is demonstrated when, having attempted to demonstrate the existence of explicit performatives, Austin observes that it can be difficult on occasion to

---

<sup>59</sup> *Philosophical Papers* op cit p88-89. See also G E M Anscombe: "Every description presupposes a context of normal procedure, but that context is not even implicitly described by the description. Exceptional circumstances could always make a difference, but they do not come into consideration without reason": 'On Brute Facts', *Analysis* 18 (1958) p71.

<sup>60</sup> "So I say "There is chair". What if I go up to it, meaning to fetch it, and it suddenly disappears from sight? - "So it wasn't a chair, but some kind of illusion". - But in a few minutes we see it again and are able to touch it and so on. - "So the chair was there after all and its disappearance was some kind of illusion". - But suppose that after a time it disappears again - or seems to disappear. What are we to say now? Have you rules ready for such cases - rules saying whether one may use the word "chair" to include this kind of thing? But do we miss them when we use the word "chair"; and are we to say that we do not really attach any meaning to this word, because we are not equipped with rules for every possible application of it?" *Phil Inv* I §80 p38.

<sup>61</sup> The metaphor of judgment is always in the background, and is discussed in more detail in chapter Five.

<sup>62</sup> In chapter one.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

distinguish even an explicit performative from a descriptive or constative<sup>63</sup>. He notes that some phrases “may even trade on this ambivalence”<sup>64</sup>, and accordingly looks for tests to clarify the connection between performatives, half-descriptives (those phrases which are ambivalent, not being performative nor just descriptive) and descriptives. In this endeavour, he encounters a number of insurmountable problems in trying to retain a distinction between performatives and “*polite phrases*”<sup>65</sup> which are “very numerous conventional expressions of feeling ... which are certainly nothing to do with performatives”<sup>66</sup>.

Austin, attempting to distinguish them on the basis of their ‘sincerity’, cannot do so simply by asking ‘how is it taken?’, since this would weaken the reliability of the explicit performative, by causing it to rely on its reception. In this case, it would be we, the ‘receivers’, who identify, from an actual performance, whether or not an act has been performed; and thus even a performative act would not in fact ‘*have to be taken*’<sup>67</sup> as a performative act: it would depend on ‘how it *was taken*’. Although the conventions might appear, to the speaker, to be in place, they might not so appear to the audience, and they would refuse to recognise the order as an order. It would not, then, be possible to know what acts had happened, until they were performed and recognised (or not). Illocutionary force would then depend on reception, and would become indistinguishable in practice from meaning pure and simple.

This would, then, eliminate the distinction Austin begins to draw as early as his third lecture between “explicit” and “implicit”<sup>68</sup> performatives, a difference based on the grounds that explicit performatives, whether opposed to the implicit performative or later to the “‘primary performative’”<sup>69</sup>, are those forms of speech which “made explicit what action it is that is being performed in issuing the utterance”<sup>70</sup>. Implicit performatives are fallible, because they do not have to be taken as the acts that they are: “The person did not *take it as a promise*: i.e. in the particular circumstance he did not accept the procedure, on the ground that the ritual was incompletely carried out by the original speaker”<sup>71</sup>. Moreover, “the point is not here just that the audience did not understand but that it did not *have to understand*, e.g. to *take it as an order*.”<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> *How To* p77

<sup>64</sup> *How To* p78

<sup>65</sup> *How To* p81

<sup>66</sup> Such as ‘I have pleasure in calling upon’ or ‘I am sorry to have to say’: *How To* p80-81

<sup>67</sup> Compare the difference between misunderstanding and the missing of performative ‘force’: “The point is not here just that the audience *did not* understand but that it did not *have to* understand, e.g. to *take it as an order*” *How To* p33.

<sup>68</sup> *How To* p32

<sup>69</sup> *How To* p69

<sup>70</sup> *How To* p69

<sup>71</sup> *How To* p33

<sup>72</sup> *How To* p33

Indeed, for Austin “such a performative formula as ‘I promise’ makes it clear how what is said is to be understood”<sup>73</sup>. He suggests that “the explicit performative must be a later development than certain more primary utterances, many of which at least are already implicit performatives”<sup>74</sup>, and he goes on to identify some of the ways in which the force of performative utterances can be implicitly conveyed.

Austin concludes his list by noting that “in a way these resources are over-rich: they lend themselves to equivocation and inadequate discrimination; and moreover, we use them for other purpose e.g. insinuation. The explicit performative rules out equivocation and keeps the performance fixed, relatively.”<sup>75</sup> The explicit performative, then, is that which has to be taken as it was meant to be taken by the speaker. However, if the unequivocal and fixed nature of the explicit performative is to be defended (so that the audience *has* to understand<sup>76</sup>), there must be some guarantee as to how it will be taken, before it is in fact taken as anything, so that the audience will know what the speaker meant, by knowing the intention that ‘underlies’ his words. And, moreover, the act must in some sense exist before it is done, and before it has been heard: it must be begotten, not created.

The difficulty is that it seems then hard in these circumstances to ascribe any other meaning to intention than the picture of it as ‘inward’ previously condemned. If the possibility of error is to be eliminated, and the audience “has” to understand, then they are understanding an act that exists in its entirety without their need to recognise it, and thus *before* they recognise it. The act here seems to exist before the words are spoken, and is thus performed first by “fictitious inward acts”<sup>77</sup>, and it is this act whose conventions render it ‘unmistakeable’. Austin is a prisoner of his presupposition that the meaning of an utterance is provided by the speaker and brought to the context: for Austin, the meaning of a sentence is ultimately ‘inward’, established by the intention of the author, and this necessarily identifies intention as internal also. Alston, Recanati, and many other theorists both post- and pre-modern are victims of the same presupposition.

Austin in fact notes that “polite phrases”<sup>78</sup> are not performative because “to be a performative utterance, even in these cases connected with feelings and

---

<sup>73</sup> *How To* p70

<sup>74</sup> *How To* p71

<sup>75</sup> *How To* p76. This qualifying ‘relatively’ is interesting: can something be ‘relatively’ guaranteed? Austin seems, here, to be undercutting his own assurance, not untypically. He does not elaborate on this notion of the relative fixity of the explicit Performative, nor give any indication of the factors that might influence this recognition of relativity.

<sup>76</sup> “The point is not here just that the audience *did not* understand but that it did not *have* to understand, e.g. to *take it as* an order” *How To* p33.

<sup>77</sup> *How To* p10

<sup>78</sup> *How To* p81



attitudes which I christen 'BEHABITIVES', is not *merely* to be a conventional expression of feeling or attitude"<sup>79</sup>. This too is a rather puzzling assertion: particularly Austin's use of the phrase "*merely* to be a conventional expression", with its suggestion that intention and convention are not the same.

Indeed, Austin here notes that he is "uncertain" about "the exact nature"<sup>80</sup> of the distinction he is attempting to draw between performatives and these "conventional expressions of feeling", and the editors of the first edition of *How To* note, following Austin's suggested examples of these 'conventional expressions', that at this point there is a "marginal note in manuscript: 'Further classification needed here: just note it in passing'"<sup>81</sup> which further underlines Austin's own uncertainty. The difficulty is obviously that there seems to be no easy way of differentiating these "polite phrases" from genuine performatives without relying on an 'inward state' concept of intention along the lines of that which Austin has previously rejected.

One might in particular ask what is so "*merely*" about 'conventional expressions of feeling or attitude', since politeness itself is a conventional performance very similar to 'making obeisance'. To regard it as 'insincere' is to fall into the trap of identifying intention as inward and, more fundamentally, of assuming a rather self-enclosed individualism; it is a perfectly proper part of normal conventional relations<sup>82</sup>. If 'conventions' are 'merely' anything, this casts some doubt on the true meaning and effectiveness of convention-based performatives, which will then have to rely on an additional "backstage artiste"<sup>83</sup> of inward intention for their effectiveness.

We can certainly ask "did he *really*?"<sup>84</sup> mean the performative sentence he uttered. However, as with sincerity and promising earlier, all we can answer is whether or not he *appeared* to mean it: the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, in what actions occur as a consequence. This does, however,

---

<sup>79</sup> *How To* p81. It should be noted that Behabitives is the name for one of the tentative classifications of illocutionary speech acts which Austin will propose in his twelfth lecture on p150.

<sup>80</sup> *How To* p80

<sup>81</sup> OUP edition edited by J O Urmson, first published 1962, reprinted 1963, edition used printed 1970 (see Bibliography) p81.

<sup>82</sup> In particular it is worthwhile noting R Finnegan's observation that "'thanking' ... is not ... to be analysed principally in terms of an inner *feeling* of gratitude, for this need not enter into the situation at all. Though the Limba are clear that thanking is a source of satisfaction to both speaker and receiver ... this is a result of the thanking rather than its cause or its essence. Rather, Limba thanking is an act of commitment: an institutionalized way of acknowledging some transaction or relationship between people": 'How to Do Things with Words: Performative Utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone', *Man, New Series* 4:4 (December 1969) p544: if this is true among the Limba, is it not also possibly true among the English?

<sup>83</sup> *How To* p10

<sup>84</sup> *How To* p84

weaken the 'guaranteeability' of meaning conveyed, and indeed would seem to make the meaning of an utterance dependent in part on its reception, unless meaning is to remain solely an 'inward' property of the utterance, known only to the speaker, and with the potential to be forever unrecognized.

Austin however does not notice this apparent discrepancy in respect of intention; indeed he goes on to attempt to distinguish "cases of *suiting the action to the word*"<sup>85</sup> from performatives. There is, however, a strong resemblance between these and saying 'Salaam' as one bows, which was previously determined by Austin to be performative not descriptive<sup>86</sup>, and which was described as a way of making "plain how the action is to be taken or understood"<sup>87</sup> just like the addition of 'I promise' to 'I shall be there'.

Thus the reason that Austin encounters a problem when it comes to some half-descriptives and 'polite phrases', is because he uses inward intention to help distinguish between what is sincere and what is insincere. 'Inward' intent has an implicit role in helping to avoid having to abandon the guarantee of explicit performatives (which will later become the convention-backed security of illocutionary 'uptake' as distinct from the free-for-all of perlocutionary effects and consequences). Austin sees it as possible and necessary to be able to distinguish between polite phrases and performative utterances on the grounds of what the speaker feels and intends, rather than simply on the grounds of what the audience recognizes. This though presupposes some things about the ease with which even speakers themselves can identify their 'inward intention'. It involves making the speaking individual responsible for the creation of meaning, rather than the hearing and receiving community within the shared conventions of which the speaker is operating<sup>88</sup>. It also totally contradicts Austin's starting position on the nature of intention.

### **Intention in Austin: Some discrepancies in practice.**

#### **3c: Conclusion**

The latter view of an intention-conveying speech act is at variance with Austin's initial view of intention. Austin's initial description of intention suggests that it is detectable only on the basis of what is seen to have been done: intention does not precede and make meaningful action, but is deduced by the hearer from the action<sup>89</sup>. The hearer or recognizer of the act thus has a partially creative role, and the speaker or initiator cannot say "my tongue

---

<sup>85</sup> *How To* p81

<sup>86</sup> *How To* p70, and see previous paragraphs

<sup>87</sup> *How To* p70

<sup>88</sup> The speaker, indeed, may be operating in this community and context without even being aware of the extent of their dependence on this cultural-linguistic community.

<sup>89</sup> And is thus, again, comparable to Wittgenstein, or at least Fergus Kerr's view of him: "Intention, for instance, is embedded in a situation, in human customs and institutions": 'Language as Hermeneutic in the Later Wittgenstein', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 27 (1965) p505.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

swore to, but my heart (or mind or other backstage artiste) did not"<sup>90</sup>, because "accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that *our word is our bond*."<sup>91</sup> The speaker is committed by what we the audience recognize as having been done.

When it comes to illocutions, however, the boot is fixed to the other foot. In Austin's view, the hearer or recognizer is compelled to recognize an illocutionary act whose nature and identity has already been fixed and established by the speaker's intention, before it is spoken: this is the basis of the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions. Austin, like Searle and Alston and many others, assumes that the meaning of an illocutionary utterance can in theory be predicted before its use in any particular context, and is provided solely by the speaker making use of predictable conventions.

There is thus a fundamental incompatibility between the view that intentions are recognized in what is done, and the view that an illocution exists irrespective of any consequences. It is only possible if the act of recognition is identified not as an act, but as an inevitable part of the initial illocution, or if the illocution is imagined as having happened once it has been spoken, irrespective of what happens thereafter, and whether anyone hears it or not. Austin and his followers tend to adopt the view that the recognition of illocutions is not a consequence of the act: this enables them to imagine that an unambiguous transmission of authorial intention is possible, irrespective of what happens thereafter.

This, of course, is precisely where the attraction of a Speech Act hermeneutics lies for some Biblical scholars: if an unambiguous transmission of authorial intention is possible, this makes it possible to depict God's Biblical revelation as a kind of illocutionary speech act, begotten not created. Alternatively, if an unambiguous transmission of authorial intention is not possible, this too will have implications for an understanding of revelation. This possibility is examined in the succeeding section, in the work of Kevin Vanhoozer.

#### **4. The Sender View of Meaning.**

##### **4a: Introduction**

All of these difficulties flowing from the inheritance of a sender view of meaning and a confused treatment of intention are visible in the work of those who use Speech Act theory as a Biblical hermeneutic. Austin's 'outward' view of intention, while often commended by his followers, is not adhered to in practice, wherever meaning is identified with the speaker alone, and as 'begotten not created'. It is the apparent ability of Speech Act theory to provide conceptual support for this idea of meaning as 'begotten' that makes

---

<sup>90</sup> *How To* p9-10.

<sup>91</sup> *How To* p10

it so attractive to its users: it enables them to buttress the idea of God as in sole authorial control of His revelation.

In this case, it is as Derrida indicates, necessary to imagine that the speaker alone establishes meaning, and brings the utterance with its meaning fully-established, to the context, to which it is presented as fully-formed. If one assumes that 'meaning' is established solely by the author, as one must if the meaning of a phrase is to be established before it is even uttered, then one is obliged to have recourse, somewhere along the line, to 'inward' intention as the basis of this 'meaning'. The only alternative, at least if one is working from an individualist assumption in respect of personality, is that 'meaning' is entirely contingent and 'up for grabs'<sup>92</sup>.

### **The Sender View of Meaning.**

#### **4b: Intention, Authorial Authority, and Meaning in the pebbles of a beach**

This outlook is evident in the work of Kevin Vanhoozer, who asks early on in *Is there a Meaning in this Text?*<sup>93</sup> (hereafter abbreviated to *Is There?*) "is there something in the text that reflects a reality independent of the reader's interpretive activity, or does the text only reflect the reality of the reader?"<sup>94</sup>. I absolutely agree that this is a serious question, but I disagree that it is an either/or question. For Vanhoozer, however, one's position on the possibility of independent hermeneutic knowledge is either hermeneutic or "hermetic"<sup>95</sup>: a result of his adopting the sender view of meaning.

Vanhoozer quotes with approval the view of Annette Barnes that texts are either "self-subsistent repositories of meaning responsible for the experience readers have of them" or are "the end-products of reading experiences, objects themselves constituted by such experiences"<sup>96</sup>. This is far too simplistic. It supposes an entirely false dichotomy<sup>97</sup> when there are intervening positions, and assumes an entirely sender-based view of reader and text<sup>98</sup>. Although Vanhoozer uses the concept of adequacy extensively, his

<sup>92</sup> What Stanley Fish refers to as "theory fear" - "the fear that [victims] ... will abandon principled enquiry and go their unconstrained way in response to the dictates of fashion, opinion, or whim": 'Consequences', in *The Stanley Fish Reader*, op cit p94.

<sup>93</sup> *Is there a meaning in this text? The Bible, the reader and the morality of literary knowledge* (Leicester, Apollos, 1998). Hereafter abbreviated to *Is There?*

<sup>94</sup> *Is There?* p15

<sup>95</sup> *Is There?* p27. His depiction of "the hermeneutical non-realist" (*Is There?* p58) as believing in interpretations not facts, and of denying the author, is simplistic and sweeping. He imagines that there is a binary opposition between belief in author/meaning and belief in interpretation/meanings that do not refer. He doesn't escape from this box: one can either believe in God or anything, it would appear: *Is There?* p59.

<sup>96</sup> *Is There?* p110

<sup>97</sup> Of the sort Derrida spent his academic career revealing.

<sup>98</sup> As Thiselton notes: "the choice between (1) a single determinate meaning based on reference and representation, and (2) a radical indeterminacy that sweeps aside reference and

idea of it presupposes communication as comprising discrete agents conveying guaranteed messages of meaning.

Intention plays a crucial role in the defence of authorial agency mounted by Vanhoozer and Ward. In discussing Ricoeur's idea of the sense of the text, Vanhoozer suggests as an example the idea of waves on a beach causing pebbles to spell out 'To be or not to be'<sup>99</sup> and notes that

the point of this example is that "the sense of the text" is logically inseparable from "the intention of the author." Unless we are able to relate a set of signs to someone who intends to convey meaning through them, we are not even able to determine whether they have sense potential. For the range of possible meanings of a word depends, minimally, on what language is being used, and when. In other words, the meaning of a word sequence depends on our ability to relate it to a historical author.<sup>100</sup>

While quite correctly identifying the recognized presence of a communicating agent as a necessity for the recognition of meaning, this nonetheless misses a crucial aspect of 'sense potential' that Vanhoozer skates over with a "we are able". It also over-identifies, perhaps even conflates, "our ability to relate it [text-meaning] to a historical author" with "the intention of the author".

I quite agree that as readers, we suppose that that which we read is an act of communication, or that it is intended to communicate<sup>101</sup>. We thus, in identifying something as a text, have already assumed the existence of an author. However, Vanhoozer's example clearly illustrates the extent to which a reader or reading community can create reading contexts, and thus create texts. If waves rather than a communicatory agent produced a pattern of pebbles spelling out 'To be ...' and someone came across them and recognized the pattern as a sentence in English, they might well ascribe textuality to it, or even recognize it as a quotation, if they knew *Hamlet*. They might indeed react in all sorts of ways, from seeing it as a supernatural message, to believing it to be a 'candid-camera-style' hoax.

The crucial point is that they would be quite likely to take something that was 'objectively' not a communication on Vanhoozer's criteria, because it was produced accidentally and with no communicatory intention, and turn it into an intentional act by receiving it as such. Thus 'we are able' as readers to

---

representation provides a contrived, artificial and misleading alternative": *Thiselton on Hermeneutics* op cit p615.

<sup>99</sup> In which he copies the suggestion and conclusions of S Knapp & W B Michaels in their seminal essay 'Against Theory', published originally in *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer 1982), who imagined an observer seeing the waves produce a Wordsworth sonnet, as a demonstration that meaning is identical to authorial intention (p728).

<sup>100</sup> *Is There?* p109

<sup>101</sup> As, for example, Louise Rosenblatt also demonstrates: *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional theory of the Literary work*, (Carbondale IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1978)

ascribe intentions to things that seem to us to be intentional, whether or not they in fact were produced by an intending agent.

In Knapp's and Michael's example, which Vanhoozer has adapted, the observer witnesses the tide creating the second stanza of a Wordsworth poem, having previously stumbled across the first. They conclude that the observer "will either be ascribing these marks to some agent capable of intentions ... or you will count them as nonintentional effects of mechanical processes" but that in the second case they would no longer be words but would be "marks"<sup>102</sup>. This is firstly quite incorrect: the words are clearly words to a speaker of English, whether produced accidentally or not – they may be words produced accidentally, but words they recognisably are<sup>103</sup>. As W C Dowling notes, that one term may entail another is not to say that they are identical:

by simply collapsing one term into the other in the way they do [meaning into intention], Knapp and Michaels in effect deprive one or the other term of any independent function. Yet in this sort of situation, one ought to bear in mind Wittgenstein's injunction that if everything behaves as though a sign has meaning, then it does have meaning. "Intention" and "meaning" behave, at any rate, as though they had independent meanings,<sup>104</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer 1982)p728.

<sup>103</sup> "They say that the marks *are* not words, sentences, poetry, language, and so forth, but merely *resemble* those things. To say this ... is quite radically to deny that the forms of language possess any defining power; it is also to deny that wherever those forms exist there is inescapably a question of interpretation, even if not an easy one ... To suppose ... that the authentic property of the sentence is conferred on it by interpretive belief, irrespective of conventional form, is to be reborn into a condition of "true belief" extreme even in these times for solipsistic intransigence. Alternatively, the supposition that forms are merely empty betrays an obliviousness of the socially constructed and consensual nature of linguistic significance": J Crewe, 'Toward Uncritical Practice', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) p756. See also A Rosmarin: "they argue that language and intention are inseparable because words, once separated from intention, are no longer really words ... Now, how do Knapp and Michaels know *this*? Well, of course, they don't": 'On the Theory of "Against Theory"', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) p781.

<sup>104</sup> W C Dowling, 'Intentionless Meaning', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 784-785. Knapp and Michaels deny collapsing the one into the other in 'Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction', *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Autumn 1987) footnote 2 p49, on the grounds that "not all intentions are intentions to mean". This does not address the problem, however, that in the case of texts, they can mean what we interpret the author as *not* having intended. Nicholas Wolterstorff also makes this point: "to aim at discerning the illocutionary act that someone performed is not to be identified with aiming to discern the illocutionary act that he or she *intended* to perform. Rather, it's to aim at discerning the one that he or she *did* perform, whether or not it was intended": 'The promise of Speech-act theory for Biblical Interpretation', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) p82. He doesn't, however, notice here that to divorce intention from meaning, while in accordance with Austin's own aims, poses its own problems for the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction. Indeed, he goes on to assert that "illocutionary acts are ... open-ended" (p89), which would seem to call into question significant elements of their distinctiveness as conventionally-based acts.

and they behave in these ways in the uses to which speaking communities put them.

Secondly, I suspect most people actually in this situation would be amazed (in Austin's phrase, they 'wouldn't know what to say'<sup>105</sup>), and their decision as a reader of English whether or not to opt for a sentient agent (and hence intention and meaning) or an accidental process (and perhaps therefore no intention only meaning) demonstrates precisely that the determination of meaning lies, at least in part, in the hands of the reader who makes this decision: it is impossible to imagine that words which held a meaning moments earlier have that meaning suddenly expunged from the observer's brain as the tide recedes<sup>106</sup>. As Hirsch notes in his comments on Knapp's and Michaels's argument, "text-authorship and meaning-authorship are not the same"<sup>107</sup>, indeed "we do not always understand by a text what we believe its author meant in composing it. The empirical claim of Knapp and Michaels seems to be false"<sup>108</sup>.

In a reverse of the situation as Vanhoozer describes it, someone might spell out in pebbles on a beach the message 'Please rescue me', which is seen by others but not recognized as a communication or even as an act, because they do not understand English, or have no concept of writing at all<sup>109</sup>. Pebbles spelling out 'To be...' are a message because we have created and receive writing. The point therefore is not that the sense of the text presupposes the text as a created entity, but that the sense of the text or of the author is itself created or received by the 'audience', and can even be created in the total absence of an author in certain circumstances.

---

<sup>105</sup> *Philosophical Papers* p88-89

<sup>106</sup> It is interesting that Knapp and Michaels seem to be victims themselves of the sender view of meaning: 'A Reply to Richard Rorty: What is Pragmatism?' *Critical Inquiry* 11:3 (March 1985): "the choice between our position and the formalist position is a choice between reading a text as the expression of *its* author's intention and reading a text as the expression of *no* author's intention. But for both Rorty and Hirsch there is ... a third possibility: reading a text as the expression of *an* author's intention": p468. This possibility, though, can be discounted because "disagreement about the meaning of a text depends not on the possibility of different kinds of intention – on the logical choice between what *its* author intended and what *an* author intends – but only on the empirical difficulty of deciding what *its* author intended. ... [Therefore] the only alternative to the intentionalism of "Against Theory" is a formalism that imagines the possibility not of two different kinds of intended meaning but of meaning that is not intended at all" – p469. The possibility that meaning is created in a 'partnership' is entirely unconsidered: a bit odd, considering their own collaboration.

<sup>107</sup> 'Against Theory?' *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) p745

<sup>108</sup> 'Against Theory?' op cit p746

<sup>109</sup> They would thus not see writing, but only a jumble of stones. We can only say, as Vanhoozer would want to assert, that this misses the intention of the writer, because we have recognized that intention (or think we have – 'please rescue me' could be a joke or an accident).

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Moreover, it is important to note that we can only say 'This is not communication' in Vanhoozer's example because, according to his description, we know that 'the message' has been created accidentally; in other words Vanhoozer has told us this, or, if we are pretending that this is real, we must have seen the waves create the message by chance. Unless we already know this, we cannot say that this is not a message; we simply have no basis for reaching this conclusion, and even if we do, as in Knapp's and Michaels's example, we then have to decide for ourselves what to say, and our decision will be decisive<sup>110</sup>. As Herbert H Clark has suggested in a conversation with Alain Trognon

the notion "what the speaker means" is replaced by "what the speaker is to be taken to mean". The change is small, but radical. The idea is that speakers and addressees try to create a joint construal of what the speaker is to be taken to mean. Such a construal represents not what the speaker means *per se* – which can change in the very process of communicating – but what the participants mutually take the speaker as meaning, what they deem the speaker to mean.<sup>111</sup>

### The Sender View of Meaning.

#### 4c: Kevin Vanhoozer on Intention, Authorial Authority, and Meaning

Vanhoozer begins his 'resurrection of the author' in *Is there a Meaning in this Text?* by asserting that "a word or text only has meaning (noun) if some person means (verb) something by it"<sup>112</sup>. This is quite inaccurate and entirely at variance with the implications of Speech Act theory, as identified in relation to the waves forming pebbles on the beach. Speech Act theory should rather be understood as implying that an utterance only has meaning if it is understood as being an utterance: if others recognize it as such. As Black, as précised by Wright argues, "the interpretation of the message performed in accordance with our learned linguistic behavior logically precedes the recognition of the intention to utter the message; therefore, understanding of that message cannot be by means of any such recognition. It is rather that the recognition comes as a result of understanding the message."<sup>113</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> This argument contains the same basic flaw as the 'Argument from Design' which suggests that the existence of God can be proved by an examination of Creation; this is only the case if as a minimum one has some idea of what God is already, and therefore some idea of what would constitute evidence of His/Her/Its work, and therefore of what a Divine Design might resemble. This is not to say that one cannot find God in His Creation, of course, merely that to do so, one must first know of God from His agents of revelation (be they any combination of the Spiritual, Sacramental, Familial, Ecclesial or Scriptural).

<sup>111</sup> Clark, quoted in A Trognon, 'Speech Acts and the logic of mutual understanding', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series* 77 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) p132.

<sup>112</sup> *Is There?* p202

<sup>113</sup> E Wright, 'Derrida, Searle, Context, Games, Riddles', *New Literary History* 13:3 (Spring 1982) p464.



That communication occurs, and that we are engaged in dialogues of communication that, in practice, entail responsibilities, I agree. That any act of communication is one-way, I absolutely dispute, as also the implication that the communicating agent is an 'individual agent'<sup>114</sup>. Vanhoozer here veers towards identifying meaning as related to or conceived in a kind of private language; however it is highly unlikely that a completely isolated person can 'mean' anything, unless they are at the least part of a recognizing and affirming cultural environment. One cannot have a private language or private meaning<sup>115</sup>.

That Vanhoozer is of necessity stuck with the concept of 'inward-intention' as the only guarantee of illocutionary meaning, is illustrated when he quotes Searle's definition of a promise as requiring that "the speaker intends his or her hearer to recognize the utterance as *counting as* a promise"<sup>116</sup>. This seeks to distinguish that which is brought to a context within the utterance like the message in a bottle, from the actual utterance spoken and received<sup>117</sup>.

It is also illustrated when Vanhoozer writes that "when confronted with apparently meaningful human behavior or intelligible signs, we cannot help but attribute intentionality" or that "intention pertains to what authors are

---

<sup>114</sup> A metaphorical entity that should, I think, be treated with great caution, and is itself highly presuppositional. As M Rosaldo notes "in focusing on the ways "intentions" are embodied in all acts of speech, speech act theorists have failed to grapple with some of the more exciting implications of their work. They think of "doing things with words" as the achievement of autonomous selves, whose deeds are not significantly constrained by the relationships and expectations that define their local world... it fails because it construes action independent of its reflexive status both as consequence and cause of human social forms": 'The Things We Do with Words: Ilongot Speech Acts and Speech Act Theory in Philosophy', *Language in Society* 11:2 (August 1982) 204.

<sup>115</sup> "It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which someone obeyed a rule. It is not possible that there should have been only one occasion on which a report was made, an order given or understood; and so on - To obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are customs (uses, institutions).

To understand a sentence means to understand a language. to understand a language means to be master of a technique." Wittgenstein: *Phil Inv* I §199 (p81). See also "hence also 'obeying a rule' is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it." Wittgenstein: *Phil Inv* I §202 (p81).

<sup>116</sup> *Is There?* p210

<sup>117</sup> In this respect I agree with Briggs who illuminates very clearly the difference between Austin and Searle concerning 'intention', quoting Austin's dismissal of a "'mental states' philosophy of mind" such as he finds in Searle, and suggesting that "understanding is less a mental state than something like an ability, or a competency" (*Words in Action* p54), the idea of competency having "proved a fruitful category in literary theory, cf Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics*" (p54 footnote 82). He also accepts Jerrold Sadock's point "that the different (illocutionary) points of a speech act are not mutually exclusive, but rather co-exist with one point usually being primary" (p58). This however still seems to assume the sentence-as-carrier-of-meaning view of utterances. It should be noted that for Searle the utterance is pre-spoken, while I assume that an utterance is that which is spoken in a specific (any) context, and thus cannot be systematic - it is the sentence in its particularity.

doing *in tending* to their words"<sup>118</sup>. More specifically, it is illustrated not by what he writes, with which I often agree, but by what he does not write, which is an acknowledgment of the activity and dynamism of our interpretation or realization, so that intention is not something obvious and self-evident, but something created by an exchange<sup>119</sup>.

Vanhoozer's too-limited concept of intention is also illustrated when in recounting the Searle-Derrida exchange, Vanhoozer supports Searle's suggestion that "my using the same words ... on one occasion to mean something different from what my friend meant on another does not evacuate my speech act (or his) of determinate meaning"<sup>120</sup>, while ignoring Derrida's point that this very iterability means that there can be no pre-utterance guarantee of meaning in any particular instance<sup>121</sup>. Meaning is determinable, not determinate. We certainly read and hear utterances as x, y or z, and assume (unless challenged) that our interpretation of the utterance is that which was 'intended' by its creator, but we have no guarantee that we are correct, nor normally do we seek for or expect such a guarantee. The 'work' in this sense is all done by the audience, not the speaker. Meaning, indeed, is not a static quality.

As is the case with the concept of 'judgment', the exact meaning of the idea of a guarantee has an importance; is a guarantee an absolute and immutable property, or does it have an element of contingency, and if so, how much? This refers, to some extent, back to the question of the extent to which Austin envisaged his theory as being complete (excluding its pre-emptive exclusions, of course), and to the uncertainty over his use of phrases such as "having a certain conventional effect"<sup>122</sup>, or "fixed, relatively"<sup>123</sup>. Moreover, the nature of communication itself, and of meaning, is greatly affected by presuppositions about who it is that is doing the communicating, and what it is to be 'I-who-acts'. The direction in which we travel depends on the places from which we start<sup>124</sup>.

---

<sup>118</sup> Vanhoozer, entry on 'Intention/Intentional Fallacy' in 'Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible', entry beginning on p327, quote from first column p329.

<sup>119</sup> This is very similar to the realisation that we are inclined to see human faces in cloud shapes, on mountains, or in the landscape of Mars, where there are none. This inclination does not mean that there are no real faces, but simply that we may need to check our assumptions when we 'recognize' a face.

<sup>120</sup> *Is There?* p212

<sup>121</sup> Both Derrida and Searle, I think, are guilty of falling into the trap Cameron identifies, using his own idiosyncratic description of acts: "It is above all in the case of speech acts that we tend to become hypnotized by the material tokens [in the case of speech, the words], and pay but scant attention to behaviour-tokens [what is done]": J R Cameron, 'Sentence-Meaning and Speech Acts'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) p109.

<sup>122</sup> *How To* p14

<sup>123</sup> *How To* p76.

<sup>124</sup> It is worth noting too that mistakes are as much instances of the speaker's failure to recognize how his words would be taken, as of the hearer's failure, in the context of an immediate activity like speaking – as, for example, when speakers cause offence.

### The Sender View of Meaning.

#### 4d: Intention, Action and Consequences: Illocutions, Perlocutions, and Arson

In *Is There?* Vanhoozer records that the legal view of someone who set fire to a rival's house, thereby unintentionally killing some of the occupants, was that she was guilty of murder "because the court ruled that an agent's intention includes what is a likely or highly probable consequence of an action"<sup>125</sup>. Thus even though the arsonist (a Mrs Hyam) "insisted that she did not *intend* to injure or kill"<sup>126</sup>, the Court found her guilty of murder (rather than accidental manslaughter), confirming that in this instance the agent was regarded as being responsible for, and as having intended, the consequences of their act, assuming that they were 'reasonably foreseeable'<sup>127</sup> to the agent themselves.

According to Vanhoozer, the Court decided that the arsonist was a murderer, even though she did not 'intend' to murder, because she did foresee the likely consequences of her action. She committed not arson, or merely arson, but also murder, rather than manslaughter; not because murder was her intent, but because she recognized that her act was likely to have certain consequences, and thus might entail death, and went ahead anyway, allowing the Court to ascribe 'murderousness' to her<sup>128</sup>. The Court recognized her act as murder, despite her protestations to the contrary, because of their opinion as to what she had in fact foreseen as to its likely consequences.

The judgment of the Court was thus based on its assessment of the actions of Mrs Hyam, and on the way in which her particular actions could be reasonably interpreted<sup>129</sup>. The Court decided, based on what she did, that Mrs Hyam was well aware of the possible risk of death to which she was exposing the people in the house, and that therefore whether or not she intended actually to kill anyone, she was guilty of murder. To be guilty of murder, it was not necessary that Mrs Hyam intended to take life, but merely that she was aware of the possible consequences of what she did. Her 'intention',

---

<sup>125</sup> *Is There?* p255

<sup>126</sup> *Is There?* footnote 252 p278

<sup>127</sup> Compare this with L J Cohen's suggestion that "for a speaker's utterance to be a warning in the happy-or-unhappy sense what is required is that it should be *of a kind that he could reasonably expect* to secure uptake": 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) p129, which criteria must presuppose 'how it is received'.

<sup>128</sup> It is relevant to note that according to Lord Hailsham, Mrs Hyam made sure that her ex-lover was not in the house before setting it alight, and having begun the blaze in the middle of the night, made no attempt to alert anyone, but went home to bed: these facts were taken by the jury in the Crown Court as constituting evidence that she was well aware of the possible consequences of her actions, and did not attempt to mitigate them in any way.

<sup>129</sup> It is important to remember that this is a decision based on what the Court, or other audience, thinks is reasonably likely, and is not itself guaranteed; it may be overturned on appeal, or subject to extensive criticism in the press – see the subsequent discussion about Jennifer Hornsby's example of 'uptake' in chapter Five.

therefore, is not simply her own aim or motive, but also that which she had foreseen as a risk and did nothing to prevent.

In fact, Vanhoozer somewhat oversimplifies the situation of this case, heard in the House of Lords (as it then was) as *Hyam and Director of Public Prosecutions*<sup>130</sup>, on appeal (by the defendant Mrs Hyam) from *Regina v Hyam*. The brief digest at the beginning of the report notes that it was held, when dismissing the appeal, “that a person who, without intending to endanger life, did an act knowing that it was probable that grievous, in the sense of serious, bodily harm would result was guilty of murder if death resulted”<sup>131</sup>. However, two of the five law Lords (Diplock and Kilbrandon) dissented from this judgement, and as it notes tersely in the report “their Lordships took time for consideration”<sup>132</sup>.

It is also worthwhile noting that Lord Hailsham, while dismissing the appeal, notes that “I do not ... consider, as was suggested in argument, that the fact that a state of affairs is correctly foreseen as a highly probable consequence of what is done is the same thing as the fact that the state of affairs is intended.”<sup>133</sup> However, he goes on to ask

but what are we to say of the state of mind of a defendant who knows that a proposed course of conduct exposes a third party to a serious risk of death or grievous bodily harm, without actually intending those consequences, but nevertheless and without lawful excuse deliberately pursues that course of conduct regardless whether the consequences to his potential victim take place or not? In that case, if my analysis be correct, there is not merely actual foresight of the probable consequences, but actual intention to expose his victim to the risk of those consequences whether they in fact occur or not,<sup>134</sup>

a willingness which allows the description murder, not manslaughter. This opinion, as I have said, was contested by a minority of the Court, but one of the things on which all were agreed was that the proper test was a subjective, not an objective test: in other words, that it was necessary to establish what Mrs Hyam had foreseen, not what a ‘normal person’ would have regarded as being foreseeable<sup>135</sup>.

Vanhoozer however follows his description of this case by suggesting an intention-based distinction between “results (illocutions)” and “foreseen or desired consequences (perlocutions)” which is quite at variance with the view

---

<sup>130</sup> [1975] A.C. 55.

<sup>131</sup> [1975] A.C. p55 paragraph F

<sup>132</sup> [1975] A.C. p64 H: in fact, the case was heard on January 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, and judgement given on March 21<sup>st</sup>, with all five Law Lords responding, although Lord Hailsham in the majority gave much the longest judgement.

<sup>133</sup> [1975] A.C. p 75 B.

<sup>134</sup> [1975] A.C. p 77 D-F

<sup>135</sup> See for example [1975] A.C. p 95 E-G.

of 'foreseen' consequences defining an act that is required by the very example he cites. Vanhoozer suggests that

for legal and for literary reasons, I believe that it is important to distinguish between intended results (illocutions), foreseen or desired consequences (perlocutions), and consequences neither intended nor foreseen (accidents). It is true that authors often hope to achieve something by their communicative acts over and above understanding. However, as we noted earlier, authors are not in control of these further, perlocutionary, effects. Moreover, the consequences of communicative actions are often unforeseen. The author's communicative act is never the sole causal factor in bringing about a perlocutionary effect. Only the illocutionary, therefore, refers to something intrinsic to the action.<sup>136</sup>

There are a number of problems with this view, aside from the questions of foreseeability and intention discussed in the previous paragraph.

Firstly, how can an intended result be achieved irrespective of the reader's context, which will affect their ability to 'see' what the author is saying?<sup>137</sup> Secondly, we can surely only tell whether or not a result was 'intended' by *recognizing* and assessing, *from our own standpoint*, the action and the actor. The conventions that make illocutions effective are not universal or acontextual, as so often seems to be assumed: a lot will depend on the specific context of the case: "when people say that a man must be taken to intend the natural consequences of his acts, they fall into error: there is no 'must' about it; it is only 'may'"<sup>138</sup>.

Thirdly, it was the foreseen perlocutionary consequences of the arson attack that 'made' the arson attack a murder as well as arson, not simply arson or manslaughter. In this instance, therefore, the 'perlocutionary' effect was absolutely 'intrinsic to the action'; to the act's being identified as, and thus being, the act that it was. The death of some of the occupants of the house was not "desired" by Mrs Hyam, but it was, based on what she did, apparently foreseen by her; and because it was the Court's opinion that she had foreseen this risk, this foreseen (and indeed foreseeable) consequence determined what act was committed.

Mrs Hyam's illocutionary act (if such it can be called) was arson with intent to frighten. Her perlocutionary act was murder, but it was this 'perlocutionary element' that defines the entirety of what she did. She did not, apparently,

---

<sup>136</sup> *Is There?* p255.

<sup>137</sup> "the search for the purely linguistic or the irreducibly logical, apart from a particular context, seems doomed to failure": Smith and McClendon, 'Religious language after J L Austin', *Religious Studies* 8:1 (1972) p57, or E Weigand: "There is ... no individual speech act which stands alone and is autonomous. Language use cannot be described from the speaker's perspective alone. The assumption that all speaker contributions are directed at someone, only demonstrates the deficiency of the monologic point of view": E Weigand, 'The Dialogic Principle Revisited', *Dialoganalyse* III:1 (1991) p89.

<sup>138</sup> Lord Denning, in *Hosegood v Hosegood* (1950) 66 TLR (Pt 1) 735, quoted by Lord Hailsham [1975] A.C. p74 H-p 75 A

have murder as her aim, but was guilty of it nonetheless: and indeed, the very existence of both “murder” and “manslaughter” are contextual, and decided upon by third parties: we do not allow the agent to determine which act occurred.

It is also noteworthy that Vanhoozer’s suggestion that perlocutions are “foreseen or desired consequences” is at variance with Austin’s own definition of perlocutions as being essentially unpredictable by contrast with the predictability of conventional illocutions<sup>139</sup>. Vanhoozer’s statement that the author’s intended result is ‘understanding’ and is illocutionary is also problematic. The assertion assumes rather a lot about what ‘understanding’ is, and its uniformity as a response to texts.

It also, of course, requires that the author must be able to predict what his audience will recognize as the meaning, and be able to guarantee this goal, since illocutions are predictable. On Austin’s definition, an illocution must be determinable by a neutral third party (a judge), which is possible only on the basis of unvarying or absolute conventions, and excepting “infelicities” and all the other ‘ills that acts are heir to’. However, these can never be entirely outflanked, and the further divorced are reader and author, the harder this gets, even assuming ‘good will’<sup>140</sup>.

### **The Sender View of Meaning.**

#### **4e: The Assessment of Intention: the work of R A Duff and R Gibbs**

Vanhoozer’s own example of the arsonist is taken from R A Duff’s legal textbook *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability: Philosophy of Action and the Criminal Law*<sup>141</sup>. Interestingly, Vanhoozer’s approach to the nature of intention, while sharing some surface similarities with those of Duff, travels in a very different direction, and sits in a rather different context. *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* is on the one hand a description of the varying, and occasionally somewhat contradictory, approaches to intention made by the English courts (with a few excursions into Scotland). It is also, however, a prescriptive work of judicial philosophy, arguing that the ‘inward states’ or ‘Cartesian’ image of intention generally adopted by the judiciary (and in common parlance even among philosophers) is incorrect. It also argues that intention itself is a two-pronged concept, and it advances arguments about the direction English law should take based on these contentions.

---

<sup>139</sup> “Any, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off ... by the issuing ... of any utterance whatsoever”: *How To* p109. “Illocutionary acts are conventional acts: perlocutionary acts are *not* conventional”: *How To* p120. “A judge should be able to decide ... what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved”: *How To* p121.

<sup>140</sup> It should also be noted that, as in *Hyam*, Judges do not always agree: this is also the situation in the *Plessy* case discussed in chapter six.

<sup>141</sup> R A Duff: *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability*, Blackwell 1990

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Duff argues that there are no “distinct and hidden mental states”<sup>142</sup> and that a person’s intention does not refer to an ‘inward state’ which can at best only be ‘second-guessed’ on the basis of what they did, but instead is entirely describable on the basis of what is seen to be done. This argument is not only entirely in tune with Austin’s own initial arguments, but is also an argument with which both Vanhoozer and I would agree. However, Duff also suggests that there are in fact two aspects to the concept of intention.

Interestingly, in the light of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to be discussed later, Duff suggests that “to hold someone responsible for an effect, to portray it as the result of her intentional action, is to hold her *answerable* for it; she may be asked to explain or to justify her action as thus described”<sup>143</sup> and that “the concept of intention does extend beyond the paradigm of intended agency: it includes, as being brought about intentionally, effects which the agent does not act with the intention of bringing about, but which are properly ascribed to her as their responsible agent.”<sup>144</sup>

He thus distinguishes that which the agent intends – which he defines as those things forming part of an agent’s own reason for acting – from that which we may say that the agent brings about intentionally, which “depends not on whether she [the agent] thinks it is relevant to her action, but on whether *we* think it is something to which she should attend as a reason against [or presumably for] acting thus; and we may disagree with her about

---

<sup>142</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p127

<sup>143</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p78. (For Bakhtin’s idea of answerability see chapter seven of this thesis)

<sup>144</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p79. In this he echoes Lord Hailsham in the Hyam case. M E Bratman, in ‘What is Intention?’ in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992), discusses the dilemma encountered by a Strategic Bomber, and initially suggests that “there is no room here for a distinction between intended and merely expected upshots” (p25), a conclusion he subsequently seeks to avoid by suggesting that intention is distinct from choice. Duff’s solution, creating a distinction between the intended and the intentional, is essentially the same distinction (indeed, J F Allen describes Bratman as establishing a difference between “doing something intentionally and intending to do something. The former case might be paraphrased as deliberately doing an action” p71) although Bratman and Duff approach the question almost ‘from opposite sides’: Duff is considering the question of the responsibility that ‘we’ will attribute to the agent in a legal setting, while Bratman considers only the view of their actions that the agent could offer as an excuse. If Strategic Bomber were to be prosecuted, it seems likely that he would be held responsible for deaths he did not choose but recognised were likely to arise: this, though, is a question of morality and culpability, as Duff would recognise (and it would, one assumes, and leaving aside questions of jurisdiction, be a question of factors such as ‘did Strategic Bomber seek to mitigate the loss’, ‘was the benefit sufficient defence’ etc.) In the following article, Cohen and Lévesque follow Bratman: “we will develop a theory in which expected side effects are *chosen* but not intended”: p37. See P R Cohen and H J Levesque, ‘Persistence, Intention, and Commitment’, and J F Allen, ‘Two views of Intention: Comments on Bratman and on Cohen and Levesque’, in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992).

this”<sup>145</sup>. That which the agent brings about intentionally, is thus that which we regard as having been intended, although the agent themselves may dispute this<sup>146</sup>.

It is important to note that both in respect of those things that are ‘intended’ and those that occur ‘intentionally’, the circumstances in which they are identified are assumed by Duff to be subsequent and dialogic. That which was ‘intended’ can be identified because it comprises the reasons that an actor would give if they were asked to explain or justify their action, but an act so described is not thereby rendered completely explicit; there may be ‘reasons’ hidden from even the actor (in the ‘subconscious’)<sup>147</sup>, and the reasons given will need to be accepted as plausible by the audience before they define the act performed<sup>148</sup>.

This is even more the case for that which is ‘intentional’: the category is explicitly dialogic, as Duff notes; “our description of her action as an intentional killing, however, depends not just on the *fact* that death ensues, but on our *judgement* that she is fully responsible for that effect. She might dispute that description ... and our grounds for rejecting ... [her] claim are moral, not purely factual.”<sup>149</sup>

This explicitly introduces the moral element which also operates, unrecognized, in the work of Jennifer Hornsby discussed subsequently<sup>150</sup>. The occurrence here of the concept of judgement is also highly significant; as Duff observes, “ascriptions of intentional agency do not describe neutral facts: they express normative judgements of responsibility, in which we may disagree”<sup>151</sup>, and given that even the intended elements of acts (since any act

---

<sup>145</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p84

<sup>146</sup> As Thomason puts it: “Plans are wholes constituted of intentions, and we recognize intentions by fitting them into recognized plans. ... *Any* good account of speaker meaning ... should connect acts of meaning to planning and plan recognition” R H Thomason, ‘Accommodation, Meaning, and Implicature: Interdisciplinary Foundations for Pragmatics’, in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992) p342.

<sup>147</sup> The ‘real’ reasons may be an inseparable mixture of emotions and memories etc, and may be acknowledged or may not, in later years – the timing of the challenge is important.

<sup>148</sup> As Tsohatzidis puts it: “Searle’s linguistic arguments for the existence of these necessary connections [between mental states and illocutions] all fail, and ... the assumption of a merely *default* connection between types of speech acts and types of mental states – that is, of a connection that licenses the interpretation of such an act as an expression of such a state as long as there are no indications to the contrary – suffices for explaining all the linguistic facts that Searle was interested in explaining, as well as many facts that he fails to explain”: ‘The gap between speech acts and mental states’, in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994) p232.

<sup>149</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p81-82. Although of course, moral beliefs are facts as well, not a different category of thing.

<sup>150</sup> In chapter Five

<sup>151</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p84



has both intended and intentional elements to it) are part of this debate, it is clear that

to discern an agent's intentions is to grasp the relation between her action and its context (including what else she does); what she will count as success or failure in what she does; and the truth of a range of hypotheticals about what she would do if ...; and we may be uncertain or mistaken about her intentions in so far as we are ignorant of or mistaken about any of these matters.<sup>152</sup>

However, if we are mistaken about her intentions this is not because we are ignorant of what has been going on in "a mental realm which is, in principle, hidden from us" but because

we are mistaken or deceived about the meaning of her actions; and that meaning is, in principle, discernible in the larger pattern of her actions and her responses ... in trying to understand a person's actions ..., I am trying to see what they mean; to discern the pattern of which they are a part, their relation to their context, and the direction in which they are moving.<sup>153</sup>

This process of discernment is, to re-iterate, a dialogic one, in which the identification of what was intended, and of what is described as intentional, is through a collective negotiation between the actor and their audience, on the basis of their relationship in a culture that already exists and makes the recognition of meaning achievable<sup>154</sup>. The meaning of the act undertaken in context consists in an appreciation, perhaps through negotiation, of what the actor intended (which cannot just be asserted, but which must be accepted as plausible or reasonable, and which may of course be incorrect or self-deluding) and of the additional intentional consequences which we the audience agree or believe are inherent in the act. However, as Duff notes several times, this is not a guaranteed process – disagreement may be inescapable<sup>155</sup>.

---

<sup>152</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p131

<sup>153</sup> *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* p132. Compare also Gibbs's suggestion (see succeeding paragraph) that "understanding [of meaning] is not simply a private mental act, however, but a social achievement taking place in the public domain" *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* op cit p327.

<sup>154</sup> Thus I agree with M Hesse that "the aim of hermeneutics must be to discover an author's prior beliefs in order to give probabilities to hypotheses about his intentions" M Hesse, 'Texts without Types and Lumps without Laws', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 42, (although understanding is not necessarily this 'tortuous'). This is what Thomason means, I think, by "the mutuality of the conversational record": Thomason, 'Accommodation, Meaning, and Implicature: Interdisciplinary Foundations for Pragmatics', op cit footnote 24 p345, expanded on p361.

<sup>155</sup> Cf J Culler: "intention is perhaps best thought of as a product. ... Intentions are not a delimited content but open sets of discursive possibilities – what one will say in response to questions about an act": J Culler, 'Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 28. Knapp and Michael demonstrate the fundamental inadequacies of their own position on intention ('Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction', *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Autumn 1987)) when they note that "the reason a speaker who pretends is nevertheless taken seriously is not that his intentions don't matter but simply

This view has some interesting similarities to the proposal made by Raymond Gibbs<sup>156</sup>. Gibbs suggests that while the absence of author-authority in writing is greater than in speech<sup>157</sup>, nonetheless this is clouded by the necessity that the realization of an act as communicatory by the hearers or readers, involves the realization of it as 'intended', and thus there is an assumption of presence in reading a text<sup>158</sup>. He proposes the idea of "hypothetical intentionalism":

The most common way of understanding written language and artworks is in terms of hypothetical intentions. Hypothetical intentionalism holds that people find language and artworks meaningful without necessarily knowing the actual beliefs and intentions of the person(s) creating the artifact. Readers and spectators form meaningful interpretations of what is written or created by reconstructing an idealized version of what someone has said, written, or created, given the artifact ... and an understanding of the conditions under which the artifact was created.

Whether language and art are understood by recovering a person's subjective intentions, or by forming hypothetical intentions ... depends on a large variety of factors. The most important of these is the extent to which sufficient common ground exists to allow speakers and listeners, authors and readers, artists and observers to infer agents' actual intentions ...

People infer loose implications of utterances, texts and artworks not always because their authors explicitly intended such meanings to be understood ... Many aspects of poetic and literary language, as well as of artworks, are best understood in terms of the communication of weak implicatures, which are

---

that he is held to have had the intention that in these circumstances ordinarily goes with these sounds" (p63), that "the choice between the alternatives [in deciding what act was performed] is a purely social one and has nothing to do with the relation between meaning and intention" and that "in both cases, the speech act the speaker will be held to have performed will be determined by the intention he will be held to have had" (p64), without at any point noticing that this makes intention a socially-determined phenomenon – my underlining throughout.

<sup>156</sup> R Gibbs Jr, *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* (Cambridge, Cambridge University press, 1999)

<sup>157</sup> Or perhaps some forms of it, since Gibbs seeks to erode the binary distinction between writing and speech as genres, in a way I support: he suggests that "rather than drawing a rigid distinction between spoken and written language, it makes better sense to differentiate between four kinds of discourse: unplanned spoken, unplanned written, planned spoken, and planned written. In any culture, spoken and written language crossfertilize each other so the particular features which distinguish each are constantly changing": *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* p180-181

<sup>158</sup> He notes that "the common ground that accumulates between author and reader constrains people's understanding of an author's text. None of this dictates that readers *must* know something about the author's actual mental state or attitudes at the time a written text was composed. Instead, readers knowing something about an author, and their assumption that the author believes people bring this information into the act of reading, influences how readers interpret what is written" *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* p186, and that "a sense of the author, real and implied, permits the reader to analyze how a text is exerting its influence" *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* p187. See also Louise Rosenblatt's description of 'transactional' meaning described in chapter seven.

meanings not explicitly represented in the minds of speakers, writers, and artists.<sup>159</sup>

Thus, for Gibbs “interpretation is a collaborative, coordinated activity where all participants have a role in determining the intentional meaning of what is said, written or artistically created.”<sup>160</sup> He suggests that “in general, writing and reading are social events involving transactions similar to those that occur in the context of negotiations between people during conversation. Texts are part of an ongoing conversation within a discourse community.”<sup>161</sup> Meaning is ascribed on this basis.

Moreover, the concept of meaning itself is not unchanging throughout all the genres of communication; there are generic differences in our understanding of the concept of meaning. There are, for example, as many different sorts of reading, as there are different genres of communication: different readings are considered culturally appropriate or required in different genres<sup>162</sup>. Gibbs hints at this when he posits as a hypothesis that “assumptions about intentionality differ depending on the human artifacts under consideration. Thus, people draw different inferences about communicative intentions when interacting with nonverbal actions, spoken language, written language, literary texts, legal texts, and different forms of artwork”.<sup>163</sup>

However, this dialogic and ‘negotiated’ view of intention is entirely incompatible with the idea of an illocution, and thus with Vanhoozer’s own thrust in *Is There?* He remains committed to a sender view of meaning and to a non-responsive, non-consequential illocution. This same problem affects the work of Timothy Ward.

### **The Sender View of Meaning.**

#### **4f: Intention in the work of Timothy Ward**

Ward notes in his book *Word and Supplement* that in respect of perlocutionary effects, Searle “concludes that the act of promising has no *essential* tie to the

---

<sup>159</sup> *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* p328-9. “Implicature” here echoes the work of H P Grice, who suggested that “implicature” was one of the fundamentals of conversation – see for example ‘Logic and Conversation’ p32ff, in *Studies in the Way of Words* op cit. There is also an echo here of A Nehamas’s suggestion that “the author ... is a plausible historical variant of the writer [the actual human who lived, died and wrote], a character the writer could have been ... Writers enter a system with a life of its own; many of its features elude their most unconscious grasp ... But the author, produced jointly by writer and text, by work and critic, is not a person; it is a character who is everything the text shows it to be and who in turn determines what the text shows.” A Nehamas, ‘What an Author Is’, *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986) 689.

<sup>160</sup> *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* p331

<sup>161</sup> *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* p197

<sup>162</sup> As Louise Rosenblatt points out with her distinction between aesthetic and efferent reading; see chapter seven of this thesis.

<sup>163</sup> *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* p333

bringing about of an effect on the hearer"<sup>164</sup>, a conclusion with which he agrees, citing the example of a promise made to someone in a language they do not, contrary to the promisor's assumption, understand. He concludes;

I have thus neither secured the uptake nor brought about the illocutionary effect of my illocutionary act. This failure, though, does not mean that I did not make the promise, and that therefore there is no promise that I am bound to keep. I simply did make the promise; any person within earshot who did understand my language and knew of my mistake would likely assume so. Again: what if I shouted my promise to someone across some distance, but they never heard my words clearly enough to comprehend them as a promise, because they were carried away by the wind? That mishap would not normally absolve me of the responsibilities associated with the making of a promise.<sup>165</sup>

Ward also criticises Fish's views on textual meaning. He puts Fish's argument into speech act terms and suggests that "Fish's point becomes equivalent to a claim that only if 'uptake' is successfully brought about can the illocutionary act be said to exist. That is, an utterance only counts as the performance of a particular illocutionary act if someone recognizes it as such".<sup>166</sup> Ward's reply to this argument is that "it is a quite counter-intuitive claim: speakers and writers do not regard the very existence of their illocutionary acts as dependent on others coming to understand their meaning and force – their effectiveness, yes; but not their existence"<sup>167</sup>.

In this respect he is entirely wrong, at least if one is to take seriously Austin's description of speech acts<sup>168</sup>. Austin certainly explicitly contradicts this view: he notes that

it is obviously necessary that to have promised I must normally (A) have been *heard* by someone, perhaps the promisee; (B) have been understood by him as promising. If one or other of these conditions is not satisfied, doubts arise as to

---

<sup>164</sup> *Word and Supplement* p83

<sup>165</sup> *Word and Supplement* p83.

<sup>166</sup> *Word and Supplement* p186. It is interesting to compare Ward's certainty with the equal and opposite certainty of J Narveson: "it is plainly essential, at a minimum, that the promise be understood to *agree* to the promise. No amount of verbal ritual on the part of the promiser, acting by himself, will create the needed obligation" – a view he thinks Searle accepts: J Narveson, 'The Agreement to Keep Our Agreements', *Philosophical Papers* 23:2 (1994) 81. Narveson also points out, quite rightly, that a third thing is also necessary: "the Consent of the Community", because "the existence of a moral obligation ... involves the whole relevant community" (p83): this, I think, is what Austin implies by suggesting that "it might be held ..." – see *How To* p22.

<sup>167</sup> *Word and Supplement* p186

<sup>168</sup> The various circumstances necessary for the completion of an explicit performative include the following: "there must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect" (condition A.1); that "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked" (A.2); and that "the procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly (B.1) and completely (B.2)": *How To* p15 – my underlining. He also later notes "an effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out": *How To* p115-116

whether I have really promised, and it might be held that my act was only attempted or was void.<sup>169</sup>

Noteworthy here are again Austin's use of the qualifying "might", the sense of dialogic participation to establish whether or not the promise was made, and the use of metaphors of judgment; "it might be held that".

Ward has concentrated solely on "the doctrine of the *Infelicities*"<sup>170</sup> and missed Austin's recognition that "as actions, [performatives] ... will be subject to certain whole dimensions of unsatisfactoriness to which all actions are subject but which are distinct – or distinguishable – from what we have chosen to discuss as infelicities"<sup>171</sup>. Ward has overlooked the fact that a promise is, whether an illocutionary act or anything else, at bottom an act<sup>172</sup>. He instead here reverts to an interior view of intention, imagining "fictitious inward acts"<sup>173</sup> rather than real ones requiring understanding<sup>174</sup>.

It is in truth quite hard to imagine satisfactorily the situation Ward describes, without asking questions about the response of the overhearer, and what the promisee might do if they were subsequently told of the promisor's 'promise'. Indeed, in what circumstances might a conversation end with a promise unheard, but without clarificatory follow-up by either party, follow-up which is at least a case of 'making-plain how the act was to be taken' and, probably also necessary to establish that an act had occurred at all?

Even Ward's description assumes the existence of four separate and crucial audiences: the overhearer; the promisee (person receiving the promise); Ward's own 'inner voice' – 'himself-to-himself' – which operates in part as an imagined audience (perhaps God alone) acting as conscience and judge; and finally 'we readers' ourselves, for whom this episode is imagined and described. I wonder too about how one would recognize the existence of an illocutionary act without recognizing its meaning.<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>169</sup> *How To* p22

<sup>170</sup> *How To* p14

<sup>171</sup> *How To* p21

<sup>172</sup> And as, for example, Smith and McClendon note, "it does seem correct to say that the existence of hearers and a common language is a necessary condition for there being any speech acts at all": 'Religious language after J L Austin', *Religious Studies* 8:1 (March 1972), p 57.

<sup>173</sup> *How To* p10

<sup>174</sup> Ward also appears to assume that an obligation can be created on a promiser irrespective of whether or not the promisee (person receiving the promise) wants the thing promised: see Narveson again "we could say that promising creates a presumption of obligation: but this presumption is negated if the promisee makes it clear that he wants no part of what is promised" 'The Agreement to Keep Our Agreements', op cit p81. I think it is not in fact clear whether a promise to do something the promisee does not want is a promise or not: I don't think it is possible to determine this in advance – it depends on circumstances. As Austin would say, it is an "unhappy" situation.

<sup>175</sup> Such is certainly part of Cohen's argument against the existence of illocutionary force ('Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?' op cit), and in this example, as in Vanhoozer's example of the

If I make a promise to someone, in a language they do not understand, my act of promising has not been felicitously achieved. If, as Ward suggests, others nearby have heard, and care about the felicitous performance of my act, they are likely to translate. If it is in their interest that my act should not be successful, they will keep quiet, or indeed mistranslate. The existence of an act presupposes its recognition and thus that it means, and what it means; an act cannot be said to exist or to have existed unless it is seen or inferred on the basis of other recognized acts.

Moreover, because in Ward's example, he imagines the presence of others who have recognized the act, this crucially complicates the question of its felicity. It creates a situation in which some have recognized the act and others have not. The act is still, however, not effective without a response of recognition<sup>176</sup>; in the case Ward suggests, we have a confusing situation in which a promise might seem to have been made, but might not have been.

There is no guarantee either way, and if one imagines the object of the promise being told later about Ward's words carried away on the wind, he would probably be in some doubt about whether the promise now stood. He would have then to consider factors such as his knowledge of Ward and his likely behaviour, and might decide to speak to him again to get clarification. He would certainly be implicitly considering what it would be "reasonable" to assume, in the particular circumstances of his case. In Austin's words, "doubts arise as to whether I have really promised, and it might be held that my act was only attempted or was void"<sup>177</sup>.

## 5. Conclusion

Austin sets out in the first of his lectures that became *How To*, a view of intention that seeks to ignore 'officious understudies' and other unnecessary 'backstage artistes'. He sets out, albeit obliquely, a view of intention that sees it as being recognised solely in what was recognised as having been done. This view is that to which all of those who use Speech Act theory as a Biblical hermeneutic ascribe, and is very similar to the view argued for by Raymond Gibbs and R A Duff. On this view, an agent cannot disclaim an act on the grounds that he did it, but didn't, in his heart of hearts, really mean it at the time.

---

waves and pebbles previously discussed, someone must have recognised this as a promise, or as an intended promise, otherwise there is no problem: a promise cannot exist if *no-one* has heard it.

<sup>176</sup> Substituting 'Warning' for 'Promising' would further indicate the infelicity of Ward's view. Ward has confused the two senses in which some verbs can be used that Cohen identifies, the "happy" and the "happy-or-unhappy", and has ignored the requirement for "happy-or-unhappy" usage, which is that the speaker could "reasonably expect" it to be understood: see 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) pp118-137, op cit.

<sup>177</sup> *How To* p22

However, in the course of his own lectures, Austin himself departs from this view of intention, in his efforts to distinguish between some acts whose meaning is guaranteed by convention, and all the rest, which are not guaranteed in the same way, and for which there is always the possibility of non-recognition. Austin's stated view of intention, and his description of the uniqueness of the explicit performative or illocution, are in the end incompatible. If there are acts whose performance is not dependent on their understanding and recognition by the audience, but which are begotten not created, these must in some sense exist independently of their recognition, in some 'backstage realm'. If the audience is not ever capable of ignoring or deconstructing an explicit performative, then this sort of act has an element of 'pre-existence' about it: it exists before it is spoken in some 'inward realm' of the speaker, of the sort Austin has initially derided.

This fundamental incompatibility is carried over into the works of Searle, Briggs, Ward, Vanhoozer, Alston, Recanati, and probably every Speech Act theorist. They all defend and utilise the illocutionary speech act, because they all subscribe, implicitly, to a view of meaning which ignores the implications for meaning of the importance of the audience/readership, and ignores the audience's active role in meaning creation. This 'sender' view of meaning starts from the standpoint of a single, 'isolated', self or agent. Communication begins with 'me', the speaker or agent, and is the process whereby I move 'outwards' to another<sup>178</sup>.

This means that if the author's intention is not identical to meaning, and if what I say is not correctly recognized, then meaning collapses. Either meaning is the possession of the author and is made a property of the utterance by the author, or meaning is the property of each individual reader and thus collapses into chaos. If there are no guaranteed speech acts, then there can be no guaranteed transmission of meaning in any circumstances.

This assumption is, however, based on a false assumption of identity and communication, which ignores the learning, mobile, changing element of identity and meaning. Moreover, it conflicts with some of the implications of Speech Act theory itself, especially those concerning the nature of intention, and the question of what makes an act recognizable as 'an act'<sup>179</sup>.

---

<sup>178</sup> As I noted in chapter one, this is also the assumption that lies behind much of what is generally called Post-modernism, except that in this case more attention is paid to the 'chasm' 'between' me and anyone else, than to the 'initiating' agent, hence Derrida's failure to consider all of Austin's potentially 'unhappy features' of an act (*How To* p21ff).

<sup>179</sup> As P N Campbell asserts: "Austin's ... constant implication is that meaning is *in* the locution ..., that meaning is *in* the illocution ..., and that meaning is *in* the perlocution ... At every turn, the move is away from the speaker and/or hearer as a source of meaning and toward the utterance, the message. And the move is somewhat startling, given Austin's statement that "... for some years we have been realizing more and more clearly that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously ...". But Austin apparently did not realize the far-

It is only possible to tell what the speaker intends, by recognising what she says (and 'what she says' depends on what we think she means), and we can only tell what a writer intends, by recognising what she has written (and 'what she wrote' depends on what we think she means). In either case, knowledge of the speaker or writer will be employed, and will probably be helpful (although it may confuse). But the audience can always overrule the agent, when it comes to determining meaning, and may not necessarily achieve unanimity in any given case.

Therefore, there is an incoherence at the heart of Speech Act theory, which affects the consistency and usefulness of the entire theory. In particular, this inconsistency in regard to intention and meaning strikes at the heart of Speech Act theory's use in defence of authorial meaning and the particular concept of God's Scriptural self-revelation that imagines it to be unmediated.

This chapter of the thesis has demonstrated that Speech Act theory cannot be successfully used to defend a 'sender' view of meaning, and thus cannot support a sender view of revelation. It is not my contention, however, that meaning and revelation do not or cannot exist, merely that they are co-operative creations, in which both the 'sender' (the speaker or writer) and the 'receivers' have a role to play. I will expand on this idea in chapters six and seven, when I discuss the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov, and suggest that their work provides a much more satisfactory hermeneutic model for a theory of meaning and revelation, along the lines already outlined.

However, before embarking on that argument, the next chapter of this thesis, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, considers another aspect of Speech Act theory that implicitly underpins the idea of the sender view of meaning and is fundamentally flawed: the idea of uptake. Uptake is the description used for the way in which conventions are supposed to achieve illocutionary meaning without being consequential or reliant in any way upon the active response of the audience. Uptake provides the conceptual backing to the idea that illocutions, and thus also an image of revelation, are capable of ensuring for the sender uncontaminated transmission of his or her message. The concept of uptake is crucial to the use of Speech Act theory in Biblical hermeneutics: it is a pillar on which its usefulness rests. The existence of uptake defines the illocution, and thus the illocutionary, 'begotten' speech act and unmediated revelation. It is thus vital to examine this concept, as is done in the next chapter.

---

reaching significance of his statement ... and we are left with a theory of meaning that is totally nonexperiential; ... that ... has, in my judgment, no relationship to communicative and rhetorical reality": 'A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) p291



## CHAPTER FIVE: UPTAKE

### 1. Introduction

As was suggested at the end of the previous chapter, the concept of uptake describes a paradigmatic assumption underlying Speech Act theory, one which is crucial to the idea of the illocution. The usefulness of Speech Act theory as a hermeneutic, and particularly as a Biblical hermeneutic, lies in the suggestion that there is such a thing as an illocutionary act, which can be a speech act, or – it is argued by others (though not by Austin or Searle) – a text act<sup>1</sup>. This illocutionary act does not require any secondary or consequential action on the part of the audience to be completed or successful. As an act, it exists and is completed and meaningful, without any need for creative audience participation.

Uptake is the name given to the unique ‘non-response to’ or ‘property of’ the illocutionary act that allows it to be constituted in this way. As such, it is thus central to Speech Act theory, and to its attractiveness to those Biblical scholars who seek to use Speech Act theory as a hermeneutic tool. It is uptake that underpins the illocution’s distinctiveness from other forms of speech act, and which allows the illocution to provide a ‘transmission’ of authorial meaning. The existence of ‘uptake’ is a fundamental assumption of the sender view of meaning. Uptake is therefore also the vehicle for revelation, if this is conceived as consisting of the unmediated messages of God: it is the response of creation to God – one of passive reception. It is the basis for the idea that the author determines meaning.

The concept of Uptake, introduced by Austin, is necessarily adopted by Briggs, Ward and Vanhoozer, and is crucial also in the work of E D Hirsch, who uses it to illuminate the meaning-significance distinction subsequently adopted by Vanhoozer. This chapter of the thesis therefore seeks to describe and illuminate the idea of uptake, and in so doing outlines an essential, and inadequate, aspect both of Speech Act theory, and of the idea of revelation it is used to underpin.

This analysis leads on to a discussion about the nature of understanding itself, and the relevance to this of the sender view of meaning. In the next chapter, the work of the Russian thinkers Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov is introduced as a way of offering an alternative to the sender view of meaning, the assumption that meaning is begotten not created, and the related idea of the isolated individual.

---

<sup>1</sup> See chapters two and three of this thesis.

## 2. Uptake in Austin.

### 2a. Uptake as a guarantor of the 'acontextual' Explicit Performative

The first appearance of 'uptake' comes in Austin's discussion of implicit and explicit performatives. The advantage of and role of the explicit performative for Austin is that it provides a theoretical mechanism for the clear transmission of meaning from speaker to recipients<sup>2</sup>. It is this which makes it different from the implicit performative. This distinction is discussed in chapter four of this thesis, in relation to its implications for Austin's view of Intention.

Austin does not note that even an explicit performative is affected by the circumstances of its utterance, which determine the felicity of its performance, and the direction or intention ascribed to it; tone of voice and accompanying gestures will greatly affect the intention ascribed to, and the meaning of, 'I promise to be there'. Such an apparently explicit performative could be altered by for example laughter, shrugs, winks, sighs, a tone of exasperation, or if the person making the promise has their arms twisted behind their back. In this sense, the explicit and primary performative are the same, in that for both, the context of the speech act in fact affects what is recognized as the meaning of what is said.

Some of these factors come into the categories which Austin has already identified and eliminated from consideration within his doctrine of language. As I noted in the previous chapter, the difficulty with the distinction between explicit and other performatives is that even 'explicit' performatives do not *have* to be taken as orders or whatever; in all cases, authority and conventions have an "essential" fluidity, and the specific circumstances of the speech act mean that infelicity can infect any performative. In attempting to make the distinction, Austin is ignoring the role of the hearer and the overall context of the utterance. Both the explicit and implicit performatives need to be understood before they are successful, and understanding is the response of the audience in context.

Austin is himself aware of the "essential" fluidity of conventions and of the ever-present necessity of recognizing the possibility of "getting away with things"<sup>3</sup> when new conventions are initiated. Indeed, "in ordinary life, a certain laxness in procedure is permitted – otherwise no university business would ever get done!"<sup>4</sup> Austin also notes the possibility that "I may say 'I don't take orders from you' ... - I do not take orders from you when you try to 'assert your authority' (which I might fall in with but may not) on a desert

---

<sup>2</sup> To adopt Derrida's description of them.

<sup>3</sup> *How To* p30

<sup>4</sup> *How To* p37

island, as opposed to the case when you are the captain on a ship and therefore genuinely have authority.”<sup>5</sup>

This implies that Austin is aware of a degree of fluidity: I might or might not recognize your authority on an island, and thus it is down to me, the audience, to make your utterance an order or an attempt. It also implies, however, that he sees a distinction between the uncertainty of a desert island context, and the certainty of ship-board life, where the captain has ‘genuine authority’. For Austin, there are thus illocutionary (‘afloat’) and perlocutionary (‘ashore’) contexts<sup>6</sup>.

In practice, however, mutiny is a possibility on a ship also. ‘I don’t take orders from you’ can as well be said afloat as ashore, and is in either case potentially mutinous or heroic, with all the conventional consequences (keel-hauling, being put to sea in open boats, Courts martial, Pitcairn Island) that that implies. As Derrida would insist, there is no such thing as a guaranteeing or saturated context, where an utterance is pre-determined to for ever mean only one thing. For an act of any sort, illocutionary or whatever, to be recognised as an act, always requires more than simply passive absorption<sup>7</sup>. There is always the possibility that an act may be recognized as being something different to that expected (with hindsight, allegedly, or by implication) by the utterer or initiator<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> *How To* p28

<sup>6</sup> To adopt Derrida’s phrase, some contexts are more saturated than others.

<sup>7</sup> As Gadamer puts it: “there is no doubt that the recipient of an order must perform a definite creative act in understanding its meaning”: *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p343.

<sup>8</sup> Two on-line articles illustrate this very point, from either side of the ‘Cold War’ divide. On the 14<sup>th</sup> November 2010 the BBC website contained the following story headline: “Singer James Blunt ‘prevented World War III’”. The story about NATO troops in Kosovo ends as follows: “Asked if following the order [to engage Russian troops] would have risked starting World War III, Blunt, who was a 25-year-old cavalry officer at the time, replied: “Absolutely. And that’s why we were querying our instruction from an American general. Fortunately, up on the radio came Gen Mike Jackson, whose exact words at the time were, ‘I’m not going to have my soldiers be responsible for starting World War III’, and told us why don’t we sugar off down the road, you know, encircle the airfield instead. And after a couple of days the Russians there said: ‘Hang on we have no food and no water. Can we share the airfield with you?’.” If Gen Jackson had not blocked the order from Gen Clark, who as Nato Supreme Commander Europe was his superior officer, Blunt said he would still have declined to follow it, even at the risk of a court martial. He said: “There are things that you do along the way that you know are right, and those that you absolutely feel are wrong, that I think it’s morally important to stand up against, and that sense of moral judgement is drilled into us as soldiers in the British army.”: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11753050> viewed 9<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

The following story dates from the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2013, and is headlined “Stanislav Petrov: the man who may have saved the world”. It includes the following: “Thirty years ago, on 26 September 1983, the world was saved from potential nuclear disaster. In the early hours of the morning, the Soviet Union’s early-warning systems detected an incoming missile strike from the United States. Computer readouts suggested several missiles had been launched. The protocol for the Soviet military would have been to retaliate with a nuclear attack of its

The fact that what Austin describes as the “over-rich resources” of actual language “lend themselves to equivocation and inadequate discrimination”<sup>9</sup> is not necessarily an indication that this makes them by comparison inadequate. Instead it indicates the vast complexity of speech situations and meanings that are part of ordinary conversation. Neither explicit nor primary performatives are able to “rule out equivocation”; as Derrida would insist, this is an ‘ill’ that is always potentially present. It can only be excluded if an illegitimate cordon is erected between the part of everyday speech preferred, and the part that doesn’t fit, in order that the part played by the recognizer can be largely ignored.

I have already quoted Dorothea Franck to this effect,<sup>10</sup> but the same point is made by Jay Schleusener, who notes that

even if we resist the temptation to confuse reference with context, we may still imagine that ordinary speech presumes nothing more than the material setting in which it occurs. The most obvious defect in this view is that it omits the specifically social presumptions which speaker and hearer share – it leaves them to meet in the same place at the same time but with no common expectations about one another’s behavior. A more subtle and perhaps more interesting defect is our casual assumption that we know what we are talking about when we talk about the material setting of a speech act. We tend to think of a little scene in a little drama, and we tend to suppose that we could name all the props needed for a successful performance. But the analogy is incompetent. Ordinary speech does not follow a script, and we can never be sure of the turn our conversation will take. If we isolate single utterances and analyse them in retrospect, they may seem to require only modest staging, but if we try to anticipate the circumstances that might be relevant to what we say next, we find that there is no end to them.

The reason for these difficulties should be obvious: the social context of a speech act is not an independent feature of the world as we happen to find it when we open our mouths to talk. It is instead a function of the way we understand our

---

own. But duty officer Stanislav Petrov - whose job it was to register apparent enemy missile launches - decided not to report them to his superiors, and instead dismissed them as a false alarm. This was a breach of his instructions, a dereliction of duty. The safe thing to do would have been to pass the responsibility on, to refer up. But his decision may have saved the world.” It ends as follows: “A few days later Mr. Petrov received an official reprimand for what happened that night. Not for what he did, but for mistakes in the logbook. He kept silent for 10 years. “I thought it was shameful for the Soviet army that our system failed in this way,” he says. But, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the story did get into the press. Mr. Petrov received several international awards. But he does not think of himself as a hero. “That was my job”, he says. “But they were lucky it was me on shift that night.”  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-24280831>. Viewed 27<sup>th</sup> September 2013.  
Gadamer describes such situations as these “as an explicit refusal to obey that is not simply disobedience but drives from the meaning of the order and its concretization”: *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p343.

<sup>9</sup> *How To* p76

<sup>10</sup> D Franck, ‘Speaking about Speech Acts’, *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) p88.

circumstances and also a function of the way we expect others to understand them.<sup>11</sup>

That equivocation is not the permanent condition of conversation is due, not to the explicitness of phrases used by speakers or to 'uptakeable' conventional acts, but to the ongoing and shared nature of communication and the strength of relationships between speakers (who are also listeners) within a language or conversation. Meaning is possible and 'reliable' (though not guaranteed) because of shared conventions, but there is always the possibility that something could be taken in more than one way<sup>12</sup>, and until an act is 'taken' by an audience, it does not exist as an act at all.

Austin, however, in the grip of the sender view of meaning, seeks ways to establish the uniqueness of one particular type of act, which is to depend not on how it is taken, but on how it was intended. However, because he cannot in practice distinguish all illocutions from consequences, he finds himself deep in uncertainty, as the following sections will demonstrate.

### **Uptake in Austin.**

#### **2b. The 'vocabulary of acts' as a distinction between uptake and understanding.**

Indeed, when it comes to recognizing an act as an act, Austin himself is aware of the positive, creative role of the act of understanding. He himself suggests that what we ordinarily in English describe as a physical act is not a series of discrete 'minimum physical efforts' (the minimum physical act), but is rather that act plus the to-be-expected and anticipated consequences. Initially, he observes that

in general, and if the action is not one of saying something but a non-conventional 'physical' action, ... we can, or may like to think we can, class, by stages, more and more of what is initially and ordinarily included or possibly might be included under the name given to 'our act' itself as *really* only *consequences*, however little remote and however naturally to be anticipated, of our actual action in the supposed minimum physical sense, which will then transpire to be the making of some movement or movements with part of our body (e.g. crooking our finger, which produced a movement of the trigger, which produced ... which produced the death of the donkey).<sup>13</sup>

However,

with physical actions we nearly always naturally name the action *not* in terms of what we are here calling the minimum physical act, but in terms which embrace a greater or less but indefinitely extensive range of what might be called its natural consequences (or, looking at it another way, the intention with which it was done).

---

<sup>11</sup> J Schleusener, 'Convention and the Context of Reading', *Critical Inquiry* 6:4 (1980) 672

<sup>12</sup> Which in fact does frequently occur

<sup>13</sup> *How To* p110-111

We not merely do not use the notion of a minimum physical act (which is in any case doubtful), but we do not seem to have any class of names which distinguish physical acts from consequences: whereas with acts of saying something, the vocabulary of names for acts (B) [referring to illocutions such as 'he urged, advised, ordered, or protested' listed under (B) on pages 101 and 102 of *How To*] seems expressly designed to mark a break at a certain regular point between the act (our saying something) and its consequences (which are usually not the *saying* of anything), or at any rate a great many of them.<sup>14</sup>

Thus while, for Austin, an 'ordinary act' is in practice made by its consequences, without which it is not that act but a different one, for illocutions there is a divorce between the act and its consequences, which are in no way constitutive of the act. Thus this sort of act (the illocutionary) requires no audience participation or recognition to be effective: once spoken, it is in existence, and this is proved by the vocabulary of names we use for this illocutionary act<sup>15</sup>. Illocutionary acts are for Austin uniquely acontextual.

Austin is correct in that in respect of 'non-conventional physical actions', the response to the question 'what did he do' is likely to be 'he shot the donkey' not 'he twitched muscles in his right index finger' or wherever. The act 'properly' described in conversation is thus 'shooting the donkey' not 'twitching a muscle' or 'twitching his finger' or whatever; these are merely 'parts' of the action<sup>16</sup>. However, Austin's suggestion that in respect of "acts of saying something, the vocabulary of names for acts (B) [*see before*] seems

---

<sup>14</sup> *How To* p111

<sup>15</sup> The phrase "the intention with which it was done", given Austin's previous definition of intention, can only be discovered from the onlookers understanding of the act and of its likely and actual effects: this is to adopt the definition of intention which Austin adopts in the 'Hippolytus passage' on pages 9-10 of *How To* where he insists that "our word is our bond", and not merely the description of our inward state of mind. The intention of the actor is established on the basis of what was observed. As I argue in chapter four of this thesis, it is our default assumption as the audience that the actor intended what actually happened, unless there are grounds for thinking otherwise. To say in one's defence 'I didn't mean to do that' is not likely to be accepted if it is generally believed or felt by the audience (and of course there may be disagreements about this) that you should have taken more care, or anticipated the eventual outcome of your actions.

<sup>16</sup> See also R A Duff: *Intention, Agency and Criminal Liability* op cit, where he argues that an act is described at a different level, and is construed as being different, in different contexts, so that the word 'act' has varying contextual meanings. I would agree with this, and suggest with Austin that in 'ordinary language' the word act, in the context of the question 'what did he do?', generally means 'the act plus its consequences' not just the 'minimum physical act', although it is certainly possible that in some circumstances it would be proper to describe the 'minimum physical act' as simply an act. See also P R Cohen and H J Levesque, 'Rational Interaction as the Basis for Communication', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992) p 225: "agents perform single instances of primitive act- or event-types ..., but each specific act or event can realize many different complex actions": they fail, however, to discern that it is recognition by the audience that determines, in different contexts, what act was performed.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

expressly designed to mark a break at a certain point between the act (our saying something) and its consequences"<sup>17</sup>, is wrong, at least if a distinction exists between an attempt and an achieved act, and if circumstances affect felicity, both of which he has himself previously asserted.

For example, in the case of 'his having shot the donkey', the question of whether he did the act or not would presumably be settled by factors such as; the presence of a dead donkey; his fingerprints on the gun; the statements of witnesses, and the like. Here the identification of the act of his shooting the donkey involves both whether or not he or someone else did it (was it his hand on the gun?), and whether or not, on the basis of what happened, he meant to do it<sup>18</sup> (was there a struggle between him and someone else, was he aiming at a lion behind the donkey, etcetera, in other words did he 'shoot it?' or did he merely 'hit it?'). As we might say, questions of "extenuating circumstances" or other "factors reducing or abrogating the agent's responsibility" would be brought in<sup>19</sup>; those things referred to by Austin as "the normal linguistic devices of disclaiming"<sup>20</sup>.

In the case of 'his having protested at a public meeting', the question of whether or not he did this act would presumably be settled by factors such as; his having a black eye or torn clothes; tomato juice on his fingers; the statements of witnesses. Here, as with the ordinary act of shooting considered previously, the identification of the act of his having protested involves both whether or not he or someone else did it (was it him at the meeting standing up and shouting or throwing a tomato?), and whether or not, on the basis of what happened, he meant to do it (was he protesting, or had he just been stung by a wasp or suffered a seizure?).

This is, as with the dead donkey, a question of not merely describing events, but also understanding them (so that a witness might say, for example, 'he did not protest; he stood up but what he said was in no way a protest - it didn't look/sound like a protest to me', or 'he never protested about anything - he didn't even stand up', or 'he was just juggling tomatoes badly'). In precisely the same way, the act of shooting a donkey has to be understood as an act. Infelicities, as Austin would observe, can affect all acts - but the same infelicities can affect them all, and the consequences actually entailed are the way in which we determine what has happened. In both cases, the shooting and the protest, it is the onlookers who determine what act has been performed, and there may be disagreement about this.

Moreover, among the consequences of your shooting a donkey are; that it will be dead or injured; that people will believe that you did it; and that people

---

<sup>17</sup> *How To* p111

<sup>18</sup> 'Meant' in this sense being equal to 'our assessment of his intention'.

<sup>19</sup> *How To* p21

<sup>20</sup> *How To* p106

will hold you responsible as hero or villain. These consequences are reasonably foreseeable and uncontroversial<sup>21</sup>. One could not, for example, generally say 'I shot the donkey, but I didn't mean to hurt or kill it – I thought donkeys were invulnerable'<sup>22</sup>, or 'I shot the donkey but I am not responsible for shooting it', and expect these to be accepted as reasonable defences, unless one also added-in additional 'extenuating factors' such as 'there was a lion behind it at which I was aiming'. Unintentionality or 'extenuation' has to be demonstrated for a defence to be 'successful' in re-describing an act<sup>23</sup>.

Even a defence such as 'the gun went off in my hands' does not destroy this assertion that acts include consequences, because to make such a defence is in practice to deny that the act of shooting the donkey actually took place at all; what happened was instead a tragic accident for which I cannot be held responsible<sup>24</sup>. It may have appeared to be an act, but its act-ness is denied, on the basis of what I assert to have been my 'inward' intention; a denial which, however, will only be accepted on the basis of others' decisions as to the reasonableness of my defence based on their understandings of what happened, their knowledge of my familiarity with firearms and my ability to aim, etcetera<sup>25</sup>.

Likewise, among the consequences of your protesting are; that a protest will have been made; that people will believe that you did it and hence that you disagreed with what was said or done; and that people will hold you responsible for your protest and will believe that you hold certain views or opinions<sup>26</sup>. As before, these consequences are reasonably foreseeable and

---

<sup>21</sup> Although, as Lord Denning observed, there may always be circumstances in which they were quite properly not foreseen – see chapter four.

<sup>22</sup> Except in some very extreme scenarios involving, say, military schemes to genetically engineer armour-plated donkeys (which are not entirely beyond the bounds of plausibility – as witnessed to by past schemes involving bomb-carrying dogs, bats or dolphins).

<sup>23</sup> Which is to say, accepted as a reasonable excuse by a jury of one's peers, whether formally constituted as such or not. This has been discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Vanhoozer's view of Intention.

<sup>24</sup> It is interesting how the question of responsibility crops up re actions.

<sup>25</sup> The implications of the fact that we have entered here into language of 'judgement' and the Court will be reflected upon in a subsequent section. It is, however, worth recalling the discussion in chapter four about intention and the example of the arsonist noted by Vanhoozer; the following discussion is really just an extended version of the conclusions posited there about acts of arson, manslaughter and murder. It should also be noted, in respect of later discussions about recognition, that to recognise something as 'not an act' but rather an accident or a natural phenomenon or whatever, is still to recognise it as something: even 'not-acts' have to be understood.

<sup>26</sup> As Austin himself notes: "To do any act in a perceptible or detectable way is to afford ourselves and generally others also the opportunity of coming to know both (a) that we did it, and further (b) many other facts as to our motives, our character or what not which may be inferred from our having done it [and which are conventionally-produced inferences]. If you hurl a tomato at a political meeting (or bawl 'I protest' when someone else does - if that is performing an action) [which it must be since Austin has already defined it as an illocution] the consequence will probably [why probably- it will only not be if there are other



## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

uncontroversial. One might say 'I didn't mean to protest – I didn't think that standing up and saying 'I protest' would be seen as a protest' or even 'I was being ironic – wasn't it obvious?', but these defences would not necessarily be accepted, any more than would be those of the putative donkey-killer (although they might be).

In these examples then, the consequences of an illocutionary act are no more escapable than are the consequences of shooting a donkey, and are only as 'distinct' from the act as are the consequences of shooting a donkey. The 'illocutionary' utterance-act of protesting seems to entail as many consequences as the physical act of shooting. In both cases, the consequences of the act, or our analyses of them as the audience, are part of making the act the act that it is. These identifications are both inextricably cultural and contextual. The distinctiveness of the illocutionary act thus appears to be an illusion.

Austin's assertion of the difference between a 'non-conventional physical act' and 'the act of saying', only survives if the 'non-conventional physical act' is held to be less than we generally, according to Austin, regard it as. In other words, only if it is equivalent solely to the minimum physical act, which Austin himself is inclined to deny, in my view correctly. If the non-conventional physical act includes, as a single act, the 'natural consequences' of the minimum physical act, or in other words the apparent intention with which it was done, then the case seems to be the same as for the act of saying 'I protest'. Illocutions cannot then be distinguished from other, 'normal', acts<sup>27</sup>.

It is therefore apparent that Austin is entirely incorrect in his suggestion that vocabulary requires us to distinguish illocutionary acts from consequences. All that has happened is that, as L J Cohen notes, some (but not all) 'illocutions' can be described as either "happy" or "unhappy". There is no distinction between different sorts of act based on the suggestion that some acts are determined by their consequences while others (illocutionary ones) are not. Cohen suggests in his article<sup>28</sup> that Austin is in his description of illocutions confused by the existence of a select number of verbs which have both a "happy" and a "happy-or-unhappy" sense, and that Austin switches between using the different senses of the verb:

We can say either 'He concluded that ..., though he was not entitled to' or 'He tried to conclude that ..., though he did not succeed', and either 'She named the

---

circumstances in play as well] be to make others aware that you object, and to make them think that you hold certain political beliefs [or at least oppose certain political beliefs]: but this will not make either the throw or the shout true or false (though they may be, even deliberately, misleading)": *How To* p110 footnote 2, with my interjections in [] as usual.

<sup>27</sup> And indeed, the idea of a 'non-conventional physical act' becomes rather blurred.

<sup>28</sup> L J Cohen, 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) pp118-137

ship ..., but the ceremony was invalid' or 'She tried to name the ship, but bungled the ceremony'<sup>29</sup>. There is, as it were, both a happy-or-unhappy sense of these verbs and also a happy one. In the former we either leave it open whether the attempt was successful or imply that it was not: in the latter we imply that it was.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, some of the time it would appear from 'normal' English usage that a performative occurs irrespective of any response, while at other times it appears that a response is required<sup>31</sup>.

Cohen himself proceeds to illustrate that even the "happy-or-unhappy"<sup>32</sup> usage of verbs does in fact presuppose an element of response, or rather, presupposes the idea that a response was reasonably foreseeable: "for a speaker's utterance to be a warning in the happy-or-unhappy sense what is required is that it should be of a kind that he could reasonably expect to secure uptake ... But a warning, in this sense, does not actually have to achieve uptake."<sup>33</sup>

This concept of 'foreseeability' is, in conjunction with that of 'judgement', one that is crucial, and rather taken for granted in Speech Act theory as generally applied. In particular, its dialogic nature is not recognized. As stated in the

---

<sup>29</sup> My footnote: We can also, of course, not know what to say, and be unsure about whether or not the ship was actually named or not.

<sup>30</sup> 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) p128

<sup>31</sup> 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) p129. This distinction that Cohen notes effectively undermines Wolterstorff's attempt to distinguish illocutionary from perlocutionary acts by using what he calls the "the hereby-test" (32), which he uses to distinguish speaking from communication. Wolterstorff wants to distinguish "such paradigmatic illocutionary actions as asserting, commanding, promising and asking" from "transitive propositional revelation [which] consists in the transmission, the communication, of knowledge (or true belief) from one person to another" and is, in his scheme, perlocutionary. He does this by suggesting that, in Cohen's terms, illocutionary acts exist only in a happy sense. This allows him to draw a distinction between illocutionary speech and perlocutionary revelation, a distinction which fails with the failure of the illocution, and is in any case highly dubious at best on the basis of his distinction between speaking and revealing, which Moses' experiences with the burning bush on Mount Horeb would seem to refute: here speaking seems to be a prima facie instance of revelation: "When the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I." Then he said, "Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ... Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." (Exodus 3:4-6, 13-15 RSV translation).

<sup>32</sup> The usage where according to Cohen we "leave it open whether the attempt was successful or imply that it was not" - p128.

<sup>33</sup> 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) p129.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

previous chapter, the concept of 'foreseeability' assumes the judgement of others as to what is, and is not, foreseeable<sup>34</sup>, and is entirely response-related. It endorses the requirement that all performative acts themselves must be recognized, and are based on 'outward signs' and on words uttered. It stresses, too, the need for any speech act to be recognized before it can be said to exist. It is entirely contextual, since the context will determine what might be or what was foreseeable in any particular case<sup>35</sup>.

However, Austin's identification of illocutions does not consist simply in their being distinguishable on the basis of the 'vocabulary of names for acts'. He goes on to suggest a number of other ways in which illocutions can be distinguished from all other acts, and these are examined in the following sections.

### **Uptake in Austin.**

#### **2c. The existence of 'a regular natural break in the chain of consequences' as a distinction between uptake and understanding.**

Austin goes on to suggest that there is a further distinction between "acts of saying something" (illocutions) and "ordinary physical actions"<sup>36</sup> since

even the minimum physical action ... [of a 'non-conventional physical act'] is, being a bodily movement, *in pari materia* [of the same substance] with at least many of its immediate and natural consequences, whereas, whatever the immediate and natural consequences of an act of saying something may be, they are at least not normally other further acts of saying something, whether more particularly on the speaker's part or even on the part of others. So that we have here a sort of regular natural break in the chain, which is wanting in the case of physical actions, and which is associated with the special class of names for illocutions.<sup>37</sup>

This also is incorrect. As I have already argued, a 'minimum physical act' is not a physical act as usually described: our understanding of what constitutes

---

<sup>34</sup> And what was, or was not, foreseen.

<sup>35</sup> And alters as the conversation continues, as J Streeck suggests in his article 'Embodied Contexts, Transcontextuals, and the Timing of speech acts', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1994) 113-137. He believes that for a proper understanding of context "what is needed ... is an account of context as an *interactively* and *intersubjectively* achieved environment of talk", which recognises that "context ... is available in the interaction" of members and "is achieved, attended to, and continuously monitored by participants in their moment to moment progression through an encounter" (116). Streeck examines some exchanges between a teacher and her class in a school, and proposes that "participants communicatively *orient each other* to the currently valid context" (117) and that "a current working consensus [for conversation], then, is a tentative claim which is *retroactively* validated by the orderliness and intelligibility of next activities that are performed on its basis" (118). This continuous re-appraisal of context is carried out through posture and kinesics as well as through linguistic factors such as "style, code, rhythm, pitch etc" (119).

<sup>36</sup> *How To* p112

<sup>37</sup> *How To* p112

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

an act is not the 'minimum physical act' but the act with its 'natural consequences', as Austin himself agrees. Therefore, a 'minimum physical act' is only part of an act, not all of it: 'the act', in this context, is shooting the donkey, of which trigger pulling is only a part, in same way as the phonetic, phatic and rhetic acts<sup>38</sup> are only part of a performative act of saying something identified as the speech act.

Furthermore, the result of a supposedly 'non-conventional physical act' such as shooting a donkey could be either being hit by one's neighbours (a physical consequence), or that they shout in protest or praise (which is not a physical act "*in pari materia*" with the shooting). Equally, the result of saying 'I protest' could be people saying 'Hear, hear', 'No! Shame!' or 'Order! Order!', which are "further acts of saying something", or that someone hits you. Urged, advised, ordered, and protested, which are all illocutions, could all have as "immediate and natural consequences" verbal responses: urge by a counter-urge or other verbal expression of doubt or hesitation; advise by protest; order by countermand or protest; and protest by the options illustrated above, or indeed by an order.

A protest could cause the saving of a life: an order could cause the loss of one. A 'non-conventional physical movement' causes a dead donkey, by physical means. An order to shoot could also cause the same result. Austin's point is simply affirming that 'non-conventional physical acts' operate physically while language acts operate linguistically. There is nothing more implied than this. A supposedly 'non-conventional physical act' could cause a linguistic response, and there is no fundamentally different sense of 'action' involved here, just different arenas of action; verbal and non-verbal. Indeed, Campbell is also right to suggest that "the consequences of what Austin calls perlocutions are very often further speech acts (as in ordinary conversations); also, they are very often silent verbal acts (as in responding to written messages); and whether or not overt, nonverbal behavior is involved, the symbolic process, i.e., some sort of language usage, is always present"<sup>39</sup>.

Austin though suggests that

the sense in which saying something produces effects on other persons, or *causes* things, is a fundamentally different sense of cause from that used in physical causation by pressure, &c. It has to operate through the conventions of language and is a matter of influence exerted by one person on another: this is probably the original sense of 'cause'.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Individual constitutive parts of the utterance as Austin has defined them: the phonetic is the uttering of "certain noises", the phatic is the uttering of certain words, and the rhetic is the uttering of something meaningful, see *How To* p92.

<sup>39</sup> P N Campbell, 'A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) 288

<sup>40</sup> *How To* p112 footnote 1

However, as a description this is true for all language acts not just illocutions<sup>41</sup>. Indeed, the point of the lengthy discussion of 'the act of shooting a donkey' has been to suggest that the identification of any act as an act involves 'conventionality'. It is conventions and context that enable us to distinguish between 'shooting a donkey' and 'the gun going off in my hands', or which makes the act of throwing a tomato<sup>42</sup> in fact a highly conventional ritual act of political disapprobation; it would be much more effective in one way to throw a brick at a political opponent, but a soft fruit or egg has become a 'conventional' way of breaching the conventions of the receptive stance of the audience<sup>43</sup>.

Any physical act has conventional or contextual overtones and can cause effects through linguistic and cultural perceptions. Indeed, the identification of an act as an act rather than a random series of gestures or sounds is due to the context and knowledge of the onlookers or witnesses. That which makes a noise an act of for example Tuvan throat-singing not garbled nonsense, or which makes a series of movements part of a conventional social ritual (such as shaking hands or waving) not an involuntary convulsive fit, is the fact that the act is contextualised (quite possibly unconsciously). This allows us to understand (or realize – make real) that it is an act; that it is deliberate not an aimless gesturing with words or language.

The fact that one of the acts that Austin examines is partly linguistic, while the other appears not to be, is neither here nor there: what makes them acts is our recognition of them, just as this also is the difference between 'attempt' and 'achievement'. This recognition is based on shared contexts and cultures, and is a part of the necessary background to all communication. Austin however concludes that language invites us to divorce the act from its consequences in the case of those language acts which he describes as illocutionary and thus conventional acts. As with explicit performatives previously, but now more obviously, Austin is trying to retain for illocutions a certainty of result which cannot be contaminated by perlocutionary unpredictability. This certainty, however, is unattainable in any specific contextual situation.

Moreover, as already demonstrated, Austin's division between consequences and acts does not exist unless one describes acts in very particular and unequal way: illocutionary acts must be described in a very different way not merely from physical acts, but also to all other uses of language such as perlocutionary acts, joking, reciting poetry, insinuating etcetera.

---

<sup>41</sup> See for example P F Strawson, 'Intention and Convention in Speech Acts,' in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 385

<sup>42</sup> Described by Austin as "any action" i.e. not one governed by convention, in *How To* p110, footnote 2.

<sup>43</sup> I am indebted to Hugh Pyper for this observation. As more recent events in Iraq have demonstrated, shoes rather than eggs are, in some cultural contexts, the preferred and highly effective conventional missiles used in acts of disapproval.

**Uptake in Austin.**

**2d. The difference between attempt and achievement.**

Of course, for Austin, it is ultimately necessary to distinguish illocutionary and perlocutionary acts because, as he recognizes, perlocutionary acts are unpredictable and to a degree response-related, while the definition of illocutionary acts is that they are predictable. The speaker has a control over them, and a control over their meaning, which is not present for the perlocutionary element of an act, which Austin acknowledges is affected by its reception and thus its context.

Austin thus also has to assert that performing a perlocutionary act is not directly associated with the performance of a 'performative' utterance, and is not a part of the same act. He notes that

it is certain that the perlocutionary sense of 'doing an action' must somehow be ruled out as irrelevant to the sense in which an utterance, if the issuing of it is the 'doing of an action', is a performative, at least in if that is to be distinct from a constative. For clearly *any*, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever, and in particular by a straightforward constative utterance (if there is such an animal).<sup>44</sup>

It is this same concern that makes it necessary also for Austin to distinguish "between an action we do (here an illocution) and its consequence"<sup>45</sup>, since consequences also, even of illocutionary acts, are not guaranteed.

However, if there is a difference between 'attempt' and 'achievement', which is presumably un-intended on the part of the actor, the consequences of an illocution would seem to be a part of its essence as an act, and what make it an act rather than an attempt. Indeed the very concept of intention that Austin has previously outlined, based on what is seen to have been done, is inimical to the assertion that consequences have no bearing on the success of the illocutionary act.

Austin himself is aware of this fundamental inconsistency<sup>46</sup>. He notes that illocutionary actions have consequences as well as perlocutionary actions, and he suggests that "distinctions need drawing, as there is clearly a difference

---

<sup>44</sup> *How To* p109. There is, of course, as Austin will subsequently demonstrate, no such thing as a straightforward constative, nor is there any way of distinguishing constative and performative utterances on the grounds that one is a doing of something and the other is not. However, the fact that Austin will subsequently abandon the performative-constative distinction does not prevent him retaining the illocutionary-perlocutionary one. The implication here again is clearly that only illocutions are performative.

<sup>45</sup> *How To* p110

<sup>46</sup> As is Margolis: he notes that "Austin fails to distinguish satisfactorily between the illocutionary effect and the "perlocutionary sequel" of speaking": J Margolis, 'Meaning, Speakers' Intentions, and Speech Acts', *The Review of Metaphysics* 26:4 (1973) p688

between what we feel to be the real production of real effects [such as the speaker's being committed by his illocutionary promise?] and what we regard as mere conventional consequences [such as my having been persuaded by his perlocutionary speech? – I presume that conventional here refers not to the use of conventions in a performative sense but to conventional as a synonym for normal, expected and unremarkable]; we shall in any case return later to this".<sup>47</sup>

Austin begins his attempt to draw these distinctions by noting the susceptibility of all acts, including locutions, perlocutions and illocutions, to ills such as those that make the difference between attempting to perform an act and achieving a successful performance. This is for him a case of "allowance being made for the ills that all action is heir to"<sup>48</sup>, and which constitute the difference between attempt and achievement.

However, as Austin notes, "we must expect infelicities here", because this undermines his later attempt to divide illocutionary effects from perlocutionary consequences. Indeed, Austin's own recognition of the need to distinguish between 'warning' and 'attempting to warn'<sup>49</sup> collapses the distinction between illocutions such as warning, dependent on convention, and perlocutions such as persuading, which ostensibly are not. *This is because what becomes central to the identity of both as 'actual' acts is the result achieved, which in either case is necessary for the "successful or consummated performance"*<sup>50</sup> *of a performative act, and which is in both cases dependent on the act's reception by its 'audience'.*

Austin also notes that there are ills which make a "distinction between producing effects or consequences which are intended or unintended"<sup>51</sup>.

---

<sup>47</sup> *How To* p102 – my words in brackets. Here I should also note that the word "convention" can be taken to denote something that is not "conventional" in the sense of being entirely rule-based, it just "is", prior to conventions as such. This is not quite the way in which "convention" is used by Austin in this discussion: rather, he is using it in a more general sense that overlaps with the idea of cultural context or expectation, or perhaps with Wittgenstein's Forms of Life. The word 'convention' has any number of different possible meanings in linguistic philosophy, rather in the way that the word judgement discussed later in this chapter does, and in this respect Catarina Dutilh Novaes has published an interesting article 'The different ways in which logic is (said to be) formal', *Academia*, <[http://www.academia.edu/906786/The\\_different\\_ways\\_in\\_which\\_logic\\_is\\_said\\_to\\_be\\_formal](http://www.academia.edu/906786/The_different_ways_in_which_logic_is_said_to_be_formal)>, exploring different uses of that term. See also D Føllesdal: "While ordinary games are usually based on conventions, agreed upon in advance, it is not equally clear what is meant by 'conventional rules of language': 'Comments on Stenius's 'Mood and Language-game'', *Synthese* 17 (1967) 277.

<sup>48</sup> *How To* p105

<sup>49</sup> *How To* p105

<sup>50</sup> *How To* p114, of illocutionary acts. Incidentally, one might ask 'how then are illocutionary acts consummated - isn't this an action that of its essence requires two participants?' The category of 'non-consummation' is precisely the failure which results from there being only one genuinely engaged participant, at least matrimonially speaking.

<sup>51</sup> *How To* p105

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

However, if it is the case that “when the speaker intends to produce an effect it may nevertheless not occur,”<sup>52</sup> then this is firstly to assume that we know what the speaker intended *independently* of his action, and secondly and more importantly to acknowledge that the difference between ‘attempt’ and ‘achievement’ is in the hands of the receiver or audience.

This again demands recognition of the need for the audience to understand and correctly realize any utterance, whatever its force, before the utterance can be said to exist in actuality. It may be the case that, as Austin suggests, “we invoke the normal linguistic devices of disclaiming (adverbs like ‘unintentionally’ and ‘so on’) which we hold ready for personal use in all cases of doing actions”<sup>53</sup> in these cases. However, our disclaiming may or may not be accepted, depending on the audience’s understanding of the entire context and thus their participation in the creation of the act.

It would then seem that the idea of the perlocutionary act presupposes a theoretical distinction between intention (‘what I intend’) and meaning (‘what I achieve’) that is obscured when we imagine an illocutionary act, because an illocution is an abstract entity in which intention is perceived without remainder (‘I intend exactly what I achieve’), in a way not possible for a perlocution<sup>54</sup>. We can compare ‘I order’ (an illocution), which appears to be itself the act, and ‘I persuaded’ (a perlocution), which is a description of the act. We can note the different tenses required; we cannot say ‘I persuade’ or ‘I am persuading you’.

It thus appears that while we can say ‘in shouting ‘look out’ I was warning’, we can only say ‘in shouting ‘look out’ I was *trying* to frighten’. It appears that the illocution is ‘complete’ or ‘successful’ before the perlocution could be, because the warning has been performed by my shout, while the perlocution remains an attempt until we know whether our hearer has in fact been frightened<sup>55</sup>. Perlocutionary actions turned into verbs describe the effects of an act of saying, while illocutionary actions turned into verbs sometimes describe the apparent aim of an act of saying, or its pre-existent, pre-uttered (and therefore guaranteed) meaning<sup>56</sup>.

---

<sup>52</sup> *How To* p105

<sup>53</sup> *How To* p106

<sup>54</sup> As Hornsby puts it: “where an illocutionary act is in question, there is, as it were, no distance between doing it and doing it intentionally: the effect characteristic of a piece of illocution just is the effect of a successful attempt at it” J Hornsby, ‘Illocution and its Significance’, in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994) 194

<sup>55</sup> In the same way, we could say ‘I ordered him and he didn’t go’, or even, almost, ‘I ordered him but he wasn’t {wouldn’t be?} ordered’ but not ‘I persuaded him but he wasn’t persuaded’.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?’ op cit p129



## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Austin also suggests that “speaking of the ‘use of “language” for arguing or warning’ looks just like speaking of the ‘use of “language” for persuading, rousing, alarming’; yet the former may, for rough contrast be said to be conventional, in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula; but the latter could not.”<sup>57</sup> The implication here is that illocutionary uses of language (as in arguing or warning) are performative and thus based on conventions, while perlocutionary ones (persuading, alarming or rousing) are not. Illocutions, therefore, are ‘guaranteed by convention’ in a way that perlocutions are not.

In fact however, both ‘illocutions’ and ‘perlocutions’ are, as acts, only attempts unless they are received and understood. ‘Illocutionary’ verbs, however, can ‘disguise’ this because of their use in both ‘happy’ and ‘happy-or-unhappy’ senses, an option not present for ‘perlocutionary’ verbs<sup>58</sup>. We could in practice only say ‘in shouting ‘look out’ I was warning’ if others agree that this is what I was doing: if no-one accepts that I was warning them, they will inevitably dispute this statement.

Or, as Campbell again notes,

what does it mean to say that I urge someone to do or believe something, that my urging must have the effect of being understood as to its force and meaning, but that it is not intended to have an effect on the person toward whom it is directed, or at the very least, that such an intended effect is not a defining characteristic of my urging? I suggest that such a description ... can mean only one thing – a completely speaker-centred view of the “total” speech situation, a view that entirely eliminates the audience. If I am aware of an audience – and I must be aware of them if I urge, warn them, etc. – and if I praise, blame, argue with, or condemn that audience it is utterly meaningless to say that I address myself to that audience but intend to have no effect upon that audience, ... Of course, there is a direct contradiction between this exclusion of the audience and the notion of audience understanding or uptake, but that notion becomes a highly problematic one at this point.<sup>59</sup>

It is to the concept of uptake, which will prove so important to a proper understanding of revelation, that we now turn.

### **Uptake in Austin.**

#### **2e. The ‘understanding’ of Consequences and the ‘uptaking’ of Effects.**

To further complicate this picture of the apparently non-consequential illocution, Austin himself is forced to acknowledge that while the perlocutionary act is simply about producing effects, there are certain senses in which the illocutionary act is *also* concerned with the achievement of effects

<sup>57</sup> *How To* p103

<sup>58</sup> As pointed out by Cohen in ‘Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) pp118-137 – see previous discussion.

<sup>59</sup> P N Campbell, ‘A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Perlocutionary Acts’, *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) p289.

although, he insists, this is in a different way to the perlocutionary act. He notes that

unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act will not have been happily, successfully performed. This is to be distinguished from saying that the illocutionary act is the achieving of a certain effect. I cannot be said to have warned an audience unless it hears what I say and takes what I say in a certain sense. An effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out.<sup>60</sup>

This he seeks to distinguish from 'consequences', which are of course 'perlocutionary' in nature. Firstly he suggests that in respect of the effects of 'successful' illocutionary acts "generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution. So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of *uptake*"<sup>61</sup>, which is different to the understanding of a perlocutionary act, which brings about consequences.

Secondly, Austin indicates that the 'taking effect' of the illocutionary act is also to be distinguished "from producing consequences in the sense of bringing about states of affairs in the 'normal' way, i.e. changes in the natural course of events."<sup>62</sup>

The two points are Austin's way of suggesting that an illocutionary act is conventional and that the act itself is the utterance of something, which enacts what it says, so that to say 'I name this ship' *is* to name it, and to say 'I baptise you' *is* to baptise you. Things are changed by the performance of the illocutionary act in a direct and immediate way; there is no intermediate position between being named and unnamed or baptised and un-baptised, or between being warned and un-warned or urged and un-urged<sup>63</sup>. The conventions compel us to recognize that an illocutionary act has been performed.

This is presumably what Austin means by "bringing about". It is clear that he envisages this being caused by, or 'in the hands of', the speaker. Presumably, Austin imagines that the effect is brought about by a kind of enforced, instantaneous recognition of the speaker's-intended-act, based on its special sort of conventionality, which rigidly determines the recognition it will get

---

<sup>60</sup> *How To* p115-116

<sup>61</sup> *How To* p116. Since it is a question of meaning and force it is more a question of understanding an illocution than a locution, unless the distinction is meaningless. This may in fact be a misprint, so that the phrase should run "generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the *illocution*." The effect for the illocution is the same either way, however.

<sup>62</sup> *How To* p116

<sup>63</sup> in the case of 'I warn you that' or 'I urge you that'.

and which allows within it no space for divergence or variation<sup>64</sup>. This is uptake, and it is mandatory on the part of the audience.

Thirdly, Austin suggests that we must distinguish between an illocutionary act and the response or sequel which “by convention”<sup>65</sup> some of them invite, whether the response is one or two-way. He cites as examples the illocutionary acts of arguing, ordering, promising, suggesting and asking to, which are ‘one-way’, and the illocutionary acts of offering, asking whether you will and asking ‘Yes or no?’ which are two-way. Austin suggests that if these illocutionary acts initiate the conventional response or sequel, this response “requires a second act by the speaker or another person; and it is a commonplace of the consequence-language that this cannot be included under the initial stretch of action.”<sup>66</sup>

These suggestions, however, are all incorrect. The securing of ‘uptake’ is simply a consequence necessary to the effective performance of the act, and indeed to its recognition as an act. The ‘uptake’ of an illocution is no different from the ‘understanding’ of a perlocution; both are necessary to our ‘realization’ of the act, which makes the act an act, not merely an ‘attempt’. ‘Uptake’, as a distinctly passive response guaranteed by convention before an utterance is uttered, does not exist. There are no unique conventions that produce this unique, mandated response, which requires no constructive creative understanding and recognition.

Moreover, the assumption that ‘taking effect’ is different to producing normal changes presupposes a distinction between ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ consequences, and the ‘conventional’ ‘taking effect’ of an illocution. It is not clear where this distinction lies. The point about illocutionary conventions such as those surrounding baptism or marriage is that they are all ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ in their specific contexts, and rules have a certain (unpredictable) flexibility, as Austin has noted in respect of rugby and “university business” previously. Austin, unlike Searle, does not attempt to list exhaustively the conventions surrounding an illocutionary act, and his use of the concept of ‘convention’ is fluid. Thus, the difference between something ‘taking effect’ and having consequences seems to depend on there being a previously established difference between a normal act and an illocutionary one.

It appears that we can tell the difference between a ‘taking effect’ and a mere ‘consequence’, because one is associated with illocutions while the other is not. However, illocutions in turn are distinguished because they ‘take effect’ while other acts merely have ‘consequences’: there is a certain inter-

---

<sup>64</sup> This gives substance to Derrida’s accusation that Austin’s vision of Speech Act theory requires an absolutely saturated and determinable context.

<sup>65</sup> *How To* p116

<sup>66</sup> *How To* p116.

dependent circularity here. Uptake has only one characteristic: it is what illocutions require. Illocutions have only one principal characteristic: they require only 'uptake'<sup>67</sup>.

The difference might, conceivably, be felt to exist in respect of highly ritualised conventions such as marriage or baptism, which 'take-effect' rather than simply 'have consequences'<sup>68</sup>. However, this highlights one of the problems with *How To* that has been mentioned briefly in chapter one of this thesis: that is, the confusion between rituals and linguistic conventions. The relationship between them is not clearly established: in *How To*, Speech Act theory is a linguistic theory only, but some of Austin's examples are rituals. This leads to some confusion between explicit performatives and ritualised acts with a linguistic element, a confusion which initially crops up when Austin includes "I do (sc. take this woman...)" as a performative, together with "I name this ship", "I ... bequeath my watch" and "I bet"<sup>69</sup>.

The essence of a performative speech act such as 'I promise', is the speaking of convention-based words in an appropriate context. There is then very clearly an overlap with ceremonies and rites, which also tend to involve words, but in which the conventionality and ritual nature of what is done and of the appropriate context become more obvious.<sup>70</sup> While it is clear that some of the highly ritualised conventional activities initially suggested by Austin, such as marriage and naming a ship<sup>71</sup>, are in one sense specifically 'conventional', by which is implied that they are highly ritualised, these are only the 'tip' of a very large 'iceberg' of conventions or presuppositions and assumptions that participate in the creation of our encultured identity<sup>72</sup>.

---

<sup>67</sup> I take this to be Grice's point when he notes, while attacking the notion of uptake in Searle et al, that "his position hardly seems satisfactory when we see that it involves attributing to speakers an intention which is specified in terms of the very notion of meaning which is being analyzed (or in terms of a dangerously close relative of that notion). Circularity seems to be blatantly abroad": Retrospective Epilogue to *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press 1989) p352.

<sup>68</sup> And where the illocutionary conditions seem to approach the definition of a convention as an explicit rule.

<sup>69</sup> All *How To* p5

<sup>70</sup> Further if, as Austin suggests in his second lecture, most performative acts are 'procedures' (See for example *How To* p14) such a definition would imply that all performative acts are conventional, undermining the distinction that Austin subsequently draws between illocutions and other performative acts. G J Warnock, in 'Some Types of Performative Utterance', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973), asserts that Austin, and many others, have in fact confused two very different types of speech act: an "operative" sort of "Mark 1" performative, "linguistically quite heterogeneous ... [which operate] in virtue of non-linguistic conventions" (p74), and a separate class of spoken utterances in which the speaker explicitly indicates that he is performing an action such as warning, which are only conventional in the sense in which all language is conventional (p78, 86), and that these two things are therefore quite distinct.

<sup>71</sup> *How To* p5

<sup>72</sup> This same possible discrepancy also underlies Austin's later identification of other "things we 'do' in some connexion with saying something" (*How To* p104), which seem for him either

The series of acts which Austin uses to establish his initial category of 'performative' acts are in fact very complex ritual actions; they are to marry, name a ship, bequeath a watch and bet<sup>73</sup>. All of these, with the possible exception of the last one, include much more than merely a 'linguistic' dimension, and all are based on a high degree of shared cultural information and assumptions. Marrying, naming, and bequeathing, to be 'felicitous' or successfully performed, involve other cultural rituals as an integral part of the whole formal and legal procedure<sup>74</sup>.

All of the acts Austin begins with are performances in which words, in the right context, are more than descriptive. However, in the examples of marrying, naming, and bequeathing, the act itself cannot be isolated into any specific utterance or combination of words, even in the right circumstances. The utterances are not, or not exclusively, central to the performance of an act that involves a series of utterances and physical actions in a specific context over a period of time<sup>75</sup>.

---

to fall into none or more than one of the three classes of locution, illocution and perlocution; actions or almost-actions such as swearing. Another example is insinuation which "seems to involve some convention, as in the illocutionary act; but we cannot say 'I insinuate... ' and it seems [,] like implying [,] to be a clever effect rather than a mere act" (*How To* p104-105 (my punctuation): according to *How To 2* this line has been reconstructed, based on the notes of Mr George Pitcher (p167)). This is so since, according to Austin, when we swear, although we might say we here use language "for relieving our feelings", there is no relation to "performative formulas and the other devices of illocutionary acts" since "we must notice that the illocutionary act is a conventional act: an act done as conforming to a convention" (*How To* p105). This, however, raises questions about the relationship between 'to insinuate', 'to act', and 'to achieve effects'. There seems, for instance, to be no reason why swearing is not a speech act whose very existence is based on shared cultural-linguistic conventions. As Austin notes "'Swearing' is ambiguous" p105, footnote 1.

<sup>73</sup> *How To* p5

<sup>74</sup> It is not possible to delineate exactly the point at which ritualised performances can be said to be merely 'linguistic' performatives – an act can be either, depending on the context and its specifics (such as betting, which may or may not be done using gestures, rituals etc), and any speech act, since it requires the right context to be effective, has a non-linguistic, cultural element: "that we must admit 'non-linguistic' considerations may seem regrettable, but it also seems inevitable. As we later indicate (and as both Austin and Quine, in their different ways, showed) the search for the purely linguistic or the irreducibly logical, apart from a particular context, seems doomed to failure": Smith and McClendon, 'Religious language after J L Austin', *Religious Studies* 8:1 (1972) p57.

<sup>75</sup> See also modern liturgical scholars on Eucharistic prayers; most would now deny that 'the Institution Narrative' is the 'consecratory bit' of the prayer – they would regard as consecratory the performance of the whole prayer in the midst of the believing community: "New eucharistic rites clearly see the 'Canon' as beginning with the *Sursum corda* and ending with the people's Amen that rounds off the concluding doxology. Partly as a result of the study of Jewish liturgy .., there came a wide acceptance of the theological principle of 'consecration by thanksgiving'." Geoffrey Wainwright, '15: Recent Eucharistic Revision', in C Jones, G Wainwright, E Yarnold SJ and P Bradshaw (eds.), *The Study of Liturgy revised edition* (SPCK, London, 1992) p 333. See also "The Spirit makes the crucified and risen Christ really present to us in the eucharistic meal, fulfilling the promise contained in the words of institution. The presence of Christ is clearly the centre of the eucharist, and the promise

Indeed, with respect to Austin's first suggested performative utterance: "'I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)' – as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony"<sup>76</sup>, not only are these words not the point of transition from being single to being married, but they are not in fact uttered in the course of that ceremony<sup>77</sup>, although 'I do' has become a conventional linguistic shorthand referring to the marriage vows. The editors record that "Austin realized that the expression 'I do' is not used in the marriage ceremony too late to correct his mistake. We have let it remain in the text as it is philosophically unimportant that it is a mistake."<sup>78</sup> However, there is a philosophical significance to this mistake: it is a further demonstration of the fact that marriage is not in fact effected by a simple performative utterance, but is instead a complex cultural ritual, within which the point of transition is hard, perhaps impossible, to isolate with certainty<sup>79</sup>.

There is in terms of 'changes of status' a far greater disparity between the acts of getting married, naming a ship, or bequeathing a watch and the act of promising, than there is between the act of promising, the act of insinuating and the act of persuading, none of which latter group is obviously more conventional than any other. It is not clear why insinuation or implication is not an act, and why 'an effect of language' is not recognized as being an act in or of language using conventions and the like, as in for example my saying of a single man 'Isn't it odd that he has never married'. This, in the right context, is insinuating something about him by using shared social and linguistic conventions<sup>80</sup>.

---

contained in the words of institution is therefore fundamental to the celebration. Yet it is the Father who is the primary origin and final fulfilment of the eucharistic event... Being assured by Jesus' promise in the words of institution that it will be answered, the Church prays to the Father for the gift of the Holy Spirit in order that the eucharistic event may be a reality": 'Eucharist: C – The Eucharist as Invocation of the Spirit', *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No 111*, (World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1982) p13, paragraph 14.

<sup>76</sup> *How To* p5

<sup>77</sup> Neither in the Book of Common Prayer or in contemporary services.

<sup>78</sup> *How To* p5 footnote 2.

<sup>79</sup> In the 1662 Book of Common Prayer order for the "Solemnization of Matrimony" the bride and 'groom declare that they will each take the other "in sickness and in health" etc (response "I will"), then they each recite their vows, following the Minister ("I, N, take thee, N, to my wedded" etc). After that, a ring is given to the bride by the 'groom and blessed, then the Minister says "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder", and after this addresses the congregation in words which include the following: "... I pronounce that they be man and wife together ..." followed by a blessing. At least two and possibly more moments would seem to be possible contenders for the moment of 'status change', if a specific moment for such is sought. As J R Cameron notes, "although we may be able to break down a marriage ceremony, a trial in court, or a football match, into separate acts of individuals, these acts can be understood only as component parts of a larger total piece of action, performed by a number of distinct but co-operating agents": J R Cameron, 'Sentence-Meaning and Speech Acts'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) 99.

<sup>80</sup> The right context being a context in which this sentence is understood, or in which it has 'secured uptake', to adopt Austin's terminology for illocutions. The phrase 'confirmed bachelor' in obituaries used to carry similar weight, contextually.

Moreover, the idea that an illocutionary act such as 'I do' or 'I baptize' can be 'conventionally empowered' to create a change from one condition or state of affairs to another is in fact a characteristic of performativity that is not exclusively 'illocutionary': it is for example part of the function of Art<sup>81</sup> and Ritual<sup>82</sup>. Further, this sort of status-change is not part of the illocutionary acts 'I order' or 'I protest', or at least not in a way any different to its presence in the perlocutionary acts 'I persuaded' or 'I insinuated'. There is generally no 'happy-or-unhappy' sense of 'I baptize' as there is for 'I warn', but this is due to the nature of the conventions that we recognize surrounding the ritual, not because one is an illocutionary verb: in Austin's scheme, they both are<sup>83</sup>.

It does seem contradictory moreover, and indeed conflicts with what Austin has stated elsewhere, to suggest that an order could take effect without being obeyed, or that the 'Yes or no' question is effective if no response is achieved. Although something will probably have been done in these instances, and as Cohen has noted, the "happy" use of these verbs is quite common<sup>84</sup>, the successful completion of even an illocutionary act cannot be achieved without the response, and it is thus at best questionable to assert that "it is a commonplace of the consequence-language that this [response] cannot be included under the initial stretch of action"<sup>85</sup>. Even if the response is described separately, it is an integral part of the one illocutionary action, without which the act cannot be said to have been happily or successfully performed<sup>86</sup>.

---

<sup>81</sup> For example in the work of David Jones (*Epoch and Artist*, London, Faber and Faber, 1959), and Paul Ricoeur – see for example P Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas Christian University Press 1976) or *The Rule of Metaphor* (Routledge, London, 2003). See also Hans-Georg Gadamer "In the experience of art we see a genuine experience (Erfahrung) induced by the work, which does not leave him who has it unchanged, and we enquire into the mode of being of what is experienced in this way"; *Truth and Method*, (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p 91, and again "the implications for the definition of the nature of art emerge when one takes the sense of transformation seriously" *Truth and Method* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1988), p 100 [my copy of the second edition seems to go a trifle awry here].

<sup>82</sup> Tom F. Driver: *The Magic of Ritual*, (San Francisco, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

<sup>83</sup> Indeed, ecclesiastical law concerning baptisms seems expressly designed to ensure that virtually any attempt will be 'happy', by allowing the laity to perform the ritual; the emphasis seems to be on assuming that it has happened, provided water has been poured or sprinkled and the Trinity invoked. Despite this, as Austin notes, things can still 'go wrong': "we might have the wrong name and the wrong cleric": *How To* p23. It should be remembered that Urmson argues that speech acts are not the same thing as performatives (see chapter one).

<sup>84</sup> 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) pp118-137

<sup>85</sup> *How To* p116

<sup>86</sup> In this respect, I disagree entirely with Alston, who believes that the illocutionary-perlocutionary divide, *pace* Austin is "unproblematic, since a perlocutionary act consists in the production of certain effects, whereas, as I will contend throughout, illocutionary acts are not so constituted" W P Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2000) 23-24. Such a view is only possible if 'interior intention', rather than meaning, is one's primary concern.

Indeed, even in the most 'happy-or-unhappy' ritualised actions, there are many 'infelicities' which can arise if for example the Minister drops dead halfway through the service; exactly when is the marriage solemnized, the baby baptised, or the Real Presence consecrated? These rituals all have a complicated and uncertain causality, in which the language of 'validity' abounds, in long-standing and detailed legal or theological arguments. In the case of sacraments or religious rituals such as baptism and marriage, it is moreover generally argued these days that some element of consent or participation is necessary in order that they might be celebrated without dispute<sup>87</sup>.

Even the most apparently 'uptakeable' of illocutionary acts, such as baptisms or naming ceremonies, require a recognition and an understanding to have happened<sup>88</sup>. If no-one understands what a baptism is, it cannot have happened. For a baptism to exist, there needs to be a community that understands there to be such a thing as baptism, and that it has genuinely happened in this case: i.e. that water has been poured and the Trinity invoked by someone who is themselves authorized to perform this ritual. There will inevitably be doubts in some cases, even surrounding a ritual such as baptism, which has been expressly designed by its understanding community to be as foolproof as possible<sup>89</sup>: this is why there is provision for individuals to be conditionally baptized.

Indeed, according to Austin, an illocutionary act may have a "perlocutionary object"<sup>90</sup> or may simply produce a "perlocutionary sequel", but the distinction between a perlocutionary act and an illocutionary act with a perlocutionary object is not clear: as Austin goes on to note, both can be non-verbal, and although illocutions are conventional while perlocutions are supposedly not, Austin admits that "it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end"<sup>91</sup>.

It should also be noted that at this point in his lectures Austin is using, as well as the terminology of happiness and felicity he earlier employed in respect of performatives, the perhaps more deceptively simple idea of 'success'. The use of words such as 'felicity' is an indication of the complexity surrounding the question of the effectiveness of performatives. Austin never satisfactorily addresses the question of what makes a performative effective, as we have discussed, but he does initially note that 'misfires' and 'abuses' are still acts,

---

<sup>87</sup> Babies need to be alive, and generally to have a baptized godparent or sponsor making promises for them, couples need to assent to their marriage, and in contemporary theology it is generally argued that the celebration of the Eucharist requires a congregation to be present and assent in the final 'Amen', or at least a community to be acknowledged – see footnote 75.

<sup>88</sup> As Austin implicitly notes himself – *How To* p23-24.

<sup>89</sup> Any baptized person can baptise another: all that is required is to pour water in the name of the Trinity.

<sup>90</sup> *How To* p117

<sup>91</sup> *How To* p118



although ones sitting in an 'unhappy' relationship to what he imagines as the intention of the actor (a knowledge to which he has artificially God-like or 'authorial' access, of course<sup>92</sup>). Thus the language of 'felicity' is an acknowledgment of the complexity of the issue of what would count as the successful performance of a performative act,

for he *does* promise: the promise here is not even *void*, though it is given *in bad faith*. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement. At most we might make out a case for saying that it implies or insinuates a falsehood or a misstatement (to the effect that he does intend to do something): but that is a very different matter.<sup>93</sup>

However, the use of the phrase "successfully performed" rather elides these complexities, and is itself an indication of the unsatisfactory nature of Austin's attempts to find a guaranteed speech act and to describe the nature of 'uptake'<sup>94</sup>.

Indeed, it is precisely because a perlocutionary verb so explicitly describes, or includes an acknowledgment of, the receiver's actual response, that Yueguo Gu suggests<sup>95</sup> that they are ineligible to be described as acts<sup>96</sup>. Observing that the perlocutionary act of alerting someone seems very close to the illocutionary one of warning them, he suggests that in this instance "the perlocutionary act is not even an act: it is merely a terminology which embraces the consequences of the illocutionary act into its name"<sup>97</sup>. Therefore, for Gu

Austin's notion of ... the total speech act and the total speech situation are distortions of what actually takes place in conversation. The total speech situation must be interpreted in terms of social interaction, in which the speaker and

---

<sup>92</sup> As T Cohen notes in respect of perlocutions: "the kind of situation commonly described by Austin, and apparently thought paradigmatic or obviously normal by him, is one in which what is said wears its force transparently (when enough of the story is told, as it always is by Austin)": 'Illocutions and Perlocutions', *Foundations of Language* 9 (1973) p495.

<sup>93</sup> *How To* p11

<sup>94</sup> Austin himself notes, in the paper 'Other Minds', dating from 1946, and published in *Philosophical Papers*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1979), that the phrase null and void he there uses is "(a useful formula in many cases for avoiding saying either 'he did' or 'he didn't')": p102. Y Gu also notes that Austin's terms can indicate his uncertainty: see his article 'The Impasse of Perlocution', *Journal of Pragmatics* 20 (1993) 405-432, see p410.

<sup>95</sup> In his thesis *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric: An Investigation of the Perlocutionary Phenomenon in Conversation* (Unpublished Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD, Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language, University of Lancaster November 1987), and in his article 'The Impasse of Perlocution', op cit.

<sup>96</sup> R N Gaines ('Doing By Saying: Toward a Theory of Perlocution', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65:2 (1979)) agrees with Gu (see for example p215), although he thinks the concept of the perlocution can be rescued by redefining it to include authorial intention and asserting that it is a part of the illocutionary act, thereby exposing himself to Gu's criticism that he has committed the "*perlocutionary verb fallacy*" of assuming "that linguistic descriptions mirror and hence define acts": 'The Impasse of Perlocution' op cit p425.

<sup>97</sup> *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric* p36.

addressee, who are both socially competent agents of acts, are engaged in conversation. And the total speech act cannot be total without taking the addressee's contribution into account.<sup>98</sup>

For Gu, "to use perlocutionary verbs or expressions to bracket another agent's response-acts and transform them into acts, which are then illegitimately attributed to S alone, constitutes the Perlocutionary-Verb fallacy."<sup>99</sup> Perlocutionary effects "ought to be explained in transactional terms with the recognition of the audience as agents of the effects."<sup>100</sup> Gu also outlaws unintended perlocutionary effects, describing them as "the Effect=Act Fallacy"<sup>101</sup>.

Gu's solution is to abandon the concept of perlocutions in favour of "the notion of the rhetorical transaction"<sup>102</sup>, since he wishes to retain the idea of the illocution. At no stage does he apply his successful demolition of the agent's ownership of the perlocutionary effect, to illocutionary consequences: part of the aim of his thesis is the protection of illocutions from being regarded as the causes of perlocutionary effects<sup>103</sup>. However, he unwittingly demonstrates not merely that perlocutions cannot simply be seen as the acts of a sender or agent, but also that illocutions cannot be thus described<sup>104</sup>.

### **Uptake in Austin.**

#### **2f. Illocutions, Judgement and Context.**

Austin also uses the metaphor of 'Judgement' to distinguish perlocutionary and illocutionary acts, on the grounds that illocutions are uniquely conventional. However, 'judgement' is a concept that is not absolute. It is,

---

<sup>98</sup> *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric* p64

<sup>99</sup> *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric* p65. 'S' is Gu's shorthand term for the speaker or initiating agent.

<sup>100</sup> *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric* p70, see also 'The Impasse of Perlocution' p422: "the so-called perlocutionary effects are not in fact caused by S, but actively produced by H, who has the claim to the agency of the effects. Thus, the perlocutionary act cannot be said to be performed by S alone. It is a joint endeavour between S and H", where H is Gu's term for the Hearer.

<sup>101</sup> *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric* p72, p75, see also 'The Impasse of Perlocution' p423: perlocutionary "effects should not be expounded in terms of causation or the acts performed by S. They ought to be explained in transactional terms with the recognition of hearers as agents of the effects."

<sup>102</sup> See for example *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric* piii, 'The Impasse of Perlocution' p423-424, 428.

<sup>103</sup> 'The Impasse of Perlocution' p427-428

<sup>104</sup> As Campbell asserts: "all speech acts produce some effect upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of those involved in such acts, and, therefore, *all speech acts are perlocutions*", op cit p290. J Sadock also asserts that all speech acts are perlocutions, of which illocutionary acts constitute one subset: "an illocutionary act is a special kind of perlocutionary act ... [to which he assigns the term] sense perlocutions" because their "success depends on the meaning of an utterance". Of that subset called sense perlocutions, illocutionary acts are, because of their reliance on meaning, also "force perlocutions": J M Sadock, *Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts*, (New York, Academic Press, 1974) p153.

rather, a metaphor, referring to a ritualised and conventional process, and like all metaphors it has an inherent fluidity as a concept. Judges can decide according to precedent (pre-existing conventions), but their decisions are always open to being over-ruled on the basis of alternative interpretations. It is not clear how definitive Austin imagines a 'judgement' as being. Indeed, the concept of judgement is used often in hermeneutics, but exactly what is being imagined is not always evident: who is doing the judging, and how might they be over-ruled (if at all)?<sup>105</sup>

Austin himself gives a variety of different impressions. He notes that

difficulties about conventions and intentions must arise in deciding upon the correct description whether of a locution or of an illocution: deliberate, or unintentional, ambiguity of meaning or reference is perhaps as common as deliberate or unintentional failure to make plain 'how our words are to be taken' (in the illocutionary sense). Moreover, the whole apparatus of 'explicit performatives' (see above) serves to obviate disagreements as to the description of illocutionary acts. It is much harder in fact to obviate disagreements as to the description of 'locutionary acts'. Each, however, is conventional and liable to need to have a 'construction' put on it by judges.<sup>106</sup>

This itself acknowledges, not merely the apparent 'conventionality' of *locutionary* meaning, but also that for both illocutions and locutions, there is no guarantee that the meaning of the utterance (whether it is couched in terms of sense and reference or of force) will be understood. Reliance is placed instead on the possibility of judgement.

However, even here Austin notes that "the whole apparatus of 'explicit performatives' serves to obviate disagreements as to the description of illocutionary acts" and he subsequently re-asserts the distinctions between "the locutionary act ... which has a *meaning*; the illocutionary act which has a certain *force* in saying something; [and] the perlocutionary act which is *the achieving of certain effects* by saying something."<sup>107</sup>

For Austin, "illocutionary acts are conventional acts: perlocutionary acts are *not* conventional"<sup>108</sup>. He notes that "perlocutionary acts are not conventional, though conventional acts may be made use of in order to bring off the perlocutionary act. A judge should be able to decide, by hearing what was said, what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed, but not what perlocutionary acts were achieved."<sup>109</sup> Austin's suggestion that "a judge should be able to decide, by hearing..." goes further than simply identifying

---

<sup>105</sup> This observation applies also, as has already been noted, to the use of the words 'convention' and 'context'.

<sup>106</sup> *How To* p114 footnote 1, passage quoted occurring on p115

<sup>107</sup> *How To* p120

<sup>108</sup> *How To* p120

<sup>109</sup> *How To* p121

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

the need for a 'construction to be put on it by judges'<sup>110</sup>. Both suggestions, however, flow from his assumptions with regard to the sender view of meaning and of personality.

Moreover, Austin's proposal that "a judge should be able to decide, by hearing..." is quite incorrect. It implies that a 'third party' could arbitrate on what was meant using shared knowledge of the general locutionary and illocutionary conventions alone. In fact, in the case of either a 'perlocution' or an 'illocution', before the judge could accurately determine how the expression was actually taken (rather than how it appears to have been intended to have been taken on the basis of the words alone, which appearance might be quite misleading), he or she would require some knowledge of the detailed context of the utterance<sup>111</sup>. A judge (or indeed a Judge) can never say for certain what act was performed, but only what act it is reasonable to assume was performed, on the basis of all the available facts, including the context<sup>112</sup>.

The nature of contextual uncertainty is illustrated by the genuinely Judicial circumstances of the case of Derek Bentley. He was hanged because of his involvement in the murder of a Police constable during a bungled break-in at a warehouse in Croydon in 1952. He was arrested with his co-defendant Christopher Craig, who fired the shot that killed PC Miles. However, Craig was only sixteen, and thus legally a juvenile who could not be hanged. Three policemen attested during the trial that Bentley had shouted to Craig "let him have it, Chris". This, the Prosecution alleged, was an (illocutionary) command to Chris to shoot<sup>113</sup>, and helped condemn him to the gallows, since the Judge and Jury took it as such, as did the Home Secretary, who refused appeals for clemency.

Bentley's sister Iris and other campaigners on his behalf have long argued that this phrase should, in the context of all the facts<sup>114</sup>, have been taken as an attempted perlocution seeking to persuade Craig to surrender the weapon, if

---

<sup>110</sup> Although this, too, with its use of 'convention' is probably in the end seen as 'guaranteed'. According to *How To 2* the section beginning 'a judge should be able to decide ...' "is added from Pitcher's notes" (*How To 2* p167), where Pitcher refers to Mr George Pitcher (p166 – see reference to page 52). It is just possible that this accounts for the potential difference between 'having a construction put on it', and 'should be able to decide, by hearing'.

<sup>111</sup> As T Cohen asserts in his 'Illocutions and Perlocutions', *Foundations of Language* 9 (1973) 497ff, where he demonstrates that a judge cannot always decide what illocutions happened on the basis of the words alone, and if the judge is informed about enough circumstances to allow him to determine an illocution, he may then also be able to predict some perlocutions.

<sup>112</sup> And taking the stance of 'the man on the Clapham omnibus' or wherever. See also D Franck, 'Speaking about Speech Acts', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984), who makes a similar point about the impossibility of 'judging' speech acts 'externally', as Point 5 of her article (p89).

<sup>113</sup> "Let him have it" having such a meaning in 1950's gangster films.

<sup>114</sup> Including Bentley's very limited intellect and an apparent mental age of eleven, which made him 'functionally' younger than Craig

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

it was said at all. In 1998 the Court of Appeal quashed Bentley's conviction<sup>115</sup> on the grounds that the original trial Judge was biased against Bentley and misdirected the Jury on points of law. This example serves to illustrate the difficulty even Judges can have (let alone mere 'judges'), in determining the categories of context and thus of language act produced. What counts as relevant information in this case, and who is to decide it?

The question of the intent of the speaker is only revealed through the conventions relating to and the context of the utterance in its dialogue contexts, and sometimes this may never be known<sup>116</sup>. The crucial point to note is that even judgements made by 'proper' Judges with wigs and Courtrooms are not guaranteed; they can be disputed, superseded, rendered obsolete, ignored, overturned on appeal etc<sup>117</sup>. These discussions illustrate that when the word 'judgement' is used, almost metaphorically, in hermeneutics, an enormous amount depends on what one means by (and assumes and imagines as being behind) the word, just as with words like adequacy and meaning. Behind these lie significant presumptions with regard to communication and who it is that speaks and hears.

E D Hirsch provides another example of this 'metaphorical usage'. He suggests that a process of "validation" is necessary "to evaluate the disparate constructions which understanding has brought forward"<sup>118</sup>, and he imagines this process in a judicial manner. He has, indeed, previously acknowledged that "my own preference is for judicial criticism which is based upon valid interpretation"<sup>119</sup>. This interpretation is carried out by "adjudicators"<sup>120</sup> who are experts in the field, able to compare (fairly, it goes without saying, since clearly no judge or adjudicator is ever biased!) "the victorious hypothesis ... with every disparate hypothesis severally". Indeed, "the judge's primary function is not to relish brilliant details of inference but to decide on the most valid principles for generating them" and to "reach an objective conclusion about relative probabilities."<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Which is not the same thing as declaring him innocent: had he been alive, he would probably have been released pending a re-trial.

<sup>116</sup> "There must be a convergence between the things that are meant and the things that are recognized as meant; this will depend on successful modeling of the hearer by the speaker", or on even more reciprocity than Thomason here envisages: R H Thomason, 'Accommodation, Meaning, and Implicature: Interdisciplinary Foundations for Pragmatics', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992) p351.

<sup>117</sup> This is important to bear in mind when Jennifer Hornsby's example of an illocution is discussed in Richard Briggs's *Words in Action*.

<sup>118</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven CT and London, Yale University Press, 1976) p170

<sup>119</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* op cit p161

<sup>120</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* op cit p171

<sup>121</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* op cit p172

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Hirsch thus imagines an objective, clear-sighted expert, in some sense above the fray, and able to discover the truth behind the froth<sup>122</sup>. He is correspondingly somewhat dismissive of advocacy: “the objectivity of such knowledge about texts has been and will continue to be disputed for so long as criticism is marred by its predilection for advocacy without any corresponding predilection for adjudication, but such knowledge is nevertheless objective and founded on well-established principles.”<sup>123</sup>

However, Hirsch subsequently concedes that

the advocates have the task of bringing forward evidence favourable to their side and unfavourable to their opponents. In doing so, they might bring to light evidence which a judge might not have thought to consider. But without a judge all those relevant pieces of evidence float uselessly. Advocates are needed ... However, unless advocates sometimes serve as judges, none of this activity will actually contribute to knowledge.<sup>124</sup>

It is interesting to observe that Hirsch here imagines knowledge as being judicial, and does not note that any judicial process is potentially flawed, not merely because adversarial systems depend on the quality of the advocate as much as on the strength or extent of the evidence, but also because any judicial system will possess certain prejudices and assumptions. Hirsch imagines advocates for various interpretations engaging in judicial procedures, bringing “forward nearly all the important relevant evidence”<sup>125</sup> which can then be adjudicated on the basis of “objectively defined and generally accepted principles.”<sup>126</sup> This, however, may be a rather rose-tinted view of the judicial process<sup>127</sup>.

As Pratt observes “any linguistic theory projects a kind of ideal speaker, and one amusing though quite irresponsible way of characterizing linguistic theories is to speculate on the ideal speaker they suggest”<sup>128</sup>. This is true not merely of the ideal speaker of linguistic theories but also of the idealized notion of “judgement” they suppose. Hirsch imagines an adjudicating expert, Austin a Judge, and Vanhoozer and Ward have at their back the Celestial Judge who knows the secrets of all hearts. Derrida, Duff, Briggs, Ward and

---

<sup>122</sup> How much more stable and trustworthy is the calm and clear-sighted view of the expert, perhaps in his well-appointed Senior Common Room, than the tumult of the rabble below!

<sup>123</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* op cit p173

<sup>124</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* op cit p197

<sup>125</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* op cit p182

<sup>126</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* op cit p183

<sup>127</sup> See for example J A G Griffith: *The Politics of the Judiciary*, (Glasgow, Fontana Press, 1985), or Stanley Fish’s own work on the ‘creativity’ of judicial decision-making.

<sup>128</sup> ‘The Ideology of Speech Act Theory’, *Centrum NS* 1.1 (1981) p5. She suggests that “for speech-act theory we could project an Oxford cricket player, or maybe a Boy Scout, an honorable guy who always says the right thing and really means it” while “in my own book on speech acts and literature, the ideal speaker that emerges is probably someone like Eliza Doolittle in a Boy Scout suit.”

Vanhoozer all agree that judgements can be made which enable communications to mean adequately, but they draw entirely different implications from this, because judgement and adequacy have such different connotations for them<sup>129</sup>.

Derrida stresses and re-stresses the hesitation, and the fact that the possibility of a mistake is ever-present and never entirely ineradicable in any situation. It is this permanent risk and potential for hiatus which the hermeneutics of for example Briggs or Searle ignore, because they stress the extent to which communication actually happens, without recognizing the fact that even when it happens 'successfully', it may not be complete or to the elimination of other possibilities. Austin, as ever, straddles both groups, sometimes appearing in both. His methodology and style are clearly on the 'apophatic' side of views of judgement, while his illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction, and indeed his exclusion of 'etiologies' from language, are far more confident in their search for 'guaranteeability', as is his use of the metaphor of 'guaranteeability' itself, in his use of the idea of judgement: "a judge should be able to decide ..." <sup>130</sup>.

### 3. Uptake in Donald Evans's *The Logic of Self-Involvement*

This problem with the idea of 'uptake', and with the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction, is inherited by those who follow Austin. The majority of subsequent scholars simply take the distinction as read, and while they may revise it to suit their particular purposes, they do not question the ultimate validity of the distinction *per se*. This is certainly true of Donald Evans. He discusses "performative force and causal power" in section 9<sup>131</sup> of his first chapter, "the Performative force of language". I agree with Evans that "the performative force of an utterance on a particular occasion is part of its meaning"<sup>132</sup> and thus I agree when he suggests that Austin's restriction of meaning to sense and reference only "does not seem to me to be warranted"<sup>133</sup>.

I also agree with Evans that there can be a distinction between on the one hand "what *I* mean in saying *S*" and on the other the belief that

the words of *S* are such that a reasonable person, who knows the relevant linguistic conventions, would in the specific context *take S* to have the meaning (that is, the performative force) which is made explicit in *P*; otherwise *S* does not

---

<sup>129</sup> So much depends on where one stands, who one trusts, and by whom (if anyone) one feels oppressed. Is Post-modernist suspicion liberating or tyrannical? It could be subversive of an Authoritarian orthodoxy, or it could be an Authoritarian orthodoxy of its own: your view of this will affect the meaning of anything Derrida has written.

<sup>130</sup> *How To* p121 – see previous discussion

<sup>131</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* op cit p68ff

<sup>132</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* op cit p69

<sup>133</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* Ibid footnote 1

*have* this meaning, even though I mean (that is, intend) S to have this meaning.<sup>134</sup>

But I believe that Evans is incorrect when he therefore implies that one can predict with certainty, having made all the caveats he lists, what will happen; and therefore that he is also incorrect to imply that meaning can be asserted to be equal to intention before the phrase has been uttered. This is partly because tone can vary meaning, but more importantly because it is what an utterance is taken-as that determines its meaning and intention. A phrase or utterance has no meaning until it is 'taken-as' something, it has only the potentiality of its 'dictionary-meaning' possibilities, which may or may not be in some way realised in its unique particularity of expression and context.

Evans then goes on to distinguish "causal" use from meaning. This distinction is necessary because for Evans meaning, including force, "depends on conventions of language and society. But whether or not what I say alarms, pleases and inspires, and so on, is simply a matter of fact."<sup>135</sup> But it is not at all clear why something that could be intended or accidental as an outcome, such as alarming, isn't just as much a matter of linguistic and social convention as whether or not the same sentence warns me. Even if Evans intends the distinction to be demonstrated in the event of a misunderstanding of meaning, because if I misunderstand the utterance I miss the meaning and force only, nonetheless the distinction fails here too, because "causal" effects can be intended but unsuccessful or successful, and 'performative' results can be unintended. All the possibilities are open in either case.

Whether or not an utterance *did* alarm me is a matter of fact, but so is whether or not it *did* warn me. Whether or not an utterance *will* alarm me can be predicted but not with certainty, and will not be known until the utterance is uttered: the same holds true for the warning – whether or not it *will* warn me won't be known until after you utter the warning. The fact that we can have both a happy and happy-or-unhappy sense of the word 'warning' obscures the fact that neither alarming nor warning will have taken place unless some have been alarmed or warned, and that the meaning of what took place can be debated in either case. Neither is more certain than the other to have occurred.

The difference seems for Evans to be that 'causal' use is not part of meaning because it is less 'certain', less tied-in to the sentence, than meaning<sup>136</sup>. The illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction based on the supposed predictability of the illocution is creeping in here again, and Evans is simply trying to divorce performative force from causation, just as Austin does, as discussed in previous sections of this thesis.

---

<sup>134</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p69

<sup>135</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* Section 9.2 p70 ff op cit.

<sup>136</sup> This applies to Evans and Austin



However it seems undeniable that conventions of language are as much 'matters of fact' as my emotional response to an event, and the force of a 'linguistic convention' is surely no more or less 'causal' than the use of rhetoric to stir emotion? Indeed, it is hard to determine the sense in which an illocution is *not* causal, in that it is caused by the understood use of language and linguistic or cultural conventions, just as is rhetorical success. It seems unlikely that *anything* linguistic could be causal in the same sense in which a switch has a causal (mechanical) effect on a current, apart perhaps from simply the effect of creeping up behind someone and saying "boo!" This might arguably constitute a purely 'causal' linguistic effect, where the result is a physical reaction caused by shock, rather than through 'cultural' causal assumptions. Jumping when someone says "boo", however, is hardly a response to a perlocutionary act: it is a response to an aural stimulus.

Moreover, even saying "boo" could possibly achieve a different response from saying "duck", "four"<sup>137</sup> or "look out". If there is, as seems possible, a potential difference between the act of shouting "boo" and that of screaming in someone's ear, this suggests that no 'linguistic' act, which we might loosely define as any use of *words* rather than mere noise, can be anything but 'linguistically causal' in part at least: there are just different, and overlapping, reasons for linking cause and effect, ranging from physical stimuli to 'understanding'. All linguistically achieved effects are causal: 'causal' and 'performative' here seems somewhat analogous to the idea of brute and institutional facts, or of regulative and constitutive rules and, like these oppositional concepts, it rather over-simplifies a complicated and shifting pattern of identity, as Thiselton notes himself<sup>138</sup>.

Evans follows, and cites, Austin when he notes that

there are many performatives which require a minimal degree of apprehension by some hearer, for example, 'admit', 'warn', 'apologize', 'thank', 'promise'; but this is a pre-condition of both the performative force and the causal power; it is not something that blurs the distinction between the two. On the whole, the distinction is clear and sharp.<sup>139</sup>

In this, he reflects the confusion that Austin incurs in his attempts to provide an adequate illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction. For Evans, the distinction seems to be between what is public (illocutions) and what is

---

<sup>137</sup> On a golf course

<sup>138</sup> The effect of the switch is an example of the causal that Thiselton gives in his Review Article: 'Speech Act Theory and the Claim that God Speaks: Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Divine discourse*', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997) p103. However, as Thiselton later concludes, "the usual distinctions about cognitive/non-cognitive, action/knowledge, causal/conventional, expressive/communicative remain useful only with the most careful and rigorous qualification" given the social and institutional context of human life (p104).

<sup>139</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p71

possibly unique and private, applicable as an experience only to you, unpredictably (perlocutions). This, however, isn't clear, and Evans simply asserts the clarity of the distinction between causality and performativity, despite both requiring "apprehension"; he doesn't demonstrate it. As with Austin, the overriding necessity for the distinction is to buttress the idea that some meanings are 'begotten', and that there is a kind of guarantee as to their apprehension, which is implicit in their existence.

In section 9.3, on Exercitives and causal power (exercitives being a particular kind of illocution "where the speaker brings about a conventional state of affairs in saying what he does"<sup>140</sup>: where he in effect exercises conventional authority to appoint, order or otherwise authorise something, hence the name), Evans attempts to deny the link between the "intended results" of an exercitive uttered with performative force, and the causal power of the same utterance, on the grounds that there are in a performative exercitive two distinct intentions: the intention that an utterance be an order, and the intention that it order someone to act in a certain way.

As I have already suggested<sup>141</sup>, it seems incredible to suppose that a performative could be complete without a performance, and Evans is here beguiled by the existence of 'happy-or-unhappy' verbs, as Austin was. Moreover, it seems perverse and unnecessarily convoluted, to suggest that in any action I have in fact two overlapping intentions. The intention that I utter an order necessarily includes the intention that the order be obeyed, since obedience is constitutive of the existence of an order. It should be noted that for Evans, as for Austin less explicitly, interior intention has returned to "duplicate the play"<sup>142</sup> and to appear, incorrectly, to determine and validate action.

I know that my utterance has been successful, or felicitous, or happy, as an order because of the actions that follow, and I will only know that the order has been successful, and the order will only have been successful, if 'the appropriate actions' occur<sup>143</sup>. To say, 'I ordered him, and the order was successful, but he didn't obey', only makes sense if the order was accepted by the society or in the context concerned, and if the disobedience leads to appropriate consequences<sup>144</sup>. An order or decree whose disobedience incurs no consequences is not an order at all, merely a 'purported' or 'attempted' order<sup>145</sup>. But this status is not absolute or unchanging<sup>146</sup>.

---

<sup>140</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p71

<sup>141</sup> In discussing the existence of 'happy-or-unhappy' illocutionary verbs as identified by L J Cohen

<sup>142</sup> *How To 2* p10

<sup>143</sup> That is to say, the actions I and others consider to be the appropriate response to 'an order'.

<sup>144</sup> Courts martial or the like

<sup>145</sup> As the examples of James Blunt and Stanislav Petrov referred to in the previous chapter indicate: they ignored orders the issuing of which were subsequently ignored by the ordering hierarchy, with no further ostensible consequences.

Orders issued by the revolutionary Provisional Government in their tents in the wilderness, which go unnoticed, unreported, and ignored beyond their own forest clearing, may yet come to be enacted, and thus come to be recognised and take effect, when the revolutionary army sweeps into the capital on a wave of tanks and popular acclaim a few years down the line. Until that point, they have taken effect only in the area/s controlled by the rebels. They cannot then be called orders, except in the forest clearing, because they have not taken effect and are not being implemented, except in the forest clearing.

It may be that the Provisional Government's Decrees never get enacted beyond the forest clearing. It may also be that after the revolution, consequences are incurred for all those who ignored the decrees when they were first issued all those years before. All of this is possible. But the existence of decrees depends on the recognised *and effective* authority of the issuing authority, which inescapably includes the extent to which it obtains obedience and gets its decrees implemented. In the forest clearing, the Provisional Government's decrees may aim at and claim national obedience, but they do not have it, and are thus not national decrees, though they may claim to be so<sup>147</sup>. When they are enforced retrospectively, they become national decrees at that point if they are effectively enforced and obeyed. But if the retrospective enforcement leads to a successful counter-revolution, the decrees, though 'legal', cease to exist effectively at that point<sup>148</sup>.

The 'success of a decree' includes its effect – its being obeyed – which is an inescapable part of its existence. Decrees that are lacking in some constitutional nicety, but which are nonetheless obeyed, are decrees far more securely than those Evans imagines, which are not null and void, and are thus in his view 'proper decrees', but which remain entirely ineffective. A 'proper decree' is one that has public recognition. Otherwise there is nothing to stop me issuing decrees governing national life from my sitting room. I can call these documents 'decrees', and affix them to as many lamp-post as I like, but they do not become decrees unless they acquire authority, any more than a 'language' I have made up, and which is known only to me, can be called a language, unless it becomes learnt by others, and acquires 'life'.

---

<sup>146</sup> As Searle notes when he observes that "the secret of understanding the continued existence of institutional facts is simply that the individuals directly involved and a sufficient number of members of the relevant community must continue to recognize and accept the existence of such facts. ... The moment, for example that all or most of the members of a society refuse to acknowledge property rights, as in a revolution or other upheaval, property rights cease to exist in that society": (London, Penguin Books, 1996) p117.

<sup>147</sup> Just as the government of Taiwan used to legislate for mainland China, and the Chinese Communist government likewise legislated for Taiwan.

<sup>148</sup> And even without a counter-revolution, the legality of such revolutionary decrees is a vexed issue, as it was in the English Civil War, and is in Egypt now: on what grounds can King Charles I, or Presidents Mubarak or Morsi, be tried, and according to what constitution?

Indeed, the scenario Evans imagines is, as Austin would say, 'unhappy', in that he is imagining the issuing of Royal Decrees in 1641 at the time of the dispute between Charles I and Parliament which lead to the English Civil War. In such situations, a whole variety of scenarios are possible. The decree of the King is presumably accepted as effective by his supporters. They believe it to be a decree, and they act accordingly, which is how we know they believe it to be a decree. If we were to ask them, they would say 'it is a decree', and they would seek to enforce it universally, on the whole country.

The King's opponents, by contrast, do not believe it to be a lawful decree. They believe the King is acting illegally or improperly, beyond the powers allowed him by God, or the laws of the land, or both. They ignore the decree, and seek to prevent it being enforced on themselves or others.

There may be some (many?) who are uncertain, in such tense political times, about the legality and appropriateness of the decree. They do not know whether to obey the decree or not. They do so uncertainly, or half-heartedly, or not all, and wait to see what happens next, or who has the largest and most aggressive body of followers in close proximity to them. This illustrates the not uncommon situation of uncertainty, in which a decree has a kind of half-life. It exists in parts of the country, and not in others, and its effectiveness varies.

A situation, however, in which *nobody* obeys a decree, destroys the claim that a decree has been issued, or demonstrates that the issuing authority has lost all claim to authority at all in the area concerned. It stretches the term 'takes effect' beyond all 'ordinary usage' to suggest that for example the 'Old Pretender' James Francis Edward Stuart<sup>149</sup> issued decrees that 'took effect' from his court in Rome after 1715. They may have been obeyed by his court of adherents in Rome, and in secret and in the hearts of his Jacobite followers in Britain, but they clearly did not 'take effect' in any meaningful way.

If 'taking effect' "does not mean that certain legal or obedient actions did in fact take place"<sup>150</sup> it is very hard indeed to imagine what it does mean; all of which illustrates the incoherence inherent in Evans's attempt to distinguish between 'causal power' which takes effect, and 'performative force' which has 'intended results', but where the results do not affect the existence and intention of the act<sup>151</sup>.

---

<sup>149</sup> Son of James II, and known as James III to Jacobites and non-Jurors.

<sup>150</sup> *The Logic of Self-Involvement* p72

<sup>151</sup> Alston falls into the same confusion when he suggests that illocutionary acts have nothing to do with effects: W P Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2000) p23-24.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Evans also tries to distinguish the meaning of an utterance from the causal effects that may be intended, by divorcing meaning from the specific context of an utterance. He suggests that my intention to embarrass you by saying “we met at the Stork Club” is not part of the meaning of the utterance, merely part of my intention – what I meant, not what the utterance meant. The utterance “we met at the Stork Club” means simply that we met at that particular location: the influence or effects this utterance might have, which the audience need to understand, are (for Evans) distinct.

In this, however, he is simply reducing meaning to sense and reference, and eliminating ‘force’, which is another word, effectively, for the contextual applicability, or actual meaning, of the utterance, in that particular context. It is assuming that the meaning of “we met at the Stork Club” is the same as one of its ‘dictionary meanings’, not the meaning it actually had when uttered. However, the meaning of that phrase when uttered will not exist until the utterance is spoken and recognised, and it may mean several different things at the same time.

This is most helpfully illustrated by the very sentence Evans uses, with its reference to the Stork Club. Spoken in New York, or to a New Yorker, certainly when *The Logic of Self-Involvement* was published in 1963, the assumption would doubtless have been that the New York nightclub on East 53<sup>rd</sup> Street was intended. This was apparently a well-known society venue until it closed in the mid 1960’s. It might not be immediately obvious why this was embarrassing, or intended to be so, though there are doubtless circumstances in which it could be<sup>152</sup>. Here, in this North American context, the meaning of the utterance relates to this location.

I suspect, however, that this is not what Evans intends. In the context of his argument, it is likely that he intends to refer to the British Soho strip joint called the Stork Club which, certainly in the 1960’s, might well have been a more embarrassing venue in which to be seen<sup>153</sup>. But the possible confusion here, since both clubs have I believe long since closed, underlines the point that the meaning of this precise utterance depends very much on its particular context. In the one case it seems potentially much more embarrassing and controversial an assertion than in the other, where it might even be a compliment, suggesting that you move in such elevated circles. By contrast for me, reading Evans’s book for the first time in 2006, it was necessary to search on the internet to find out what the Stork Club might be: the phrase has long since lost any capacity to embarrass, in Britain or North America.

Assuming for the moment that the strip club was the one to which Evans intended to refer, it is also quite possible to imagine, not merely that the

---

<sup>152</sup> For an ardent prohibitionist, perhaps, or someone supposed to have been elsewhere at the time, or who was there committing adultery.

<sup>153</sup> Before they became a much more common sight on British high streets.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

statement was intended to be embarrassing in 1963, but that this sentence in particular contexts could have meant many other things, and been intended to do so. Among this gamut of possibilities the context will determine which ones apply. Given the context of his argument, Evans assumes that such a statement can only be embarrassing, and can only be so intended. This is, however, not true.

I can deliberately embarrass you by saying “we met at the Stork Club” – I can also accidentally embarrass you, and whether or not either happens is contextual. I can succeed or fail in my intention (so far as I know it myself): but my intention is not the same as the meaning of the phrase, which could mean various different things. It could mean, ‘I intend to embarrass you, and/or insult and damage you’; or it could mean rather something along the lines of ‘aren’t we both jack-the-lads’; or it could simply be a relatively ‘neutral’ statement of past events. The results an utterance has constitute part or all of the meaning of the utterance, for an order as for an utterance meant to embarrass. The difference is in the context and cultural conventions in play. For example, the utterance here will have a different meaning, potentially, if said to a bishop, a stripper, or a gangster, and depending on your role and relation to the person addressed.

As L J Cohen notes, and as I have already quoted him as suggesting,

if it makes sense to discuss the meanings of English sentences, as grammarians, lexicographers and logicians often do, then it looks as though any individual utterance of ‘it is raining’ may be ascribed both a meaning, derived immediately from the meaning of the English sentence ‘it is raining’, and also an illocutionary force, depending on such variable factors as the intonation with which the sentence has been uttered. But on a stricter phonetic analysis here we have not just one sentence of spoken English, but at least two... The difference between a rising and a falling intonation has as much right to affect the classification of individual utterances into English sentences as has the difference of sound between ‘raining’ and ‘hailing’.<sup>154</sup>

Cohen essentially here suggests that ‘the direct meaning’, which I refer to as the dictionary meaning/s, has no necessary bearing on the meaning as uttered and heard. This actual meaning of ‘it is raining’ will depend not merely on intonation, but on all sorts of other contextual factors too, such as: was the speaker planning to go out for a picnic; has he placed a bet on there being a dry day; has there been a five month drought; does he intend to frolic in the rain; has he been arguing about the likeliness of precipitation with a friend?<sup>155</sup>

Likewise, in Evans’s example, to say ‘we met at the Stork Club’ is not necessarily embarrassing, although it may be, and it may or not be intended

<sup>154</sup> ‘Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) p126

<sup>155</sup> This list is not exhaustive!

to achieve that result, but what it does mean will depend on context and circumstances. The meaning such a phrase has, will depend on how it is taken, by the speaker, by the hearers, and by the person addressed. 'How it is taken' is not divorced from estimations and assumptions concerning the intention with which it was said, but neither is it directly analogous to those ideas. Evans goes astray, like Austin, by concentrating on meaning as determined by the speaker, rather than by correctly recognising meaning's collaborative nature<sup>156</sup>.

It is not possible to divorce causal and performative power on the lines Evans suggests, by trying to distinguish causal effects from meaning. Causal effects, or indeed, simply 'effects', can be distinguished from intention, in some circumstances, but both meaning and intention are determined by the effects the utterance has: these may not be unvarying or unanimous, but they will constitute the meaning of that phrase in those circumstances<sup>157</sup>, and what is linguistic and cultural will always be to a degree institutional and not merely 'brutishly causal'. Any act needs to be understood to exist, and this understanding is always an active response from a specific cultural and linguistic context: thus there is an element of conventionality about all acts, and the blanket performative/causal distinction must be questioned.

#### **4. The concept of the Perlocution in the work of Anthony Thiselton**

Unlike Evans, Thiselton recognises the nature of understanding as an active, 'institutional' process<sup>158</sup>. However, in following Evans he still creates some

---

<sup>156</sup> Which Seale is forced to acknowledge in *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, Penguin Books, 1996), when discussing 'counting as'; "the entire argument of this chapter has produced a strange result. I am not entirely comfortable with it, but here it is. The move from X to Y [that X counts as Y] is already linguistic in nature because once the function is imposed on the X element, it now symbolises something else, the Y function. This move can exist only if it is collectively represented as existing. The collective representation is public and conventional ..." p72. Of course, this fatally undermines the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction.

<sup>157</sup> As I discuss in more detail in the following chapters of the thesis.

<sup>158</sup> *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: the collected works and new essays of Anthony Thiselton* (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on Religion. Collected works), (Aldershot UK, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006). p 26 - "Gadamer's major point, like that of Wittgenstein, is that *only as part of the very process of understanding can we tell in each case, and not in advance, what counts as an act or process of understanding.*" I absolutely agree with this, and think that for Thiselton this poses immediately the problem of how in this case to conceive the illocution-perlocution distinction, and the uptake-understanding divergence. I should note here that it is not the illocution per se that is a problem: the illocution, as a contextually-created social act, as it were, is fine. But what is very problematic is the attempt to distinguish this from the perlocution, because to do so, unveils or reveals a whole load of distinctions that are very suspect. If the illocution and the perlocution must be distinguished, then the problems arise. And why must they be distinguished? In the end, simply because the assumption is that for illocutions meaning is begotten, and thus to an extent guaranteed before it is spoken.

problems for himself, exemplified when he suggests, in his essay 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda'<sup>159</sup>, that

Jesus did not rely on mere causal power in language. Perlocutions operate by the causal power of psychology and rhetoric, and may readily be confused ... with the perlocutionary force of sheer assertiveness. This can degenerate into rhetorical wheedling or into verbal bullying, and stands a thousand miles away from the authority of Jesus. Illocutions depend on other factors, especially on the institutional role and authority of the speaker to perform the act.

The words of Jesus become effective as valid and operative speech-acts because he is the anointed one, appointed as God's elect to mediate divine forgiveness, divine judgment, divine commission. Divine promise, divinely authorized freedom and pledges of divine love. Thus when he says to the paralytic 'Your sins are forgiven' (Mk. 2:5; Lk 5:20; cf Mt 9:2), the speech-act operates with illocutionary force (*i.e.*, in the saying of it, not merely *by* the saying of it), because Jesus is who he is. Ahead of his time, Karl Barth was entirely correct to insist that speech of God is act, and act of God is speech, and that this is bound up with what linguistic theorists call institutional states of affairs but which Barth expounded in terms of divine decree, divine election and covenant promise.<sup>160</sup>

There are a couple of difficulties here, in addition to the causal-institutional distinction Thiselton takes from Evans. One concerns the description of perlocutions, which seem here to be identified on the grounds of ethics as much as linguistics, and which are given a rather moral 'flavour', as though what primarily distinguished them was their immorality rather than any linguistic or conventional factors<sup>161</sup>.

The other concerns the nature of Jesus' 'illocutionary' authority. With regard to this last point, the first thing to note is that proving Jesus' institutional authority, and therefore His ability to perform the illocutions Thiselton mentions rather than to blaspheme, is rather the point of the Gospels, and lies at the centre of His dispute with other areas of authority in Judaism, and in His social setting. Mark's Gospel itself suggests that even for Jesus, His authority had to be recognised to be effective<sup>162</sup>. Christians say of Jesus 'He is the Messiah; therefore He has authority to forgive sins'. But plenty of people who witnessed Jesus forgiving and healing thought to themselves 'who is *he*

---

<sup>159</sup> in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) pp 107-141.

<sup>160</sup> 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda' op cit p132

<sup>161</sup> I note here Gadamer's observation that "I find it frighteningly unreal when people like Habermas ascribe to rhetoric a compulsory quality that one must reject in favor of unconstrained, rational dialogue. This is to underestimate not only the danger of the glib manipulation and incapacitation of reason but also the possibility of coming to an understanding through persuasion, on which social life depends": *Truth and Method* op cit p593.

<sup>162</sup> Mark 6:4-6 "And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief." RSV



to forgive sins?' He was unable to perform those 'illocutions', precisely because to them He was not the Messiah<sup>163</sup>.

We, reading as Christians, have already been persuaded that Jesus is the Messiah, and therefore for us He has the necessary institutional authority: He has the charism from God. This persuasion, which is a perlocutionary effect, is a function of and an intention of the Gospels. But, as with the textual criticism and the question of self-involvement we discussed in a previous chapter, this response is a question of the kind of readers we are, and the kind of reading we are engaged in.

Similarly, in discussing Luke's Christology in his Gospel, Thiselton asserts that Luke (and Jesus) shun "explicit rhetoric urging Christological claims"<sup>164</sup> because "the performing of acts on the basis of *causal force* constitutes in essence an *act of power through self-assertion*"<sup>165</sup>, relying rather on "illocutionary acts which rest on institutional roles [which] serve their purpose as *acts which point by implication away from the self to some source of authority which lies beyond the self alone*"<sup>166</sup>.

However, the point about the majority of the acts that Jesus does is that they presume institutional authority, and are only effectively performed if that is present. If Jesus is not the Messiah, or sent from God, He has no authority to forgive sins<sup>167</sup>, and His healings are performed by demonic rather than Divine institutional forces and authority. Therefore, His performance of that act is in itself a claim to an identity and an institutional role. The performance of Messianic acts is an act with the 'perlocutionary' aim of persuading the onlookers that He is the one in whom they should have faith, and the recounting of those stories is likewise a perlocutionary, persuasive

---

<sup>163</sup> Mark 3:21-22 "And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, "He is beside himself." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Be-el'zebul, and by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." RSV

<sup>164</sup> 'Christology in Luke, Speech-Act Theory, and the Problem of Dualism in Christology after Kant' in J B Green and M Turner (eds.) *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) p462.

<sup>165</sup> 'Christology in Luke' op cit p463.

<sup>166</sup> 'Christology in Luke' op cit p463.

<sup>167</sup> Luke 5:20-26: "And when he saw their faith he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you." And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, "Who is this that speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?" When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, "Why do you question in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins" he said to the man who was paralyzed "I say to you, rise, take up your bed and go home." And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God. And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today." RSV See also Luke 7:48-50: And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." RSV

(Evangelistic) one. Thus, Jesus is performing a perlocutionary act, albeit a non-linguistic one, which is indeed intended to draw attention to Himself, and to Him who sent Him, together.

Jesus often appears reluctant to state His identity plainly, or have others do so, for reasons we can speculate upon, but these do not I suggest include a belief that the use of causal language is 'immoral', but rather because He can be more persuasive in Himself. He is trying to show people the Kingdom, not merely describe it. If saying does not serve Jesus' purposes, this is not because of something specific to the nature of linguistic perlocutions, but because in Jesus' particular context, testifying to Himself verbally won't work: after all, even His illocutionary speech acts, or institutionally-authorized ones, if you prefer that description (as I do!), are not evidence for those who do not already believe. They could only be evidence for who Jesus (or Luke) *thinks* He is.

It also is not clear why Thiselton thinks that a perlocutionary act relies on an act of power, as opposed to an act that is institutional, given that perlocutions are context-dependent. For Jesus the point is that He could, presumably, have stood up and said plainly "I am the Messiah"<sup>168</sup>. Equally, He could have demonstrated His identity plainly by acts of power<sup>169</sup>. But the miracle of, for example, turning stones into bread, would hardly have been a perlocution, though it surely would have constituted an act of causal power, and would doubtless have been highly persuasive<sup>170</sup>.

Alternatively Jesus, as He does in John's Gospel, can spend a long time engaging in a perlocutionary discussion about being the bread of life<sup>171</sup>, presumably trying to persuade, but equally knowing that some will turn away because it is a hard saying, and only those whom God calls will come. This perlocutionary, rhetorical Jesus is hardly engaging in an act of power, particularly compared with the preceding miracle of the loaves, though He is asserting things about Himself (such as that He is the bread of life) which

---

<sup>168</sup> which in some ways He did in the synagogue at Nazareth: Luke 4:16-21 RSV: "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

And the Father more or less makes a causal act of power when at Jesus' baptism the heavens open and He declares "thou art my son ...".

<sup>169</sup> This is what the temptations in the wilderness represent, according to some scholars.

<sup>170</sup> As would a resurrection appearance in the middle of Pilate's tribunal or the Sanhedrin.

<sup>171</sup> John 6:25-71

others simply cannot believe or accept. So Thiselton's illocutionary-perlocutionary, causal-institutional distinction seems unclear.

This is not to say that I disagree with Thiselton's conclusions about Jesus, or Christology in general, merely that I disagree with his use here of the categories of speech-act theory, and don't think they are helpful – indeed, I think that they lead to misunderstanding<sup>172</sup>, since all of the things that Thiselton asserts about what Luke is doing 'Christologically' in pages 467-8 of his article, which may well be correct, amount really to saying simply that Luke is seeking to persuade us of these things, which is of course a perlocutionary action.

The Gospel of Luke has, if one wishes to use these terms, *prima facie* perlocutionary force, since it was written to persuade that Jesus is the Christ, and has participated in doing so many times. It does this in various ways, including by showing how Jesus Himself did all sorts of things that only the Messiah had the authority to do, or could do. To suggest that Jesus performs actions in the Gospel of Luke, that only the Messiah could do, seems highly plausible. Further, to suggest that we in reading are meant to grasp this implied status and role, is equally likely. But therefore it seems inescapable that Luke the author is trying actively to persuade us that Jesus is the Messiah.

Thus, in depicting Jesus performing various acts such as forgiving, exorcising, etc, which we might want to bracket together as socially-constrained actions called illocutions, Luke is performing a larger persuasive act, which we should then call a perlocution, although this too is an action reliant on various social conventions such as language, writing, narrative, the authorial voice, etc, as discussed in chapter three of this thesis.

Thiselton refers to Evans for the distinction between "*institutional authority* and *causal force*", and outlines the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions as constituting the difference between the "*illocutionary force*" of actions assuming an "*institutional state of affairs*" and the "*perlocutionary force*" of causal persuasion such as rhetoric<sup>173</sup>. However, the difference between the two sorts of act in the examples that Thiselton cites, lies not in language but in context and society.

There clearly is a distinction between the verdict of a court backed up by institutional and social opinion<sup>174</sup>, and a barrister's argument, seeking to persuade<sup>175</sup>. But the distinction is one of role, not of linguistic usage, or 'rhetoric'. A judge could use, in pronouncing judgement, the most rhetorically

---

<sup>172</sup> In addition, I don't really see why he thinks they are illuminating.

<sup>173</sup> 'Christology in Luke' op cit p462

<sup>174</sup> Which Thiselton notes has "*illocutionary force*" 'Christology in Luke' op cit p462

<sup>175</sup> Which has "*perlocutionary force*" if it "was sufficiently persuasive" op cit p462.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

persuasive of language, because no judgement is given in isolation: every judgement has an element of persuasiveness about it, to explain why the judge is passing the sentence or coming to the decision that they are, with a view to higher courts and the possibility of appeal; the judge's career; the newspapers; and legal precedents.

Likewise, a barrister could be as perfunctory or plain-speaking as they like; their job is to present arguments on their client's behalf, and expose the weaknesses in opposing positions. It is not the language that distinguishes, but the stance we have towards the speaker. The judge may well seek to be persuasive in his language and intention; indeed he may persuade his hearers of many things, including his own correct decision and wisdom. His ability to declare a verdict depends on, and is circumscribed by, his social role, as is the barrister's: the judge couldn't sentence to death (in this country), and the barrister can't, while acting as counsel, also give judgement.

What makes the difference between an illocution and a perlocution here is the role the speakers are playing, and the social authority they have. When a judge says "He is clearly guilty", this phrase is likely in most cases to have a different meaning than the same phrase uttered by a barrister – but for example it won't necessarily if the judge is summing up to a jury and says to them, 'if on the basis of the evidence you find that so-and-so occurred, then he is clearly guilty. However, you may find etc ...'. In this case the distinction is all about context.

Thiselton, here, I think, makes the same mistake that many of the critics who see illocutionary effects in texts make, which is that they are looking for the cause of things they notice, at 'the wrong end' of the encounter. In both cases, what makes a text effective or self-involving, and what makes an act institutionally directive rather than simply a rhetorically persuasive perlocution, is the social context we recognise, not any inherent virtue of the language or text. Thiselton's use of the language of 'causal' and 'performative or institutional' merely helps obscure the fact that the difference between them lies in social role and how we accordingly take what is said, and therefore makes it more plausible to look elsewhere. Thus it also enables Thiselton ignore the consequentiality of illocutions: that they do not exist in isolation, without being recognised<sup>176</sup>.

---

<sup>176</sup> In fact, I think Thiselton is as confused about the relationship between effects and illocutions as Evans is, at least in his early work *Language Liturgy and Meaning. Grove Liturgical Study no. 2* (Bramcote, Grove Books, 1975). Here, he suggests (pages 18-19) that "it is important to note that executives do not *do* things simply by causal force. ... a government decree may actually *make* certain actions legal or illegal. When such a decree is said to 'take effect', this does not depend on whether a given number of men actually change this attitude towards the actions in question, but only on whether the decree is null or properly enacted. In this sense, it is not the physical act of uttering a warning, or a pardon, or the baptism formula that actually 'does' anything, but the status of the pronouncement within the whole framework of pre-supposition, status, authority, and propriety on which the utterance

### 5. The concept of Uptake in Richard Briggs's *Words in Action*.

The concept of uptake which emerges from Austin and which underpins the idea of the illocution has been thoroughly explored in the preceding sections, and demonstrated to be inadequate. This again demonstrates that the sender view of meaning itself is untenable, with serious implications for non-participatory views of revelation. However, before this suggestion can be developed, it is necessary to consider the work of Richard Briggs, who develops the idea of uptake, using the work of Jennifer Hornsby.

Richard Briggs recognizes problems with Austin to a greater extent than do Ward and Vanhoozer. Briggs notes that Austin's suggestion that conventionality is a distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary acts is "inconclusive or equivocal"<sup>177</sup>, and he rejects the idea that illocutions are uniquely conventional. However, in rejecting this problematic notion in the interests of clarifying the distinction between performatives, conventions, and illocutions, Briggs removes a crucial basis of the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions.

The conventional basis of illocutions in *How To* is more important than Briggs allows. Without it, there is no distinction between illocutions and other speech acts since all acts using speech could be included on a spectrum ranging from external and physical conventions such as ceremonies and rituals, to linguistic conventions, all of which are located in a cultural-conventional context. This accordingly seems to make the illocutionary category meaningless.

Briggs would disagree with this assertion. The basis upon which he would do so is made clear when he discusses the work of Jennifer Hornsby<sup>178</sup>. He notes that Hornsby suggests that

an illocutionary act is one which is successfully performed regardless of what response it evokes. It can, in this sense, be considered independently of any response. The only refinement to this basic idea required to make it work is to accept that the act must be performed in a context where it is *understood*. For this she uses the notion of reciprocity,<sup>179</sup>

which requires that people "recognize" speech "as it is meant to be taken"<sup>180</sup>. Briggs notes that "beyond this, an illocutionary act is effective regardless of

---

depends for its performative force." However, as I have argued in respect of Evans, understanding is an effect, and a decree that does not take effect is not a decree, but something debatable.

<sup>177</sup> *Words in Action* p42

<sup>178</sup> Jennifer Hornsby: 'Illocution and its Significance' in Tsohatzidis (ed.) *Foundations of Speech Act Theory* p187-207

<sup>179</sup> *Words in Action* p66

<sup>180</sup> Hornsby: 'Illocution and its Significance' op cit p192, quoted in *Words in Action* p66.

response. In contrast, perlocutionary acts require more than just reciprocity to have their proper consequences"<sup>181</sup>. The argument here is very reminiscent of Austin's suggestion that illocutions do not have effects but only require "uptake"<sup>182</sup>, while it has rejected the unique conventional basis of illocutions that supposedly makes this possible.

Further, there is no coherent way of divorcing a response to an act from 'being in the state of understanding' the act. Whether one calls it 'understanding the act', or 'reciprocating the act', or 'recognizing the act', it is nonetheless a response to an utterance or initiative which is necessary to that utterance's or initiative's becoming the act we recognize. Hornsby and Briggs imply that all that is required for illocutions to be recognised, is that speaker and listeners be 'correctly aligned', in the 'right relationship' to each other. This, however, is true for any act.

Misunderstanding arises because the speaker (or author) and hearer (or reader or target) disagree, to some varying extent, about the meaning of any particular utterance. The further apart their assumptions about their communicatory context, the greater or more serious the divergence of view as to the meaning of the specific utterance. For any utterance to be understood on an agreed basis by all concerned, the participants must all be 'correctly aligned' with each other, and in the 'right relationship', aware of such things as personal intonation and sense of humour. Unless illocutions can provide a unique guarantee that there will be 'correct alignment' or a 'right relationship', the category is meaningless and useless.

The crucial distinction that comes into view clearly here is between viewing understanding as simply the passive acceptance of something as 'that which it already is'<sup>183</sup>; or as an act of recognition, or perhaps better an act of

---

<sup>181</sup> *Words in Action* p67

<sup>182</sup> *How To* p116

<sup>183</sup> As Lähteenmäki remarks, for this kind of model "the task of the listener consists in mechanically decoding the message and in finding out the idea or thought represented by the given linguistic form produced by the speaker ... Speaking is seen as an active process, whereas perception and comprehension are regarded as passive and automatic in nature ... the understanding of an utterance is considered basically as mechanical decoding of message" M Lähteenmäki, 'On Meaning and Understanding: A Dialogical Approach', *Dialogism* 1 (1998) p77. An example of precisely this view is Nicholas Wolterstorff, who suggests the following about discourse: "Typically, there's something that the discourser wants to say, some speech action he wants to perform; his desire to do that may or may not be motivated by the desire to express some inner state. To perform that speech action, he has to causally bring about ... some action which will count-generate that speech action ... If all goes well on both sides, the interpreter, in discerning what counts as what, will perforce discern the content of that implemented action plan; and typically the sequence of her discernment will reverse the sequence of its formation" *Divine Discourse* op cit p183. Aside from any quarrel with the mechanistic model of discourse Wolterstorff here adopts, his use of the words "perforce" and "typically" is also noteworthy. See also his description of understanding on p198.

realization, which involves an active participation in creating 'the something' in the first place. Hornsby and Briggs both clearly take the first view of understanding, predicated on the sender view of meaning, and it is this which allows them to distinguish understanding from anything 'responsive', since it is so 'uninvolved', uninvolving, and 'flat'. They reveal again the dependence of the illocution on this particular 'uptakeable' concept of understanding<sup>184</sup>.

Uptaking is 'simply' a matter of observing something that already exists in completeness: it is just a question of acknowledging that, as Briggs puts it (adopting Searle), 'x counts as y in context c'<sup>185</sup>. This formula is, however, incorrect or inadequate. If it should be read as 'x necessarily counts as y in context c' rather than as 'x may be counted as ...', 'x is likely to be counted as ...', or 'x is generally counted as ...', then it is a proscriptive utterance which circumstances can always disprove. It does not describe real dialogic utterances as they exist in practice and thus it is either falsely prescriptive or simply a description of a particular act that has just taken place<sup>186</sup>.

---

<sup>184</sup> One that I don't think is shared by Thiselton – see for example 'The Use of philosophical Categories in New Testament Hermeneutics', *The Churchman* 87:2 (1973) p93.

<sup>185</sup> *Words in Action* p58, quoting Searle, *Speech Acts* op cit p36.

<sup>186</sup> Indeed, it appears that Searle and Briggs may have misunderstood G E M Anscombe here. They both suggest that in her article 'On Brute Facts', *Analysis* 18 (1958) 69-72, Anscombe distinguishes between brute and non-brutish facts. This seems by no means certain, rather Anscombe seems to me to be suggesting that the same fact can be more or less 'brutish' depending on what one is doing with it: "as compared with supplying me with a quarter of potatoes we might call carting a quarter of potatoes to my house and leaving them there a "brute fact". But as compared with the fact that I owe the grocer such-and-such a sum of money, that he supplied me with a quarter of potatoes is itself a brute fact. In relation to many descriptions of events or states of affairs, which are asserted to hold, we can ask what the "brute facts" were; and this will mean the facts which held, and in virtue of which, in a proper context, such-and-such a description is true or false, and which are more "brute" than the alleged fact": thus brutishness in facts depends on exactly what question is being asked – it is not a quality that sits in opposition to 'institutional' or some other such class, but is a relational, and indeterminate one. Facts are 'brutish' depending on their relationships to other descriptions and events, and only in certain specific contexts: in different contexts, facts become less 'brutish' and more uncertain: thus brute facts may very well also be what Searle would call 'institutional', that is to say, dependent for their existence on "institutions as background" (Anscombe p69). As she later observes, the institution or context which presupposes a description of a state of affairs called A "may or may not be presupposed to elements in the descriptions xyz", where xyz are "facts which are brute in relation to A" – p72. Fish makes this same point in his article 'How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism', *MLN* 91:5 (October 1976) 983-1025, where he observes that "the facts Searle would cite as "brute", the facts stipulated by the standard story, are also institutional, and ... the power of the Law to declare a man and woman husband and wife is on a par with the (institutional) power of the standard story to declare that Richard Nixon exists": p1020. This is further exemplified by Searle himself, unwittingly: in *The Construction of Social Reality*, (Penguin Books, London, 1996 p27) he notes that while "brute facts require the institution of language in order that we can state the facts", the facts themselves, such as that "the sun is ninety-three million miles from the earth", "exist quite independently of language or any other human institution". But surely, a "mile" is an institutional, not a brute, descriptor, and the measurement of space implied by "mile" is an institutionally-effective one? Later on in the same work Searle notes that the "original distinction between brute and

It is certainly not the case that language has a kind of ontological primacy, so that any word or utterance could be thought of as inexorably and inextricably related to a state of affairs. The sentence 'I order you to stop' has no acontextual absoluteness, no profound linguistic permanence. But equally, in customary usage we do not count things as other things; we do not 'think about' the meaning of utterances, unless we are in doubt as to what they might be. In general we do not say 'I am counting this as an order'; we simply react, either by obeying, or by mutiny, or whatever<sup>187</sup>. It requires no conscious decision to 'take' language before it 'exists' or 'works'. Our act of recognition is not, therefore, separate from the act we recognize, nor is it necessarily consciously reflective or consciously undertaken<sup>188</sup>. Our act of recognition, in concert with the related acts of others, makes an initiative into an act, and a single initiative can of course be recognized as more than one sort of act: as an act of liberation or act of terrorism, for example.

If, however, someone says 'why did you do that?', then we would say, 'because it was an order', or perhaps, 'because I took it as an order'<sup>189</sup>. However, we can say this only with hindsight, because at the time, it was our 'taking it as' an order that made it an order, and our taking it as an order was not necessarily a conscious activity; we did not 'take it as', but we simply recognized it, or heard it. There is then a certain sense of preconscious participation in the enactment of the utterance as part of our dialogue, a sense which is also held by the speaker, and which has therefore affected the act of speaking itself<sup>190</sup>.

---

institutional facts has now been transcended" (p121-122), which again suggests a degree of uncertainty here, although the point that he is seeking to make about the 'reality' of collective or institutional facts is one I entirely accept, though as I will argue in chapter seven, I think there are better ways of understanding the phenomenon.

<sup>187</sup> Sometimes, of course, our assumed certainty is misleading, and then, if we become aware of this, we have to stop and think, but as Wittgenstein observes, "one doesn't 'take' what one knows as the cutlery at a meal *for* cutlery; any more than one ordinarily tries to move one's mouth as one eats, or aims at moving it." *Phil Inv* IIxi p195.

<sup>188</sup> See Wittgenstein again: "Try not to think of understanding as a 'mental process' at all. - For *that* is the expression which confuses you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say, "Now I know how to go on." ... for us it is *the circumstances* under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on." *Phil Inv* I §154-155 p61.

<sup>189</sup> Although this latter is less likely unless we are thinking 'philosophically' or are defending ourselves in a position of some doubt.

<sup>190</sup> I echo here Wittgenstein's assertion that a rule is "a *matter of course*. As much as it is a matter of course for me to call this colour "blue". ... "Red" means the colour that occurs to me when I hear the word "red" - would be a *definition*. Not an explanation of what it is to use a word as a name". §238-239. This is the point also made by Mika Lähteenmäki 'On rules and rule-following: obeying rules blindly', *Language and Communication* 23 (2003) where he quotes Wittgenstein noting "'How am I able to obey a rule?' ... if I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say: 'this is simply what I do'" §217, and notes that "Wittgenstein came to realise that knowing a rule cannot be identified with having a correct mental representation of rule ... He rejects the idea of rules as



Therefore the uptake of an illocution is a secondary response; a neutral acceptance of something as 'that which it is', but in which the identification of 'what it is' has already been made. Uptake is thus the act of understanding *that which has already been recognized or realized*. However, this definition of understanding as creative of and participatory in meaning is not open to Briggs, since he and Hornsby agree that, "the speaker relies only on a certain responsiveness on her audience's part for her utterance to work for her as illocutionarily meant: the audience takes her to have done what she meant to. ... When reciprocity obtains between people, they are such as to recognize one another's speech as it is meant to be taken,"<sup>191</sup> a condition that clearly presupposes meaning as having a pre-utterance existence.

Indeed, when Hornsby writes "so what a person relies on to tell A something is A's being open to the idea that she might be telling him what she in fact means to tell him: unless A can readily entertain the idea that she might be doing this, A could hardly take her to be doing it"<sup>192</sup> she illustrates precisely the difficulty; there must be an act of recognition before there can be anything to hear. The condition of "being open to the idea that" is already a realization of "the idea that" - if no-one is open to "the idea that", then it will not be possible to successfully express it<sup>193</sup>. Briggs also refers to "a context"<sup>194</sup> in which the act can be understood. Again, this is a clear undercutting of the idea that meaning is brought in by the response-neutral illocutionary act.

---

formula-like reified objects and conceives of them as routine-like skills to act in a normatively correct way in various types of situations. For him, "obeying a rule" is a practice. Wittgenstein holds that rules do not exist independently of action and to know a rule amounts to mastering a technique". Lähtenmäki suggests the "idea of rule as *praxis*" (55) and that it is "the existing practices, customs and institutions that constitute the last court of appeal for our judgements concerning the normativeness of this or that behaviour" (56) though I note that where Wittgenstein is gardening, Lähtenmäki is, as I have noted for so many other hermeneuts, in a courtroom. Lähtenmäki acknowledges though that rules are learnt, and that they "are not external to the behaviour nor do they cause the behaviour from outside" (56). As Lähtenmäki remarks, "actual meanings [of utterances] are *emergent* in their nature" op cit p77. I think that Searle's suggestion in *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, Penguin Books, 1996), that the 'x element' is potentially a brute one, while the 'y element' is entirely linguistic and institutional (p68) is another recognition of this.

<sup>191</sup> Hornsby: 'Illocution and its Significance' p192, passage referred to in *Words in Action* p66.

<sup>192</sup> Hornsby; 'Illocution and its Significance' p193

<sup>193</sup> Hornsby's acknowledged omission of 'attempt' from the clause 'attempt to take her to' is equally significant - see Hornsby; 'Illocution and its Significance', p205 footnote 14. There are strong similarities here with Wolterstorff, who notes that "so that one's uttering of a sentence may count as one's making a request, it is not necessary that one and one's fellows *actually count it as that*; ... The relation is that speaker and audience *ought to count it as that* - *ought to acknowledge it as that* in their relations with each other." (*Divine Discourse* op cit p84) This concept of "normative ascription" is one that is clearly ethical, but is also self-contradictory in that clearly *someone* is counting it 'correctly' and recognising your 'proper' 'normative standing', otherwise - surely - you are simply delusional?

<sup>194</sup> *Words in Action* p66

Referring to a prosecution for rape in which the defence Counsel successfully alleged that the prior conduct of the victim contributed to the assault, so that her refusal of consent was thereby diminished in its force, Hornsby observes that “just as it is more or less automatic that an attempt at an illocutionary act is fully successful when certain socially defined conditions obtain; so, when certain conditions do not obtain, there cannot be a fully successful performance.”<sup>195</sup> Or, as Briggs suggests in a précis; “social conditions determine which illocutionary acts may be possible”<sup>196</sup>. This, however, underlines again the observation that reciprocity is a response requiring a pre-existing context, and is itself only detectable on the grounds of responses. In Hornsby’s example the woman’s saying ‘No’ was not an ‘illocutionary’ act of refusing consent to sex as Austin would have defined such an act, because the perpetrator of the assault did not respond as she apparently intended and, crucially, in the opinion of a Judge (and Jury?) her ‘no’ was in various respects flawed and thus ‘inoperative’ (an assertion we can make on the basis that they apparently found the accused ‘not guilty’<sup>197</sup>).

Here, the response of the accused man, and the Judge and Jury, and commentators in the news media, was such as to recognize the woman’s ‘No’ as one of a variety of other acts, on a spectrum ranging from ‘the cry of a victim of patriarchy’ to ‘the complaint of someone seeking to deny her responsibility for her own choices’<sup>198</sup>. Her act was understood as, and thus became, an entirely different thing in different contexts.

For the woman’s ‘No’ to have been effective as a refusal, or to have been accorded the status of a refusal, it would have to have been understood as such by her attacker, or at the least by the Court system representing, albeit imperfectly, a ‘social consensus’. We can assert that it was not understood as a refusal, and was not therefore effective as a refusal, because of the responses that it in fact achieved, in particular from those entrusted with judging whether or not it was a refusal, and thus whether or not the accused was a rapist<sup>199</sup>.

Of course, had the case gone to Appeal, and had the judgement been overturned, then the understanding of the act, and thus its identity, would have changed. Indeed, when the history of this and other related events is

---

<sup>195</sup> Hornsby, ‘Illocution and its Significance’ p198

<sup>196</sup> *Words in Action* p67

<sup>197</sup> Once again, we return to the image of ‘judgement’.

<sup>198</sup> Both of which précised opinions have been aired on cases like Hornsby’s example, by newspaper columnists.

<sup>199</sup> Who in Austin’s phrase “should be able to decide, by hearing .., what locutionary and illocutionary acts were performed”: *How To* p121. The Tony Martin case, where a farmer lay in wait for and shot a burglar, is another example of competing recognitions of one event; there was dispute over the act he performed; premeditated murder or shooting in self-defence (indeed, he might be said to have performed some other act, which our current legal categories do not allow us to adequately describe).

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

created in subsequent generations, the woman's 'No' may well be seen as something different again, and as illustrative of unreconstructed twentieth-century prejudices<sup>200</sup>; evidence perhaps of what our descendants consider to have been our inability to hear women properly, when they 'sit in judgement' upon us.

That the Judge and Jury's understanding is 'unwaveringly correct' is not something I intend to assert. The point being made is simply that 'illocutions' as Hornsby imagines them are not cast-iron, and cannot exist unless they are recognized, and thus that the category is meaningless. The recognition of something as 'an illocution' or as any act depends on the context of the speaker and hearers. Hornsby herself clearly recognizes the woman's 'No' as constituting a refusal, but equally clearly others have and do not. People in different contexts recognize something differently.

This example illustrates clearly one of the assumptions underlying the sender view of meaning: that everyone else shares one's own context and knowledge or, at the very least, ought to share them. Hornsby here starts from a position of knowledge: she believes that she knows exactly what the woman meant. This knowledge is presumably based not on an intimate knowledge of the woman who was assaulted, or of the events of the assault, but on Hornsby's own context: she knows that 'no always means no'<sup>201</sup>.

Interestingly enough, Hornsby and I entirely agree that social conditions can make some things impossible to say, or perhaps to be heard. We might agree, also, on the moral implications of this, and on the contribution of pornography to the "silencing"<sup>202</sup> of some groups. However, we entirely disagree on whether or not such a 'not-heard utterance' could be an illocution. Hornsby asserts that it can, on the basis of her own estimation and knowledge of the sincerity of the woman speaking<sup>203</sup>. She thus reverts, quite explicitly, to an interior view of intention, and assumes an interesting but here unexplored correlation between illocutions and morality<sup>204</sup>.

Hornsby recognizes the sincerity of the speaker by according to herself the authorial (and almost divine) privilege of knowing how things ought to be taken, and of thus being able to assert whether they have been taken correctly or not, (possibly without having been at either the scene of the assault or the

---

<sup>200</sup> Much as we regard, for example, witchcraft trials.

<sup>201</sup> And assumes that this is a descriptive statement, rather than a prescriptive, morally active one: in fact what is usually being asserted is that "no ought always to be taken to mean no".

<sup>202</sup> Hornsby, 'Illocution and its Significance' p199

<sup>203</sup> Hornsby, 'Illocution and its Significance' p199

<sup>204</sup> Like E D Hirsch. See also J M E Moravcsik, 'Introduction' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) p3: "to ascribe knowledge and competence to someone is to make normative claims that are very similar to the ones we encounter in ethics".

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Court). She makes a moral judgement, with which a number of people then and subsequently would agree, but this is in no sense illocutionary; as she is aware, a number of people in the same culture did not recognize, and moreover to use Austin's phrase, 'did not *have to*'<sup>205</sup> recognize, the woman's 'No' as a refusal of consent.

Indeed, the Judge and Jury are quite explicitly required to understand the events of the assault in a quite different context from Hornsby's own: where she knows what happened, they are required to try and decide, on the basis of what they hear in a law court, what they think happened. A juror who began the trial already convinced as to the facts of the case would probably be debarred on those very grounds. Hornsby's hermeneutic context is interestingly reminiscent of the difference between a believer's reading of Scripture and a non-believer's reading: if we 'know' Jesus is God, that is part of the context, but if we are using the text to *determine* whether or not Jesus is God, it isn't<sup>206</sup>.

The whole thrust of Hornsby's argument is based on *her* recognition of the meaning of the woman's 'No' as a refusal, a judgement which may well be morally correct, but which is not absolute or objective. Rather, Hornsby's 'recognition' is an example of the real responsiveness and activity of being an 'uptaker'<sup>207</sup>, and of the necessity of being in the appropriate sort of context or relationship. Being in the right relationship<sup>208</sup> is a circular process affecting the understanding of the meaning of the utterance. Recognizing speech "as it is meant to be taken" is not an act of the sort that can be performed irrespective of the context of the hearer and of the response it evokes. To claim that it is, is to have pre-judged what has been said from a preconceived context, a description in fact of the hermeneutic position consistently adopted

---

<sup>205</sup> *How To* p33

<sup>206</sup> I am grateful to Professor Hugh Pyper for this observation.

In his discussion of this example in Hornsby, J W Adams exemplifies the same problem. He suggests that "regardless of the response a particular utterance produces, only the proper linguistic conventions operating within reciprocity constitute the necessary factor for the performance of a successful illocutionary act" while at the same time noting in a footnote (fn 132) Hornsby's suggestion that "the judge's interpretation of the woman's "No" as "Yes" demonstrates that to "do a perfect illocutionary act of refusing, an utterance of the word 'no' is not enough ... a condition of her having fully successfully refused [is] that she be recognized as attempting to refuse" J W Adams, *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 448* (New York, T&T Clark, 2006) p42. Here, for Adams, the judge is performing a perlocution that invalidates an illocution, though it should also be noted that there is something unsatisfactory in suggesting that to 'do a perfect illocutionary act of refusing, a condition is that she be recognized as attempting to refuse': surely to do a perfect act of refusing requires a recognition of more than an attempt - it requires as an outcome either or both of the following results: that the other party accepts the refusal, and/or that society 'endorses' the refusal.

<sup>207</sup> And the responsibility which is involved.

<sup>208</sup> Being righteous, since righteousness is being in a right relationship with God

by Briggs, Ward and Vanhoozer<sup>209</sup>. It must also be noted that both Briggs and Hornsby refer to illocutions as having been “successfully performed” or as ‘working as illocutionarily meant’. This is language that is a good deal more definite than Austin’s initial talk of ‘felicity’, which is designed precisely to skirt around the question of the precise moment at which a performative becomes happy<sup>210</sup>.

Thus I agree with Briggs that a speech-act<sup>211</sup> is successfully performed if its non-linguistic conventions are in place, since one of the conventions must be that people recognize and understand the act. However, I do not believe that any speech-act can be said to have been “successfully performed regardless of the response it provokes”<sup>212</sup>, nor that it makes any sort of sense to assert both this and that such an act still requires “mutual understanding of the utterance”<sup>213</sup> in order for it to be achieved. A response (of recognition and understanding of the act as the act that it therefore is) will have been achieved, if the act has become “felicitous”, and this will only be detectable by the response of hearers, the speaker and others; it is by response that we know what has happened, and by response that something (rather than another thing or nothing) occurs at all: response is a “non-linguistic convention”. There is, however, absolutely no guarantee of unanimity about the identification of acts.

## 6. The Concept of Uptake: Conclusion

The relationship between the recognition of an act and the consequences that are an inextricable part of the act and allow us to recognize the existence of the act, is entirely misunderstood by Austin and those who follow and adapt him. For Austin, conventions operate to ensure that the illocution will always be effective if correctly uttered: conventions make meaning identical to

---

<sup>209</sup> If subsequent generations are dismissive of the prejudices of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, this too will be on the basis of their different contextual position and differing assumptions and reading or hearing strategies. We believe, in the Western world of the early twenty-first century, that Judges and Jurors are properly required to discover what happened on the basis of what is said in court, not on the basis of their own prejudices. These prejudices, however, cannot be entirely eliminated. I suspect that Hornsby believes that the Judge and Jury were in some sense unable to hear without prejudice: that they were ‘institutionally chauvinist’. Later generations may agree with her. However, neither our grandchildren nor Hornsby are prejudice-neutral; they are simply operating from a differing set of contextual assumptions: the Judge and Jury assumed that they were being fair-minded; Hornsby assumes that they were ‘deaf’.

<sup>210</sup> Although, as Cerf notes, Austin’s decision to talk of ‘issuing an utterance’ is to some extent a similar verbal sleight of hand, allowing one to slip away from ‘ordering’ or just ‘speaking’, to a new term with less ‘baggage’: W Cerf, ‘Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words’, in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) p362ff

<sup>211</sup> He in fact refers to an illocution not a speech act, but I don’t believe that the concepts can be usefully disentangled: *Words in Action* p68

<sup>212</sup> *Words in Action* p68

<sup>213</sup> *Words in Action* p68

intention. For illocutions, meaning is not merely conventional but is to some degree guaranteed. It is not just that the meaning of utterances is recognized by the 'audience' on the basis of shared conventions, but that in the case of illocutions or explicit performatives, the existence of conventions guarantees beforehand how the audience will take an utterance. Conventions in this case make interior intention transparent.

This assumption is shared by Austin's followers in the field of Biblical hermeneutics. As Ward notes, "Kevin Vanhoozer has argued that convention and intention are not opposing concepts, but may be defined in terms of each other, if convention is seen as a corporate intention"<sup>214</sup>, where he refers to Vanhoozer's suggestion that "a convention may be said to be a corporate intention"<sup>215</sup>. However, the reverse is rather more the case: once again things are being viewed from the 'wrong end' of the relationship.

It is not that intentions coalesce to form conventions – rather it is the pre-existing conventions that we inherit without conscious choice, that allow us to identify and actively realize intentions<sup>216</sup>. An intention, then, may be said to be created by conventions. As Haugeland observes: "the instituted intentionality of public symbols is *original intentionality*. The extant normative order in the communal pattern is *sui generis* and self-sustaining, via the mechanism of conformism; it is the fountainhead of all intentionality, public and private."<sup>217</sup>

It is the recognition by the audience that an utterance fits into the conventions, that allows them to recognize it as meaning something, and thus to recognize also the intention of the speaker as indicated in the utterance. This, however, eliminates the possibility of a sender-based meaning guarantee. It suggests, to use Austinian terminology, that all speech acts, not just 'minimum physical acts'<sup>218</sup>, are created in part by the audience, and it acknowledges that no speech act can be an act without first having some effective consequences including active, creative understanding. No speech act can exist by virtue of the sender or speaker alone, and meaning is created in conversation not begotten in a pre-existing intention<sup>219</sup>.

---

<sup>214</sup> *Word and Supplement* p86 [my underlining].

<sup>215</sup> *Is There?* p244.

<sup>216</sup> S Knapp and W B Michaels make exactly the same mistake when they assert that "to insist on the primacy of intention is not to deny the importance of convention; it is only to point out that conventions don't even count as conventions unless they are intended" 'A Reply to Our Critics', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) p799: this is simply putting the cart before the horse.

<sup>217</sup> J Haugeland, 'The Intentionality All-Stars', in J E Tomberlin (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives 4: Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind* (Atascadero CA, Ridgeview Publishing Co, 1990) p413. Where he identified conformism, I would identify learning, which conformism assumes, of course.

<sup>218</sup> *How To* p110 ff.

<sup>219</sup> See for example, G L Bruns: "Understanding can never be the product of a single act of cognition, nor can it even be constituted as a single euphoria", 'Structuralism, Deconstruction, and Hermeneutics: Review of J Culler's 'On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after

Therefore I conclude, with Derrida, that the concept of the illocution as outlined in Austin and Searle, and employed by Briggs, Ward and Vanhoozer, is fatally flawed. It ignores the implications of the importance of the audience or readership and context of any act, for the idea of 'meaning'. It ignores the active role in meaning creation of the 'receiver' of any utterance, and the fact that all utterances are not self-contained, but exist within many pre-existing conversations.

Derrida's conclusion that performative utterances are different only in degree not in kind from what Austin described as "parasitic" utterances; that they are all "kinds of iteration within a general iterability which constitutes a violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or *speech act*"<sup>220</sup> is one I therefore share. I agree that "given that structure of iteration, the intention animating the utterance will never be through and through present to itself and to its content."

I also agree with Derrida that Austin's suggestion that

ordinary language ... excludes a general citationality or iterability ...[means] that the 'ordinariness' in question – the thing and the notion – shelter a lure, the teleological lure of consciousness ... [and that] in order for a context to be exhaustively determinable, in the sense required by Austin [at least as his argument unfolds], conscious intention would at the very least have to be totally present and immediately transparent to itself and to others, since it is a determining center of context. The concept of ... the context thus seems to suffer at this point from the same theoretical and 'interested' uncertainty as the concept of the 'ordinary', from the same metaphysical origins: the ethical and teleological discourse of consciousness.<sup>221</sup>

Although Derrida does not appreciate the complexity of Austin's approach to intention, I nonetheless share his general conclusions regarding Austin's dependence on a particular and inadequate view of meaning and personality,

---

Structuralism (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1982)', *Diacritics* 14:1 (Spring 1984) p21, and again "'what constitutes knowledge has always to be worked out by means of discourse, not just once for all, but by means of an endless give and take among multifarious voices – which is what Gadamer means by tradition" p21, and "for Gadamer, understanding always requires the endless back-and-forth of a many-sided dialogue into which one must enter if one is to understand at all, but which one can never comprehend as a totality from any privileged methodological position. Understanding in this case can never be adequately described either as objective consciousness or as subjective or intersubjective agreement: ... tradition ... concerns the historicity of dialectic: this many-sided dialogue is nothing more or less than what comes down from the past – and we are in it and of it. Dialectic ... is a mode of being rather than a mode of thought; it is the form which the linguisticity of our being takes. It is that to which we belong and which we are, and it is that which we seek to understand. Our hermeneutical task, in this event, is not, however, just to make ourselves heard within this heteroglossia but also to listen, where listening is listening in Heidegger's sense of being open to the saying of language" p22.

<sup>220</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p18

<sup>221</sup> Limited Inc (*Sec*) p18

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

and on the part necessarily and surreptitiously played by interior intention in Austin's performative scheme<sup>222</sup>. Austin and his followers assume a sender view of meaning which is ultimately incompatible with their stated view of intention. This view of meaning is a predicate of the idea of the guaranteed speech act, of which Divine revelation is assumed to be an instance, and it requires an assumed distinction between 'understanding' and 'uptake', which leads to the distinction between 'meaning' and 'significance'.

In this chapter I have discussed the concepts of Uptake and Understanding, and showed that the concept of Uptake is inadequate. This discussion feeds directly into the question of meaning. As a corollary to the idea of Uptake, Ward and Vanhoozer adopt Hirsch's idea of a Meaning/Significance distinction, because this allows them to defend the idea of Authorial revelation. There is indeed a strong similarity between the idea of illocutionary uptake as found in Austin and Briggs, and the idea of meaning and significance in Ward and Vanhoozer. However, Vanhoozer and Ward's adoption of Hirsch's concept of meaning is inadequate for much the same reasons as those which affect the concept of uptake.

The next chapter assesses the idea of meaning which Ward and Vanhoozer adopt and modify from the work of E D Hirsch, a famous opponent of Derrida's, and a sometimes almost lone voice seeking to re-assert authorial control over meaning. It considers how meaning and understanding are viewed, and the inadequacies of the views adopted by Ward, Hirsch and Vanhoozer. All of this is preparatory work, necessary before the outlining of my own proposals for meaning and understanding, based on the work of other scholars, which are put forward in chapter seven, and on the basis of which I make some suggestions with regard to revelation, in my concluding chapter eight.

---

<sup>222</sup> Although I think that Derrida himself does not escape entirely from its grip, either: and certainly J H Miller does not – see J H Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2001). Chapter four of this work demonstrates a binary opposition between 'saying' and 'doing' that collapses everything into doings that are ultimately unverifiable: the idea that we could say 'he is angry' and know it because we recognise it as anger, and thus that intention and emotion are collectively determined (though not determinate) does not occur to him: or rather, he is convinced (like Proust, apparently) that other people, especially if we love them, must always remain unknowable to us. In this respect he is mistaken. It is not true to claim, as he and Proust do, that others must remain for ever shadows to us, nor that we are imprisoned by sense perceptions – because without firstly knowledge of others, and secondly sense perceptions, there would be no 'us'. Our sense(s) of our self are learnt and determined: what Proust's experience as quoted by J H Miller indicates is that we can have more than one self. This is so because our 'selves' are socially constructed on the basis of the stories that we are taught and which we adapt and tell and re-tell about ourselves – we construct narratives of our life which explain who we are, and it is this realisation that accounts for the 'mythic' nature of the 'Freudian unconscious' noted by C Emerson in his discussion of Valentin Volosinov's *Freudianism; A Critical Sketch* (Bloomington IA, Indiana University Press, 1987), which he insists on attributing to Mikhail Bakhtin; see C Emerson, 'The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language', *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 251.



## CHAPTER SIX: MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

### 1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined the concept of uptake and compared it to the hermeneutic idea of understanding. By contrast with understanding, the idea of 'uptake' is inadequate as a description of how we recognise meaningful acts.

The idea of uptake is an essential part of the illocutionary act in Austin, and is thus integral to the defence of authorial revelation attempted by Richard Briggs in particular. However, while uptake is important for Vanhoozer and Ward to the extent that they rely on the concept of the illocutionary act, both these latter scholars also make use of the work of E D Hirsch and his distinction between meaning and significance. (It should be noted that Hirsch has revised his initial theory to include the concept of Transhistorical Intention, a concept which in practice entirely undermines the meaning-significance distinction, and illustrates its inadequacies – this revision is discussed subsequently<sup>1</sup>).

Before returning to the main argument of this thesis, and outlining my own preferred model of meaning and revelation based on the hermeneutics of Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov, it will be useful to examine Hirsch's concepts, and the use made of them by Vanhoozer and Ward. In particular, it should be noted that both the distinction between the illocution and the perlocution, and the distinction between meaning and significance, assume the idea that meaning is begotten, and thus both are 'captives' of the sender view of meaning.

### 2. 'Meaning' and 'Significance' in Kevin Vanhoozer and Timothy Ward

In Ward's and Vanhoozer's work, meaning is the 'illocutionary' property of a text, and is produced simply by the speaker/author<sup>2</sup>. It is 'uptaken' by the reader, leaving no room for indeterminacy. Likewise, significance is the 'perlocutionary' property of a text, produced by the reader's response. It is created by the reader 'understanding' the text.

For example, Vanhoozer suggests that

while it is clear that the Fourth Gospel was written in order to persuade others that Jesus is the Christ (John 20:31), it is still not clear whether this purpose is part

---

<sup>1</sup> See E D Hirsch Jr, 'Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory', *New Literary History* 25:1 (1994) 549-567.

<sup>2</sup> "meaning is a matter of illocutions, while significance concerns perlocutions", *Is There?* p261

of the meaning of the text.... The subsequent response and behaviour of the audience are extrinsic, often unstable, factors, and thus cannot be part of what makes a speech act what it is. The Fourth Gospel testifies to Jesus Christ regardless of how readers respond to it, but it only *persuades* if readers respond to its testimony with belief. Searle excludes the author's perlocutionary purpose from his definition of meaning.<sup>3</sup>

Vanhoozer believes that "the subsequent response and behaviour of the audience are extrinsic, often unstable, factors, and thus cannot be part of what makes a speech act what it is" because illocutions are conventional in opposition to perlocutions, and are thus differentiated from perlocutions precisely by the stability of meaning that they supposedly guarantee. Thus, for Vanhoozer, the author's intent as manifested in the text (a possible definition of what Vanhoozer thinks of as 'meaning') makes the text the thing that it is, irrespective of any response, but its purpose is a perlocutionary effect requiring a response.

Vanhoozer therefore adopts E D Hirsch's distinction between meaning and significance and suggests that there is a difference between *meaning*, which is determinate, unchanging and past (it is what the author intended in his text) and *significance*, which is what the text means in the context of our reading of it. Meaning, for Vanhoozer, is what the text was 'meant' to mean by the author, and significance is what it means to us now, which includes its persuasiveness as to its authorially-produced purpose. Thus, "properly to describe meaning requires us to describe the author's intended action - not the plan with which the author set out to write, nor the consequences that an author hoped to achieve by writing, but what the author was doing *in* writing, *in* tending to his words in such and such a fashion."<sup>4</sup>

In other words, for Vanhoozer "meaning is a matter of what the author is attending to and of the way he or she attends to it."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, "textual meaning does not change because it is tied to what an author intended, and did, in the past."<sup>6</sup> However,

the concern for relevance - for reading with the aim of bringing a text to bear on contemporary concerns - is a concern for what Hirsch calls "significance." Unlike meaning, the significance of a text can change, for significance pertains to the relation between the text's determinate meaning and a larger context (i.e., another era, another culture, another subject matter).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> *Is There?* p228

<sup>4</sup> *Is There?* p253

<sup>5</sup> *Is There?* p259

<sup>6</sup> *Is There?* p259

<sup>7</sup> *Is There?* p259

Thus “a text’s significance is a function of how the text comes to be explained and evaluated in terms of contexts not presumed by the author. Significance corresponds more to *criticism* than to interpretation.”<sup>8</sup>

Vanhoozer therefore suggests, as already noted, that “meaning is a matter of illocutions, while significance concerns perlocutions”<sup>9</sup>. Significance is a consequence of meaning, and cannot be a part of the illocutionary act because it is a consequence. This of course is why Vanhoozer needs to adopt this distinction: meaning is an illocutionary act, which does not depend for its existence on ‘extraneous consequences’. Meaning is ‘uptaken’, Significance requires a response. As Ward notes

in the performance of this divine illocutionary act, Scripture is sufficient for the mediation to any and all readers of ... God’s ‘real semantic presence’ to human beings. Divine ‘semantic presence’ becomes divine ‘personal presence’ when the text’s perlocutionary effect is brought about in the life of the reader by the action of the Holy Spirit. This restates the christocentric thrust of Luther’s understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture: to urge ‘Scripture alone’ is to urge it as alone the means by which Christ comes in such a way that true knowledge of him is possible. To assert this is not to assert that Scripture is a sufficient guarantee of cognition of the divine illocutionary act (*notitia*), let alone that it can bring about in the reader the appropriate perlocutionary effect (*assensus* and *fiducia*). A reader of Scripture can still fail to recognize Christ, or, recognizing him, may still reject him.<sup>10</sup>

Thus it is clear: meaning is an illocutionary act and is uptaken, and significance is a perlocutionary act and may (or may not) be understood.

### 3. The definitions of ‘Meaning’ and ‘Significance’ in E D Hirsch

In fact, Ward and Vanhoozer have added to Hirsch’s original conception of the difference between meaning and significance. Hirsch, in his work *Validity in Interpretation*<sup>11</sup> suggests that the distinction between meaning and significance is a moral or pragmatic one determined by the posture of the reader, rather than one determined by different sorts of understanding<sup>12</sup>. However, Vanhoozer, to make his scheme successful, needs the author to be able to guarantee meaning because meaning is, in his scheme, necessarily illocutionary, while significance can be perlocutionary and contingent in nature.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Is There?* p260

<sup>9</sup> *Is There?* p261

<sup>10</sup> *Word and Supplement* p205-206.

<sup>11</sup> E D Hirsch Jr, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven CT and London, Yale University Press, 1976)

<sup>12</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p 26: “any reader can adopt or reject any norm, and he is justified in thinking that there is no absolute necessity for his choosing one or another. ... Partly for this reason, I have chosen a different sort of defense – one that appeals not to the ethics of language but to the logical consequences that follow from the act of public interpretation.”

This tension is illustrated by Ward's discussion of Hirsch<sup>13</sup>. As Ward notes,

Hirsch turns out not to be the robust defender of the author which he is conventionally taken to be. In the end what he seems to want most of all is that professional interpreters of texts should agree that however much they might continue to understand textual meaning as polyvalent, they should begin at some point with a recognition of what the author may have meant; this will provide them with a shared object of discussion, before they move, however quickly, on from there. Hirsch defends authorial meaning since he thinks it the best way to foster methodological consensus.<sup>14</sup>

For Hirsch, the author cannot guarantee meaning: to discern authorial meaning requires a conscious strategy of interpretation (a particular reading strategy) on the part of the reader. Hirsch is aware of the conscious creative effort of all reading. He believes that it is possible to read a text neutrally and simply realize in it the author's intention, but that many other readings are also possible: there is a moral and logical choice to be made by the reader<sup>15</sup>.

Hirsch believes that only reading for the author's purpose or intention can allow there to be any possibility of determinate meaning and thus any possibility of validity in interpretation (the title, of course, of his first, detailed, exploration of this topic). He suggests that "once the author had been ruthlessly banished as the determiner of his text's meaning, it very gradually appeared that no adequate principle existed for judging the validity of an interpretation."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, "to banish the original author as the determiner of meaning was to reject the only compelling normative principle that could lend validity to an interpretation."<sup>17</sup>

Hirsch, therefore, as Vanhoozer states, distinguishes between meaning (the author's accessible intention) and significance: "*meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand,

---

<sup>13</sup> *Word and Supplement* p161 ff; especially pages 165-166.

<sup>14</sup> *Word and Supplement* p166-167. See also Vanhoozer, 'A Lamp in the Labyrinth: the Hermeneutics of "Aesthetic" Theology', *Trinity Journal* 8:1 (1987) p29: "Hirsch's account of meaning, however, is only a recommendation ... Hirsch is here offering not an argument but a recommendation, not a logical analysis of meaning but a stipulative definition."

<sup>15</sup> Despite the fact that both Hirsch and Ward believe that Hirsch is eschewing morals for pragmatism, I do not accept that this is true. Hirsch certainly acknowledges that a reader "may or may not accept the idea that all uses of language carry moral imperatives" (*Validity in Interpretation* p26), but even to suggest that "the choice of a norm for interpretation is a free social and ethical act" (p26) is to acknowledge that a moral choice is being made: it is simply a choice about which different views of morality conflict. Hirsch is not prepared to 'pin his colours to the mast' here, because he hopes his logical defence of authorial intention will be enough. See also Hirsch's version of Pascal's Wager: 'The Politics of Theories of Interpretation', *Critical Inquiry* 9:1 (September 1982) p243ff.

<sup>16</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p3

<sup>17</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p5

names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus, notwithstanding some differences, there are very strong similarities between Hirsch’s definition of meaning and the Speech Act idea of an illocution. In particular, both are conveyances or “representations” of an agent’s intended meaning that owe nothing to the realizing ‘work’ of the audience. Both are ‘non-relational’: they are ‘neutral’ ‘conventional’ aspects of what has been done by an agent. It is also assumed by both that the meaning is conceived ‘outside’ the text, in the agent’s intention, which is made visible or actual in the text or utterance. Although in both cases the text or utterance – the act performed – has meaning, and it is the act itself which means (meaning is in ‘the thing that is done’) not any prior intention, nonetheless the meaning is ‘impregnated’ into the act by the agent. The act has meaning, but the meaning that it has owes nothing to the specific recognition of that particular, contextual, act<sup>19</sup>, which has been begotten not created.

However, Hirsch’s understanding of meaning is rather more nuanced than the suggestion that meaning is an illocution. Hirsch’s conception thus differs in some respects from Vanhoozer’s scheme, although its greater degree of subtlety does not help it evade the ‘understanding-uptake’ dilemma faced by Vanhoozer’s Speech Act scheme. Although Hirsch acknowledges the activity of understanding, he does not apply this recognition consistently, a flaw he shares with Austin, as we have seen in the previous chapters.

Unlike Vanhoozer, Briggs, Hornsby and Ward, Hirsch is well aware that all meaning has to be *recognized*, not merely ‘absorbed’ or ‘uptaken’:

meaning is an affair of consciousness not of words. Almost any word sequence can, under the conventions of language, legitimately represent more than one complex of meaning. A word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it. There is no magic land of meanings outside human consciousness. Whenever meaning is connected to words, a person is making the connection, and the particular meanings he lends to them are never the only legitimate ones under the norms and conventions of his language.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p8

<sup>19</sup> Compare J R Cameron: “Clearly whatever kind of thing the meaning of a sentence type may be, it can only be construed as a function of, or abstraction from, the specific meanings which individual tokens of that sentence-type possess in their specific contexts of utterance”: J R Cameron, ‘Sentence-Meaning and Speech Acts’. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) p112.

<sup>20</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p4 – and see the comparison later in this chapter of the thesis between this phrase and Austin’s description of perlocutions.

Hirsch is also quite clear that the meaning of sentences is not “literal” but context-related (which he describes as “*occasionalist*”<sup>21</sup>): “words and sentences outside of actual use have no fixed literal meaning at all. ... Meaning-making and meaning-understanding ... is occasionalist”<sup>22</sup>. However, Hirsch not only assumes that it is possible to understand exactly the meaning intended by the author, but that meaning is related either to the intention of the author or the responder, and that in either case it is a property of the text understood by a consciousness, rather than a function of active relationships<sup>23</sup>. For Hirsch, meaning is a static, abstract property, and its making is distinct from its understanding.

There is therefore an innate, fundamental contradiction throughout Hirsch’s work between on the one hand his recognition that meaning is constructed, and on the other his insistence that the text’s original authorial meaning is an unchanging property of the text when read. Hirsch’s concept of meaning depends on the idea that one can understand a text as the author originally intended, without having an experience or relationship with it (since these are a part of the text’s significance rather than its meaning<sup>24</sup>), but that this understanding is nonetheless an active process on the part of the reader (a fact about which Hirsch is insistent).

#### 4. E. D. Hirsch’s concept of understanding, and its relation to meaning

Hirsch recognizes that “a physical object that we see is not defined for us by the particular content of our retinal vision, but by what that content means as interpreted by us.”<sup>25</sup> Thus he acknowledges that we learn and understand meaning. Indeed, he goes on to note that “all cognition is analogous to interpretation in being based upon *corrigible schemata*”<sup>26</sup> and thus that “*the process of understanding is itself a process of validation.*”<sup>27</sup> For Hirsch, “verbal understanding is not purely intuitive, then, but it cannot be purely rule-governed either, and it cannot be some arbitrary mixture of the two, as I have

---

<sup>21</sup> E D Hirsch Jr, ‘On Theories and Metaphors: A Comment on Mary Hesse’s Paper’, *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) p53.

<sup>22</sup> E D Hirsch Jr, ‘On Theories and Metaphors’ op cit p54.

<sup>23</sup> See Gadamer “understanding is not a method which the inquiring consciousness applies to an object it chooses and so turns it into objective knowledge; rather, being situated within an event of tradition, a process of handing down is a prior condition of understanding. *Understanding proves to be an event ...*” *Truth and Method* op cit p320.

<sup>24</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p16. Thus whether or not an author subsequently asserts that the meaning of a text has changed for them is irrelevant: what they are asserting is that the significance of the text has changed for them – its meaning remains the same. Compare his view with that of R Panikkar, who suggests that “The text is always dependent on a context and, if the latter varies, the text has also to change accordingly if the original message or meaning of the text is to be preserved.” R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) page viii.

<sup>25</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation*, (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1978) p30.

<sup>26</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation* p32

<sup>27</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation* p33

shown in discussing speech act theory. For our intuitions are open to correction, and our rules and conventions are open to change."<sup>28</sup>

Understanding, then, should be "conceived of as a validating, self-correcting process – an active posting of corrigible schemata which we test and modify in the very process of coming to understand an utterance"<sup>29</sup>. This is therefore, although Hirsch does not note this, an entirely dialogic, conversational and consensual model in practice. In this respect, Hirsch is not a particularly happy associate for Ward and Vanhoozer, for whom meaning needs to be uptaken, rather than creatively understood.

However, Hirsch then goes on to suggest that "meaning is an object that exists *only* by virtue of a single, privileged, precritical approach."<sup>30</sup> While I agree (as would Bakhtin) that Hirsch is right that "it is within the capacity of every individual to imagine himself other than he is, to realize in himself another human or cultural possibility"<sup>31</sup>, this does not mean that all meaning can have only one perspective: that of the author alone. (It is interesting to note that Hirsch's description of the act of "deliberate reconstruction of the author's subjective stance"<sup>32</sup>, especially in his footnote 29 on page 238, is very close to Bakhtin's description of the first stage of the actualization of meaning<sup>33</sup>).

I agree with Hirsch that the recognition of intention is an integral and inescapably necessary part of all communication. However, Hirsch also seeks to defend the sender view of meaning, which conflicts with his view of understanding, which is neither sender-based nor static. For Hirsch, meaning is 'what the author meant', including all of the emotions and values which he acknowledges are a part of the author's act. This can be imagined so satisfactorily by a reader, in an act of understanding, that the author's original meaning is thereby re-enacted or revived. Hirsch accepts that "meaning is not restricted to conceptual meaning ... it embraces not only any content of mind represented by written speech but also the affects and values that are necessarily correlative to such a content." Thus it includes

not only intentional objects but also the species of intentional acts which sponsor those intentional objects... the reader should understand that an intentional object cannot be dis severed from a species of intentional act, that subjective feeling, tone, mood, and value, are constitutive of meaning in its fullest sense. One cannot *have* a meaning without having its necessarily correlative affect or value.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation* p34

<sup>29</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation* p34

<sup>30</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation* p44

<sup>31</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation* p47

<sup>32</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p238

<sup>33</sup> See next Chapter, in the section on Reading and Understanding

<sup>34</sup> *The Aims of Interpretation* p8

However, this being the case, it is hard to see how this meaning can be entirely in the hands of the author: and of course Hirsch would agree. He suggests not that authorial control is inescapable, as Vanhoozer by contrast implies, but that it is possible and preferable to any other reading strategy. However, to understand the author's meaning, it is necessary then to have the emotions and experiences and values – the 'necessarily correlative affects or values' – that the author assumed and imagined, otherwise the meaning will be different.

In relation to Hirsch's scheme, then, meaning could be described as both illocutionary, in the sense that the original, authorial meaning of the text is an unchanging property of the text, and perlocutionary, in that "a word sequence means nothing in particular until somebody either means something by it or understands something from it"<sup>35</sup>, a phrase which strongly echoes Austin's description of a perlocution<sup>36</sup>. The actual meaning of the text can be known on the same basis as that on which, according to Duff and Austin, intention operates. That is, Hirsch believes that meaning, like intention, is a public matter, not an interior and private one: "the irreproducibility of meaning experiences is not the same as the irreproducibility of meaning. The psychologistic identification of textual meaning with a meaning experience is inadmissible. Meaning experiences *are* private, but they are not meaning."<sup>37</sup>

Vanhoozer, Ward et al would claim to agree with this, of course, but as we have already seen, the view of intention which they, like Austin himself, are obliged in practice to adopt conflicts with this assumption. I too entirely agree with the idea that meaning is public not private, but this is consistent with my conversational, reciprocal view of meaning. Hirsch, however, fails to notice that the fact that meaning is public not private, does not guarantee that 'what the author meant' will be automatically accessible without 'contamination' or remainder<sup>38</sup>, nor does it guarantee that meaning is simply 'what the author meant'.

---

<sup>35</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p4

<sup>36</sup> "any, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever, and in particular by a straightforward constative utterance (if there is such an animal)": *How To* p109. This is one of the reasons why Vanhoozer goes on to revise Hirsch's scheme in favour of the concepts of "meaning accomplished" and "meaning applied" – see the following section on 'Transhistoric Intention'.

<sup>37</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p16

<sup>38</sup> As Bruns notes: "we know, as a matter of hermeneutic experience, that we can arrive at [authorial] intentions, and thus be guided by them, only in a manner of speaking, that is, by producing our own versions of them. You could say that no matter how hard we try, we always operate allegorically when we read" – and allegory will become an important concept for Hirsch later: G L Bruns, 'Intention, Authority, and Meaning', *Critical Inquiry* 7:2 (Winter 1980) 301. See also later in Bruns's article: "When I read, I lend my spirit to the letter, and each reading fills the letter with the spirit of my reading. I regularly or routinely assume – it is part



In addition, it would appear that Hirsch is here divorcing meaning from an experience, so that the correspondence between meaning and an illocution is again striking: both are in no way dependent on anything unpredictable. However, it is not clear how to distinguish 'a meaning experience' from 'recognizing the unchanging meaning' or from appreciating 'necessarily correlative affects or values', any more than it was clear how to distinguish the idea of 'uptake' in Austin et al, from that of understanding. This is for Hirsch a fundamental difficulty since Hirsch, like Austin but unlike Vanhoozer, acknowledges that the recognition of meaning is a positive action of consciousness, and that meaning includes the emotions and values which were a part of the author's original creative action.

Hirsch clearly wants to distinguish 'the experience of a text', which is associated with the text's significance and value for the reader (and which is very similar to that which Vanhoozer would identify as the perlocutionary effect of the text), from simply 'what the text means', which is based solely on the innate meaning of the text. However, since this meaning is, as Hirsch would agree, public and constructed, it is not clear how meaning can be understood without being experienced, even given the moral determination to have no experience of the text, but realize only its meaning. Hirsch is imagining an activity, or rather a 'pseudo-activity', very close to the uptake on which illocutions rely. It is inadequate for precisely the same reasons: the act of realizing is active and contextual. It cannot be neutral or acontextual.

Hirsch believes that "to understand an utterance it is, in fact, not just desirable but absolutely unavoidable that we understand it in its own terms."<sup>39</sup> But we have to understand it using our own terms – we have no option. We cannot learn neutrally, because we ourselves are not neutral or given identities. Understanding, as Gadamer demonstrates, is an active involvement in existence, a cause and an effect of personal development. Gadamer notes that

reconstructing the original circumstances, like all restoration, is a futile undertaking in view of the historicity of our being. What is reconstructed, a life brought back from the lost past, is not the original. ... Similarly, a hermeneutics that regarded understanding as reconstructing the original would be no more than handing on a dead meaning.<sup>40</sup>

---

of the convention by which I try to authorize my reading – that I read the letter in the same spirit in which it was written. Although with many or perhaps most texts I cannot plausibly do this, there is no doubt that when I do not or cannot read the letter in this spirit (the spirit, say, of authorial intentionality) I had better be able to explain why not; that is, I had better be able to adduce the authority of my reading, which may (who knows?) outweigh the authority with which the letter was composed": 'Intention, Authority, and Meaning', op cit p 304.

<sup>39</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p134

<sup>40</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p166-167. By contrast, he asserts that "the co-ordination of all knowing activity with what is known is not based on the fact that they have the same mode of being but draws its significance from the *particular nature* of the mode of being that is common to them. It consists in the fact that neither the knower nor the known is 'present-at-

He explicitly argues that “just as the events of history do not in general manifest any agreement with the subjective ideas of the person who stands and acts within history, so the sense of a text in general reaches far beyond what its author originally intended”<sup>41</sup> and thus “the hermeneutical reduction to the authors’ meaning is just as inappropriate as the reduction of historical events to the intentions of their protagonists”<sup>42</sup>.

Thus, an utterance is not recognised as such in its own terms and then understood: the act of recognizing an utterance is a creative, active one, in which the utterance is recognized by a reader who has learnt how to recognize utterances and is continually learning from them and being affected by them, and who is inescapably in conversation with the utterance he or she has just recognised, and the context of its recognition. It is thus both undesirable, and impossible, to understand meaning ‘neutrally’, from outside history: there is no such space in which to stand, as Gadamer asserts<sup>43</sup>.

However, Hirsch seems to assume precisely that such a stance is possible. He states that “since all understanding is “silent” – that is, cast only in its own terms and not in foreign categories – it follows that all sceptical historicism is founded on a misconception of the nature of understanding.”<sup>44</sup> However, it is contradictory to suggest both that understanding is a construction, and that it is “silent”, which implies that it is a passive response to one voice. Understanding is part of a whole series of conversations, and while it includes an assumption of agency and a degree of ‘listening’ on the part of the reader

---

hand’ in an ‘ontic’ way, but in a ‘historical’ one, i.e. they both have the *mode of being of historicity*... the historicity of human Dasein [There-being] in its expectancy and its forgetting is the condition of our being able to re-present the past... belonging to traditions belongs just as originally and essentially to the historical finitude of Dasein as does its projectedness toward future possibilities of itself. ... Thus there is no understanding or interpretation in which the totality of this existential structure does not function, even if the intention of the knower is simply to read ‘what is there’ and to discover from his sources ‘how it really was’” p262.

<sup>41</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p380

<sup>42</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p382. He later suggests that “normative concepts such as the author’s meaning or the original reader’s understanding in fact represent only an empty space that is filled from time to time in understanding”: op cit p413.

<sup>43</sup> “There is no such thing, in fact, as a point outside history from which the identity of a problem can be conceived within the vicissitudes of the history of attempts to solve it. ... The standpoint that is beyond any standpoint, a standpoint from which we could conceive its true identity, is a pure illusion”, as is the idea of course that the true identity of something is outside how it seems to us – this is to revert again to ideas of inward intention and agency: *Truth and Method* op cit p384. Later, Gadamer refers to the idea that one can “think only in the concepts of the epoch one is trying to understand” as a “naive illusion” (p414) because this would entail trying to understand while also trying to “exclude what alone makes understanding possible. ... To try to escape from one’s own concepts in interpretation is not only impossible but manifestly absurd. To interpret means precisely to bring one’s own preconceptions into play so that the text’s meaning can really be made to speak for us”: p415.

<sup>44</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p135

or hearer, 'silence' is impossible. As Gadamer demonstrates, it is not that we have a choice of understanding in the text's terms or in our own, it is that when we understand any text, it is we who are doing the understanding, and we cannot eliminate our own prejudices and assumptions, or understand without that act being a creative act of participation. Understanding is a creative act, involving at least two 'voices' and possibly many more: it is inescapably plural, perhaps even cacophonous.

For Hirsch, however, understanding is also "timeless"<sup>45</sup>. This assertion could only have even the appearance of plausibility if we who understand were also timeless. For example, he suggests, in respect of Simone Weil's interpretation of *The Iliad*, that

we agree with it because we too have read *The Iliad* and have perceived that same meaning – even if we have not recognized it so explicitly. I cannot imagine any competent reader of any past age who did not implicitly grasp this meaning in *The Iliad*, though I can certainly imagine a time when readers did not feel this meaning to be a comment on life worthy of a special monograph.<sup>46</sup>

But this is entirely inadequate, and ignores the affect of context on meaning<sup>47</sup>. We do not agree with Simone Weil's interpretation because we have already perceived or recognized this meaning: her interpretation introduces something new that simply 'seems right'. To suggest that "I cannot imagine any competent reader of any past age ..." is entirely without point: this does not go any way towards proving that Simone Weil's interpretation is unoriginal. I can well imagine "competent readers" who were not struck by the way in which "*The Iliad* discloses the role of brute force in human life"<sup>48</sup>: readers who understand it simply in heroic terms, or as an early form of 'beat-'em-up' entertainment.

Moreover, to suggest that "I can certainly imagine a time when readers did not feel this meaning to be a comment on life worthy of a special monograph" is to recognize the crucial role played by context in the conversational creation of meaning: in brutal, feudal or hierarchical societies, the violence of life might be taken for granted and go unremarked: in a 'more civilized' age it might take apparently exceptional experiences for a critic to rediscover and make obvious for the first time this aspect of meaning, which these particular contexts and experiences have brought out<sup>49</sup>. As Gadamer asserts, "historical

---

<sup>45</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p137

<sup>46</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p139

<sup>47</sup> "it is in contexts that meaning occurs": S Fish, 'What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973) p133. See also the discussion of Bakhtin's and Rosenblatt's views in the next chapter.

<sup>48</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p138

<sup>49</sup> See also J E Kennard's discussion of various context-affected readings of Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* in 'Convention Coverage or How to Read Your Own Life', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 74ff. The idea of a 'competent reader' is really for Hirsch a

tradition can be understood only as something always in the process of being defined by the course of events. ... It is the course of events that brings out new aspects of meaning in historical material. By being re-actualized in understanding, texts are drawn into a genuine course of events in exactly the same way as are events themselves."<sup>50</sup>

Even the linguistic conventions that we agree make verbal meaning are not merely linguistic: they include the context of the utterance. It is not, then, the case that 'verbal meaning is that aspect of a speaker's intention which may be shared', but rather it is the case that 'verbal meaning is what the hearer or reader recognises as being the meaning of the utterance, based on conventions that the hearer or reader assumes are shared'.

Thus while I accept that verbal meaning is sharable, I do not agree with Hirsch's speaker-centred suggestion that it "is [just] the shareable content of the speaker's intentional object"<sup>51</sup>. Nor do I agree with the suggestion that just because verbal meaning is always shareable, it is therefore unchanging. Verbal meaning, like all meaning, is a collective activity. Meaning is not "determined once and for all by the character of the speaker's intention"<sup>52</sup> – which would simply abolish any distinction between the two concepts – but by some form of encultured conversation involving the responders and the agent. Indeed, intention itself is collectively determined, as I suggested in chapter four of this thesis.

The verbal meaning of any particular intentional act is not for the agent alone to decide, but is decided conversationally (again, the similarity between Hirsch's description of meaning, and Austin's description of the perlocution, is interesting). Thus the concept of "the same verbal meaning" presupposes a particular, propositional view of meaning, as extractable from the words used, which may just be appropriate in some contexts, but not by any means in all<sup>53</sup>.

---

circular entity: he assumes that meaning is something agreed by all competent readers, and any historical reader who does not agree, turns out not to be competent!

<sup>50</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p381

<sup>51</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p219

<sup>52</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p219

<sup>53</sup> To quote Fish: "the pure semantic value of the utterance is ... merely an abstraction, which, although it can be separated out for the sake of analysis, has no separate and independent status": S Fish, 'What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973) p137. See also J R Cameron: "the significance of an indicative utterance will be transformed from a performative significance ... into something static, with the action taken out; it ceases to have the nature of an institutional fact, and is no longer something created at a particular time (the time of utterance). (Our unwitting surgery amounts to filleting, not mere amputation, and its product is a cadaver)": 'Sentence-Meaning and Speech Acts'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) p115.

Hirsch persistently imagines that recognizing the meaning of a text, while an active effort, is not a response: “neither in fact nor in logic is a verbal meaning the same as any of the countless relational complexes within which it can form a part.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore the fundamental difference between Hirsch and me is that while both he and I would agree that meaning is shareable<sup>55</sup>, I would believe that meaning is only shareable; there is no meaning otherwise: it is created in sharing. All meaning is relational and responsive<sup>56</sup>. Hirsch believes that meaning is created singly, and recognized by others. It is neither relational nor responsive. It is thus to all intents and purposes uptaken not understood, although Hirsch would deny this.

Hirsch also objects to the notion that “what one understands is really one’s perception of or response to a meaning.”<sup>57</sup> This suggestion is clearly inadequate and Hirsch is correct to object to it. ‘What one understands’ is not a response to the meaning, but it is the meaning of the thing itself, created in part by one’s own understanding act. A meaning is, quite crucially, attached to what is realized as being (because it has meaning) an act (or an aspect of one), and which therefore has value and content<sup>58</sup>.

## 5. Authorial Intention and Transhistorical Intention:

### 5a. In E. D. Hirsch

A view of meaning such as that adopted by Hirsch, Ward and Vanhoozer, which sees it as being constituted in essence by the author’s intention realised within the text, poses for Christian biblical hermeneutics in particular, a great problem. How is one to understand the many Old Testament events and prophecies that are traditionally seen by Christians as referring to the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity? It cannot plausibly be asserted that the account of Abraham’s meeting at the Oaks of Mamre, for example, was intended by its human author to refer to God as Triune, or that the human author of chapter 53 of the Book of Isaiah intended, in describing the Suffering Servant, to refer to the Messiah Jesus of Nazareth<sup>59</sup>.

---

<sup>54</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p39

<sup>55</sup> “a single principle underlies what we loosely call “the norms of language.” It is the principle of sharability”: *Validity in Interpretation* p31

<sup>56</sup> If it is true, as Wittgenstein asserts, that there can be no such thing as a private language - “hence also ‘obeying a rule’ is a practice. And to *think* one is obeying a rule is not to obey a rule. Hence it is not possible to obey a rule ‘privately’: otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.” *Phil Inv I* §202 (p81) - then it is equally true that there can be no such thing as a private meaning, and for the same reasons. An utterance can, however, have one meaning for a small group of initiates, and another for ‘the public’.

<sup>57</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p37

<sup>58</sup> See the discussion of the act of shooting the donkey in chapter 5 section 2 of this thesis. See also S Fish, ‘What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?’ in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973) p148.

<sup>59</sup> Because of the difference in time between the authorship of these texts on the one hand, and the revelation of God’s full nature, and Jesus’ own full identity, on the other.

Moreover, as the Russian hermeneut Mikhail Bakhtin has suggested, one of the attributes of 'great literature' is often said to be its continuing immediacy and relevance in contexts outside those imagined by the author<sup>60</sup>. Great literature 'still has things to say' to each new generation: it is a treasure trove, never exhausted by any number of readings, and neither Hirsch nor Vanhoozer wishes to entirely divorce this continuing appreciation of either the Bible, or of 'great literature' in general, from the author's intention or control. This divorce would be necessary if all such future appreciations came under the scope of 'significance' rather than meaning.

It is of course possible to say of the Bible that God is the author, rather than any human, so that 'new' Christian meanings are in accord with what the Divine Author intended. Vanhoozer suggests that the Divine authorship of the Old Testament, is evidenced in its Canonical status, which allows the "fuller meaning" of the Scriptures to emerge. He accepts that sometimes "the meaning of a historical event, for instance, does not become apparent immediately"<sup>61</sup> (although it is not clear how this affects the objective 'reality of the past' he has previously so strenuously defended) and seeks for some way of preserving this recognition consonant with meaning being only that which was intended by the author.

He notes that the

answer, I believe, depends on what – or rather whose – intended act we are interpreting. A text must be read in light of its intentional context, that is, against the background that best allows us to answer the question of what the author is doing. For it is in relation to its intentional context that a text yields its maximal sense, its fullest meaning. *If we are reading the Bible as the Word of God, therefore, I suggest that the context that yields this maximal sense is the canon, taken as a unified communicative act.*<sup>62</sup>

However, what this suggestion illustrates is that it is quite explicitly the context that allows us to read and understand properly, a context not imagined by the human author: Paul did not decide to write canonically; indeed none of the New Testament authors saw themselves as writing 'Scripture'. Moreover, this context – the Canon – has been created by another context: the Christian Church. Readers, guided by God (at least as Christians believe and hope), have created this context, and it is not simply propositional – 'all the books which say the same thing are Canonical' – but is in large part inherited. The 'fullest' meaning thus remains 'intended' only by virtue of a sleight of hand in respect of authorial identity, since in the case of the Bible

---

<sup>60</sup> "For, we repeat, great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation, they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth" *The Dialogic Imagination*, (Austin TX, University of Texas, 2000) p422.

<sup>61</sup> *Is There?* p264

<sup>62</sup> *Is There?* p 265

the claim is that 'God wrote the Canon'. In truth, if God did write the Canon, He did so through its readers<sup>63</sup>.

It is the context that creates the maximal sense, not an innate property of the text or the will of the author (unless, in the case of the Bible, one wishes to see the will of the author as operating in the reading context as well as the writing of the text). Vanhoozer is simply privileging one particular context of one particular set of texts, on the basis of his own preconceived, inherited contextual assumptions.

This dilemma is also present in Vanhoozer's use of Bakhtin's idea of the "fuller literal sense"<sup>64</sup>, which he uses as a justification for saying that Scriptural authors intended their Christian Canonical presence<sup>65</sup> so that Christian use of the Old Testament does not contradict his insistence that meaning is authorial. However, in so doing he entirely ignores the thrust of Bakhtin's work, which is to stress the extent to which any author is in dialogue with both his own time and subsequent generations, and that meaning is produced in this dialogue<sup>66</sup>.

Moreover, the option of a Divine Author is not available to anyone seeking to link contemporary appreciation of 'the classics' to the author's original meaning, since it is an argument which depends for its plausibility solely on a specific Christian context. Hence, in order to provide an authorially-determined 'intention context' in which the fullest meaning can be identified without departing from authorial determination of meaning, Hirsch introduces, and Vanhoozer adopts, the concept of "transhistorical intention".

Hirsch takes his first steps towards this idea with his suggestion

that for some genres of texts the author submits to the convention that his willed implications must go far beyond what he explicitly knows. This is to some degree an aspect of most texts ...: the principle for including or excluding implications is not what the author is aware of, but whether or not the implications belong to the *type* of meaning that he wills.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> This of course is exactly what Nicholas Wolterstorff also ignores – he suggests that God "appropriates" human discourse – *Divine discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) p63, but as he makes clear this is an entirely context-dependent recognition (p187). However, he completely fails to recognise the effect of this on his suggestion that discourse is an illocution as opposed to the perlocutionary nature of revelation. This is an accusation that is also levelled at Wolterstorff by B S Childs in his 'Speech-act theory and biblical interpretation', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:4 (2005). He points out that Wolterstorff completely neglects the canonical sense of Scripture,

<sup>64</sup> *Is There?* p 313

<sup>65</sup> Bad news if you read them in Synagogues I suppose

<sup>66</sup> For further reflections on Vanhoozer's use of Bakhtin, see the next chapter.

<sup>67</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p123-124

Hirsch himself is aware that this has implications for Scriptural interpretation: he suggests in a footnote that

the human author's willed meaning can always go beyond what he consciously intended so long as it remains within his willed type, and if the meaning is conceived of as going beyond even that, then we must have recourse to a divine Author speaking through the human one. In that case it is His willed type we are trying to interpret, and the human author is irrelevant. We must not confuse his text with God's. In either instance the notion of a sense beyond the author's is illegitimate.<sup>68</sup>

In essence, then, this is a re-definition of the idea of 'speaker's meaning' from 'things he willed' to include 'things he willed by implication, according to the genre he dictates for his text'. It allows therefore, the idea of context, albeit one that is entirely subservient to the author's dictating will. It also, of course, assumes that questions of genre and context are questions of authorial declaration rather than of negotiation or 'readerly' contextual ascription.

Hirsch subsequently came to 'qualify and deepen' this argument in his article '*Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory*'<sup>69</sup>. Hirsch accepts Gadamer's suggestion that

application, and hence anachronism, and hence, as I shall argue, allegory, form implicit features in the interpretation of all writings that are intended to apply across time...  
Such writing typically intends to convey meaning beyond its immediate occasion into a future context which is very different from that of its production... The basic structures of those future situations may be preimagined, making the structure of allegory *analogous* to the structure of the original meaning. But the specific content of a future analogy ... cannot be known. Hence in producing transoccasional writing, one almost always intends "contents" that go beyond the literal contents of one's mind.<sup>70</sup>

He goes on to quote some examples of the Supreme Court of the United States of America's interpretations of the Fourteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, comparing a decision supportive of separate railway carriages for different 'races' (*Plessy v Ferguson*, 1896) with one declaring against separate education (*Brown v Board of Education*, 1954), some fifty years later. Hirsch suggests that the difference in the Supreme Court's interpretation between the two cases was that the second was

partly based on a recently determined relevant fact about the social world unknown or unaccepted by the interpreters in *Plessy* - namely that in the American context the psychological effects of separate facilities make them *inherently* unequal. Thus, on the basis of a "truer" understanding of what

---

<sup>68</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p126 footnote 37.

<sup>69</sup> E D Hirsch Jr, 'Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory', *New Literary History* 25:1 (1994) 549-567.

<sup>70</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p552.



[Justice] Marshall called "the nature of the objects themselves," the justices ruled that separate facilities are inherently unequal.<sup>71</sup>

Hirsch's argument is that the writers of the Fourteenth Amendment intended "to convey meaning beyond its immediate occasion into a future context which is very different from that of its production"<sup>72</sup>: they intended "'contents" that go beyond the literal contents of [the writers'] mind."

Hirsch is in fact trying to find a middle way between on the one hand the "narrow literalism"<sup>73</sup> of Constitutional 'originalists' such as Judge Bork, and on the other the "rigorous anti-originalists who wish to dispense with authorial intent altogether"<sup>74</sup>, by substituting for it "the reader's intention"<sup>75</sup>. On the face of it, Hirsch's hermeneutical concern to restore meaning to the author's domain ought to make him entirely sympathetic to the 'originalist' position, which was highly critical of 'judicial extrapolation', and sought to overturn this habit in favour of an entirely literal interpretation of the Constitution, based solely on what its Eighteenth Century writers could have intended.

However, the 'originalist' view found favour in a particular political context that was highly critical of 'liberal judgements' such as that in *Roe v Wade*, and shared some common ground with an element of particularly Republican Party 'anti-big government' thought. Hirsch is unwilling to conclude that the United States' Constitution should be construed as intending to mean only what it meant in the Eighteenth Century, and thus that Constitutional clauses are inapplicable to issues such as abortion or Roosevelt-style 'Public Works', which were not in the minds of Eighteenth Century legislators. Therefore he seeks to propose an alternative, which maintains some supposed 'authorial control' over meaning, while allowing for a degree of contextual extrapolation.

There is such a position: one that acknowledges meaning as a dialogue, in which all parties have a share. However, Hirsch is attempting to find a middle way while still retaining his defence of authorial intention. Allegory (and 'liberal' judicial interpretations) are still, for Hirsch, necessarily governed by the transoccasional intentions of the author, otherwise they are immoral and inappropriate. Hirsch traces the origins of his idea in Saint Augustine's biblical hermeneutics. Hirsch suggests that Augustine assumes that "the historical Moses *intended* readers to apprehend relevant truths that he, Moses, did not and could not be directly aware of." In other words, the revelation of Jesus Christ fulfils and illuminates the 'Old' Testament.

---

<sup>71</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p552-553.

<sup>72</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p552

<sup>73</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p555

<sup>74</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p555

<sup>75</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p556

Hirsch suggests:

An allegory is wrong if it is untrue to the spirit of the original intent. Interpretation must always go beyond the writer's letter, but never beyond the writer's spirit. And the writer's spirit is determined not simply by abstract theological speculation about the nature of God's truth, but is rooted in what Moses historically intended. Even if that original intention wished to accommodate itself to all sorts and conditions of future readers and periods of history, still it is to the spirit of Moses's intention to which we must turn for interpretive sanction, even as we transcend the immediate contents of that intention.

... *Brown's* overruling of *Plessy* was an example of legitimate allegory, because *Brown* was based on a current understanding of the reality to which the law referred. Relevant reality as currently understood is one of the two legitimating principles for allegory. The other principle [is] that of constraint by original intention... An allegorical interpretation is legitimate when there is an empirically determined connection between the original intention to refer and that intention's present reference. By 'reference' I mean what St Augustine and [Justice] John Marshall called respectively 'truth' or 'the nature of the objects themselves'.<sup>76</sup>

Hirsch goes on to use in support the "blank-tag theory of names"<sup>77</sup>: the idea that names refer simply by naming, without needing descriptors. He suggests that "a reality in the world is not picked out by descriptions, but rather by a name that has a historical continuity or causal chain" so that we are able to refer "by virtue of the continuity of linguistic usage."<sup>78</sup> Hirsch refers to a "naming-baptism" or a "meaning-baptism"<sup>79</sup> which begins the process of reference, and states that "the originating act has content that helps determine the nature of the intention to refer."<sup>80</sup>

Hirsch thus argues that the

medieval allegorizers of Homer were sound in principle. Their fault lay in their empirical inaccuracy regarding the spirit of Homer's original meaning-intentions, not in their finding anachronistic allegorical meanings... Macrobius and others were right to hold that the present meaning of the ancients is the transhistorical reality to which they meant to refer in the incompleteness of their knowledge.<sup>81</sup>

This idea is adopted and amended by Vanhoozer and Ward.

---

<sup>76</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p558

<sup>77</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p559

<sup>78</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p559

<sup>79</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p560

<sup>80</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p560

<sup>81</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p562

**Authorial Intention and Transhistorical Intention.**

**5b. In Kevin Vanhoozer and Timothy Ward**

For Vanhoozer, as we have noted, convincing a reader is a perlocutionary effect achieved by the author, and is to be distinguished from getting readers to understand you, which is an illocutionary action by the author<sup>82</sup>. However, Vanhoozer notes that there is nonetheless a complication: “what are we to make, however, of cases where an author intends to address readers *in contexts other than the author’s own*? Is such an intention a matter of mapping or meaning? We have seen that writing allows authors to communicate *at a distance*. Just what is the author’s *attention span*?”<sup>83</sup>

This is a crucial question, because the distinction between illocutionary meaning and perlocutionary significance depends upon the plausibility of the presence of a ‘saturated context’<sup>84</sup> allowing the uptake of meaning. The greater the apparent contextual discrepancy between the author and the reader, the less plausible the possibility of a saturated context appears. (Not least among the possible indicators of contextual discrepancy would be precisely those factors affecting reading of the Biblical texts at the beginning of the twenty-first century: a considerable chronological gap, and a considerable cultural and linguistic gap.)

Vanhoozer does not detail how to distinguish those cases where the author intends a trans-contextual address from those cases where he does not. Instead he adopts a variation of Hirsch’s idea of “transhistorical intentions”: “the point is that an author’s intended meaning can tolerate a small revision in mental content and still remain the same”<sup>85</sup>. It should be noted that “mental content” here appears largely synonymous with the “author’s intended meaning”, and thus that meaning becomes synonymous with ‘the idea that the author wanted to express’, rather than ‘what was done’. Meaning is thus in practice a propositional concept, rather than an ‘artistic’ or poetic one, and is necessarily reliant on a perfect, ‘saturated’ context for uptake.

Vanhoozer suggests “that certain applications may belong to the meaning rather than the significance side of the meaning/significance distinction”<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> And which presumably requires merely reading with good will? “Illocutionary intent is thus constitutive of communicative action and of meaning in a way that perlocutionary intent is not”: *Is There?* p261

<sup>83</sup> *Is There?* p261

<sup>84</sup> Derrida’s phrase in his discussion of Austin

<sup>85</sup> *Is There?* p262. Vanhoozer does not, either, provide a definition of ‘small revisions’, nor indicate who decides what is or is not ‘small’, although this is presumably bigger than the sort of “sometimes perversely close” (Ward: *Word and Supplement* p172) or “inconsequential” (*Word and Supplement* footnote 121 p 172, quote occurring on p173, quoting *Is There?* p397) detail that Vanhoozer accuses Derrida of dwelling on!

<sup>86</sup> *Is There?* p262

and therefore that the meaning/significance distinction ought to be re-worked:

*The meaning/significance distinction is fundamentally a distinction between a completed action and its ongoing intentional or unintentional consequences... [Transhistorical intentions identify] neither new acts nor unintended effects, but rather applications of the original intended meaning. I would therefore be happier to speak of meaning in terms of the author's intended meaning and of significance in terms of the author's extended meaning. When authors successfully enact their intentions, we can say *meaning accomplished*; when these meanings are brought to bear on other texts and contexts and so achieve perlocutionary effects, we should say *meaning applied*.<sup>87</sup>*

Vanhoozer does not want to limit 'meaning' to being a bland reconstruction of old senses and leave a text's contemporary significance and effects entirely cast adrift and without any relation to the author's intention, but equally he cannot do away with his need for an illocutionary guarantee.

Ward likewise suggests that

it can be argued that the meaning of the Bible is left unchanged by the present action of the Holy Spirit if some universal reference can be identified in the biblical texts themselves [such as the suggestion] ... that the New Testament Gospels were addressed not to particular Christian communities ..., but to 'any and every Christian community in the late-first century Roman Empire' [and that therefore, since] ...there seems to be no significant hermeneutical difference between being separated from the particular culture of the writer by space and culture, or time and culture. It may be, then, that [the] ... argument can be expanded to include the possibility that the Gospel-writers intended also a future reference to Christians in all ages: trans-cultural reference may include trans-historical reference. People and situations of whom the Gospel-writers knew nothing are therefore referred to in the text to the extent that the particularities of the text claim to be of universal significance.<sup>88</sup>

Thus "the action of the Holy Spirit in relation to the Bible is not to perform a new speech act, but to bring about the perlocutionary effect of the speech act(s) which God has performed and continues to perform."<sup>89</sup>

Ward and Vanhoozer thus blur their own illocutionary/perlocutionary distinction in order to claim authorial approval for certain 'perlocutionary' effects that the author would not normally under a speech act scheme be credited with having been able to predict accurately, or to claim as part of his

---

<sup>87</sup> *Is There?* p262. I wonder why Vanhoozer refers to 'other' texts and contexts, since Perlocutionary effects apply to significance within the author's own context too, on Vanhoozer's account.

<sup>88</sup> *Word and Supplement* p203-204

<sup>89</sup> *Word and Supplement* p204. The role of the Holy Spirit is discussed in chapter eight of this thesis.

act. There are, however, a number of profound problems with this concept of transhistorical intention.

## **6. Problems with Transhistorical Intention.**

### **6a: Differences in genre.**

The first problem with Hirsch's suggestion is that much of his description of the idea of Transhistorical Intention is based on the use of the United States' Constitution in the US Supreme Court. However, the genre of 'Constitutions', whether authorially or collectively determined, might not necessarily work in the same way as other textual genres. The ways in which texts and intentions are assessed and regarded, might vary between, say, legal and literary contexts, or even within legal contexts if different branches of the law or legal codes are being considered.

Constitutions, and statutes generally, are collectively authored, politically 'approved', and entrusted to 'licensed readers' (the Judiciary), at least in some democratic states. Conventions of precedence and hierarchy affect how legal texts may be read. None of this is necessarily applicable to literary or Biblical texts<sup>90</sup>. In order to establish that the rules he has outlined for legal allegory work in the same way for literary or Biblical allegory, Hirsch should spend some time acknowledging and reflecting on the potential (but arguably irrelevant) differences between them. This he does not do. Instead, he assumes that all sorts of texts are read in the same way: context, after all, is of limited significance in his scheme.

## **Problems with Transhistorical Intention.**

### **6b. The irrelevancy of Authorial Intention.**

It is of course obvious that the intention of the various authors of the Fourteenth Amendment was not merely to permanently amend the Constitution, but to do so in particular respects, because these are implications of what 'we'<sup>91</sup> understand by the concept of a written Constitution and the process of Amendment. Aside from the fact that aspects of the Amendment, if not the entire Amendment, may have been intended to be punitive, the Amendment also states that all people born in the United States are citizens entitled to "equal protection" from the law; that the numbers of Representatives for each state should be proportionate to its enfranchised population; that rebels are barred from office; and that neither

---

<sup>90</sup> As Jarrett notes: "there is no 'official' philosophical answer [to "what Kant meant in a certain passage"] (even if there is something like that), but there is an 'official' (legal) reading of the First Amendment. When there is, as in [some] law, an authoritative interpretive tradition, the original meaning and intent of the author is only *one* of the factors to be considered in determining "what the text means": 'Philosophy of Language in the Service of Religious Studies', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 155.

<sup>91</sup> I.e. Members of democracies with written constitutions with amendment provisions, students of the history of the USA, etc.

Confederate bonds nor the costs of the emancipation of slaves would be met by the United States Government.

In *Plessy*, this Amendment was not believed (by the majority) to have any effect on the legality of the provision of segregated railway carriages or other facilities, explicitly including schools. In *Brown*, this same Amendment was believed to affect the legality of the provision of segregated schooling. Both of these decisions were made with reference to the Fourteenth Amendment and the intentions of the writers. The fact that the meaning of the Amendment was differently understood in these two cases does not in practice reflect the intentions of its original drafters, but rather reflects the fact that meaning is not governed solely by intention, even in the case of legal documents<sup>92</sup>. The question of intention is further complicated in legal contexts by the fact that it is affected by legal precedents, and most if not all constitutional documents are collectively authored.

As Mr Chief Justice Warren suggested when delivering the opinion of the Court in *Brown*<sup>93</sup>

the most avid proponents of the post-War amendments undoubtedly intended them to remove all legal distinctions among "all persons born or naturalized in the United States." Their opponents, just as certainly, were antagonistic to both the letter and the spirit of the amendments and wished them to have the most limited effect. What others in Congress and the state legislatures had in mind cannot be determined with any degree of certainty.<sup>94</sup>

Therefore he goes on to suggest that "in approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868, when the Amendment was adopted, or even to 1896, when *Plessy v Ferguson* was written. We must consider public education [which he has already noted did not really exist in 1868] in the light of its full development and its present place in American life throughout the nation."<sup>95</sup>

Thus, Mr Chief Justice Warren seems to be dismissing the idea that the intention of the writers of the Amendment is directly relevant: rather he will go on to construe the Amendment for himself, in the light of its current

---

<sup>92</sup> Indeed, English Courts have in the past been reluctant to interpret Statutes on the basis of what was said in Parliamentary debates and Committees, preferring simply to rely on their own construal of the words of the Act concerned. See also S Fish, 'Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases', *Critical Inquiry* 4:4 (Summer 1978).

<sup>93</sup> The papers relating to this case can be found at the website of the Legal Information Institute, part of Cornell University Law School, at <http://www.law.cornell.edu/lii.html>. The Legal Reference for the case is 347 US 483.

<sup>94</sup> The Opinion of the Court in *Brown v Board of Education of Topeka*, given by Warren, C.J., is at [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0347\\_0483\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0347_0483_ZO.html). This quote comes from the fourth paragraph of the Opinion.

<sup>95</sup> [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0347\\_0483\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0347_0483_ZO.html). This quote comes from the eighth paragraph of the Opinion.

context. He will adopt, in other words, a view of intention as understood action consonant with Professor Duff's suggestion discussed in chapter four of this thesis. While the 'originalist' would argue that the intentions of the writers of the Constitution or Amendment should be paramount, Chief Justice Warren's argument effectively asserts that the Constitution is not the property of its originators: rather it is owned by each succeeding generation of Americans. The Constitution is not a dead document, but one that lives in current American life<sup>96</sup>.

By contrast with the decision in *Brown v the Board of Education*, Mr Justice Brown, giving the opinion in *Plessy v Ferguson*<sup>97</sup>, stated that

the object of the amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but, in the nature of things, it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political, equality, or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. Laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation ... do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other, and have been generally, if not universally, recognized as within the competency of the state legislatures in the exercise of their police power. The most common instance of this is connected with the establishment of separate schools for white and colored children, which have been held to be a valid exercise of the

---

<sup>96</sup> As Jarrett notes "When there is, as in law, an authoritative interpretive tradition, the original meaning and intent of the author is only *one* of the factors to be considered in determining "what the text means". This is especially so with texts that are used as a source of norms, for, as often remarked, changing conditions give rise to questions that could not have been envisaged by earlier writers. A standard example of this concerns the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment – for the Founding Fathers were not in a position to consider whether, or under what circumstances, a wiretap is an unreasonable search. The interpretation of such ('normative') texts is not so much the search for the original meaning and intent of the author as the construction of meaning for the present ... Neither law nor theology is history. (Nor, Barthes tells us, is literary criticism).": 'Philosophy of Language in the Service of Religious Studies', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 155. See also the view of Gadamer: "every age has to understand a transmitted text in its own way, for the text belongs to the whole tradition whose content interests the age and in which it seeks to understand itself. The real meaning of a text, as it speaks to the interpreter, does not depend on the contingencies of the author and his original audience. It certainly is not identical with them, for it is always co-determined also by the historical situation of the interpreter and hence by the totality of the objective course of history": *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p307. Indeed, Gadamer later asserts that "a law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text ... if it is to be understood properly – i.e., according to the claim it makes – must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application": op cit p319-320. This also illustrates some of the potential generic differences in play here.

<sup>97</sup> Legal Information Institute – the Opinion of the Court in *Plessy*, given by Brown, J., can be found at [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0163\\_0537\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0163_0537_ZO.html). The Legal reference for the case is 163 US 537.

legislative power even by courts of states where the political rights of the colored race have been longest and most earnestly enforced.<sup>98</sup>

However, in his dissenting opinion Mr Justice Harlan describes this judgement as in his opinion “pernicious”<sup>99</sup>, and suggests that “the thin disguise of ‘equal’ accommodations for passengers in railroad coaches will not mislead any one, nor atone for the wrong this day done.”<sup>100</sup>

There are thus a variety of competing interpretations of the Fourteenth Amendment, depending not merely on time but clearly on political approach. It is hard to believe that any of the original framers of the Amendment would have intended such a variety of approaches, although different members of Congress would doubtless have held all of these views. The fact that there have been such deep disagreements as to the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment (and its legality) indicates absolutely clearly that the meaning of ‘transhistoric’ documents does not depend on the interior intentions of the writers, but rather on varying interpretations of the text itself, from within different contexts.

### **Problems with Transhistorical Intention.**

#### **6c. The Context of Reading and ‘public consensus’**

The question of textual interpretation therefore alights on the question of context. When Hirsch suggests that Saint Augustine assumes that “the historical Moses *intended* readers to apprehend relevant truths that he, Moses, did not and could not be directly aware of”, or that the revelation of Jesus Christ fulfils and illuminates the Old Testament, it is quite wrong to assert that Moses ‘transoccasionally intended’ to refer to the Holy Trinity or the incarnation of God, leaving aside the question of Moses’ historical existence and the authorship of the Pentateuch<sup>101</sup>.

It is perfectly acceptable for a Christian to argue that the Old Testament does indeed, because it is God’s revelation of Himself through human authors, refer to and mean Christian doctrines. However, it is wrong to assert that this meaning is the intended meaning of the human author/s: there can be no basis at all for suggesting that this meaning is inherent in the intention of the human author/s. When read in a Christian context, this text may very properly have these Christian meanings. However, this text could equally

---

<sup>98</sup> Op cit. This quote comes from the Twelfth paragraph of the Opinion.

<sup>99</sup> Legal Information Institute. The Dissenting Opinion of Harlan, J., can be found at [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0163\\_0537\\_ZD.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0163_0537_ZD.html). This quote comes from the Fifteenth paragraph.

<sup>100</sup> Eighteenth paragraph. Although he also suggests, in the previous paragraph, that “there is a race so different from our own that we do not permit those belonging to it to become citizens of the United States. Persons belonging to it are, with few exceptions, absolutely excluded from our country. I allude to the Chinese race.”

<sup>101</sup> Since someone or some series of people did indeed write these books.



properly be read in a Jewish, secular or Islamic context, in which case it would have no such meaning. To suggest to an observant Jew that Moses intended to refer to the Trinity or the Incarnation would be offensive (and probably laughable) and, in the context say of a Synagogue or Sabbath meal, also simply wrong.

The Christian sees those meanings because he or she believes that God has revealed Himself uniquely in Jesus Christ and that His spirit animates and guides His Church, from which context many hidden things become plain. The Christian may also believe that Moses, enjoying the Beatific vision, now pays homage to the Trinity and worships the Incarnate God. Neither a Jew nor a Muslim (nor indeed an atheist) would believe this: for them, the Church's reading context is erroneous (and blasphemous). Moses did not *intend* to refer to the Trinity. That he does so, is because the Church is able to read the Trinity into texts, in a perfectly authentic, inspired dialogic reading activity, believing herself to be guided into all truth by the Spirit.

Further, the nature of "relevant reality currently understood" is problematic. Hirsch objected to the notion of a public consensus as to meaning on the (spurious) grounds that unanimity is impossible, so that there would always be competing meanings.<sup>102</sup> However, "relevant reality" is no more fixed or certain. The dissenting judgement in *Plessy* is evidence of the fact that relevant reality can always be understood in more than one way.

Hirsch assumes that it is firstly possible to "empirically determine"<sup>103</sup> the author's meaning and intention, and to establish a link between the author's intended meaning and the asserted allegorical meaning of the text now. For allegory to be legitimate, Hirsch asserts that it needs to be in line with the author's original intention, 'empirically' extrapolated forwards into current conditions. The idea is that the 'present reference' of the author's original intention is the truth or essential nature of the text. It is rather as though one could ask – 'if Shakespeare had been alive today, what would he have wanted Hamlet to mean?'

As a description of the conversational way in which meaning is established, this is accurate enough, if a trifle obscure. However, the perennial confusion between intention and meaning (or attempt and achievement) is still unresolved, and is compounded when Hirsch goes on to use in support the "blank-tag theory of names"<sup>104</sup>: the idea that names refer simply by naming,

---

<sup>102</sup> "The idea of a public meaning sponsored not by the author's intention but by a public consensus is based upon a fundamental error of observation and logic. It is an empirical fact that the consensus does not exist, and it is a logical error to erect a stable normative concept (i.e. the public meaning) out of an unstable descriptive one." *Validity in Interpretation* p13: see the discussion of this point later in this chapter.

<sup>103</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p558

<sup>104</sup> 'Transhistorical Intentions' p559

without needing descriptors. He suggests that “a reality in the world is not picked out by descriptions, but rather by a name that has a historical continuity or causal chain” so that we are able to refer “by virtue of the continuity of linguistic usage.”<sup>105</sup>

Again, this is accurate as far as it goes, but we are able to name things successfully not simply because of a continuity of grammar or language, but because we are taught the use of language and learn references and names as part of our cultural inheritance. What is passed down is not an ‘original intention’, but an agreed definition, which is itself contextual and susceptible to change. The name ‘John Smith’ might in the United Kingdom refer to an unknown person (rather like ‘John Doe’), to a Brewing Company, or to the now deceased Labour Party politician, as well as to one of millions of other individuals. We will determine (successfully or not) which is referred to, on the basis of the shared conversational context, not because of some magic inherent in the name. Neither descriptors nor ‘the name itself’ refer. What refers is that word uttered and recognized in that particular utterance in that particular context, a context within shared conversations and cultures<sup>106</sup>.

As previously noted, Hirsch refers to a “naming-baptism” or a “meaning-baptism”<sup>107</sup> which begins the process of reference. He states that “the originating act has content that helps determine the nature of the intention to refer.”<sup>108</sup> But this originating act is not the action of an isolated author. Babies do not name themselves: the names they are given, and which are often (or universally) conferred upon them in a public ritual which has inherited forms and meanings of its own, are themselves names which are inherited and chosen by others, with all sorts of connotations and histories.

We do not name ourselves and force the rest of the world to name us according to our own dictates: we are named, and perhaps later we acquire nicknames, that are given to us and we accept. We can of course change our names both legally, when an adult (at least in some cultures), and by inventing nicknames for ourselves, but these are ineffective if no-one agrees to call us by our new name. We may, too, be known by different names in different contexts. However, any baptism is a collective act. This is true especially of the rite of Christian baptism, which is baptism into the collective inheritance of the Church as the Body of Christ, but it applies also to “naming-baptism” and “meaning-baptism”.

---

<sup>105</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p559

<sup>106</sup> “If there has to be anything ‘behind the utterance of the formula’ it is particular circumstances, which justify me in saying I can go on – when the formula occurs to me” which is not a separate ‘mental act’ aside from ‘going on’: *Phil Inv* I §154 p61.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p560

<sup>108</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p560

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Thus what Hirsch calls the “originating act of meaning” is not an act carried out by an individual agent, but is rather an aspect of a continuing conversation between a whole culture of actors who both speak and listen, and who agree on the meanings of utterances and names. Intention, and the interior mental knowledge of a speaker<sup>109</sup>, are irrelevant for meaning: meaning is what is recognized as having been done.

However, it is not clear why, if Augustine was right about Moses’ intentions, the medieval allegorizers were wrong about Homer’s, or why the decision of the majority in *Plessy* was wrong in its own time (as the dissenting judgement of Justice Harlan alleged)<sup>110</sup>. Augustine was not, I suggest, more ‘empirically accurate’<sup>111</sup> about Moses than the medieval allegorizers were about Homer. Moreover, it is not clear why Hirsch assumes that there will be “progress in knowledge”<sup>112</sup>. Things may be forgotten and overlooked as well as developed, and it is also the case that our own present-day knowledge is no more necessarily complete than was our ancestors (as the very existence as well as the form of the dissenting judgement in *Plessy* implies<sup>113</sup>).

If it is argued that, for example, Moses intended to be true, and to tell the truth about God, therefore he must have meant the Trinity even if he didn’t know it, because the Trinity is a truth about God, then this argument surely also applies to every text ever written. Many authors intend not just to be interesting and revealing and to entertain, but also to express truths about the human condition of some sort or other. If their authorial intention is to be true, then surely all of them must intend to be orthodox Christians, or to be compatible with orthodox Christianity, on the assumption that orthodox Christianity is now known to be true. This was, I suggest, more or less the assumption behind medieval allegories of Homer.

I note, too, that the examples Hirsch uses to test his theory that “progress in knowledge is indeed a legitimating interpretive principle”<sup>114</sup> are all concerned with the meaning of phrases: dephlogisticated air, water, and “the atoms of Democritus/ And Newton’s Particles of light”. In each case, Hirsch is asking about the meaning of a word, and wondering whether or not some of the associations it might hold for us, are implied in the use of the word or phrase

---

<sup>109</sup> What Austin called “pretended acts”.

<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Hirsch sometime seems to suggest that in its own time, the majority judgment in *Plessy* might have been legitimate, although it is so no longer.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p558

<sup>112</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p562

<sup>113</sup> Harlan J was well aware that the Court was being racist: here he was doubtless in the vanguard of public opinion. In our terms, however, while correct in his view of *Plessy*, he was also himself guilty of apparent racism against the Chinese: in this sense, he both illustrates that knowledge is disputed, and warns us against believing that later generations will vindicate us in every respect rather than both praising and condemning us alternately.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p562

by Priestley, Coleridge or Blake. He does not address the question of the meaning and value of a work of art.

Hirsch then secondly suggests that “sometimes in order to remain true to original intent you must reject original mental content.”<sup>115</sup> This is a pretty clear recognition that intention does not dictate meaning. Indeed, Hirsch goes on to recognise that “the idea of present consensus [is] critical in defining the limits of legitimate allegory”<sup>116</sup> because ‘truth’ or ‘the nature of the objects themselves’ “is, in actual practice, identical with our current consensus-understanding of reality.”

Not only is this alone a complete reversal of his previous dismissal of the possibility that meaning is a matter of public consensus, but Hirsch goes even further: “when current theories about natural or social reality are highly conflicted, we cannot determine present referentiality.”<sup>117</sup> It is on this basis of ‘general agreement’ that “the legitimately allegorical *Plessy* of 1896 became the illegitimately allegorical *Plessy* of 1954.” The problem is, of course, that there has never been a consensus about the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment, as Chief Justice Warren observed in *Brown*.

When *Plessy* was decided, Justice Harlan vigorously opposed it: there was no consensus even on the Supreme Court, let alone anywhere else. For many people, including a Supreme Court Justice, *Plessy* was illegitimately allegorical even in 1896, and something important is lost if one adopts a position that makes it impossible to acknowledge the legitimacy of this kind of dissent in relation to meaning. Further, when *Brown* effectively overturned *Plessy*, this was by no means the result of a unanimous social consensus. It reflected changing attitudes, and perhaps even a change in the opinion of the majority, but there remain opposing views. Racism persists, and ‘originalists’ too would oppose the ‘creativity’ of the judgment in *Brown*.

Hirsch has asserted (as previously noted), that “the idea of a public meaning sponsored not by the author’s intention but by a public consensus is based upon a fundamental error of observation and logic. It is an empirical fact that the consensus does not exist, and it is a logical error to erect a stable normative concept (i.e. the public meaning) out of an unstable descriptive one.”<sup>118</sup> It is not clear, however, why normative concepts have to be stable, and why there cannot be a variety of different publics, each of whom has their own consensus. Why must there be one consensus and one public meaning?

It is legitimately possible for something to have more than one meaning, depending on the context in question. The legitimacy of *Plessy* as an allegory

---

<sup>115</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p563-564

<sup>116</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p564

<sup>117</sup> ‘Transhistorical Intentions’ p564

<sup>118</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p13

of the Fourteenth Amendment does not depend on social consensus. The legitimacy of *Plessy* depends on the views of the community who are considering it. For some communities in America, the majority view in *Plessy* doubtless remains legitimate. They are not in a majority in the body politic. Even now there may be communities in which it would be unwise to insist on *Brown* or on the minority view in *Plessy*, and safer to keep one's head down. Present referentiality is determined by different groups differently, and then disputed<sup>119</sup>.

It may be that over time disputes are resolved and a meaning agreed. Presumably one interpretation emerges victorious over time, or communities divide along interpretative grounds. However, the example of *Roe v Wade* and the continuing controversy over abortion in the United States (and indeed elsewhere) indicates that it is possible for different groups to regard an allegorical interpretation as legitimate or illegitimate over a period of several generations, without there being any agreement in sight. A completely unanimous consensus is probably impossible<sup>120</sup>, and certainly unnecessary: all that is required is that enough people agree with an interpretation for it to be meaningful in that particular communal context<sup>121</sup>. Thereafter, every interpretation develops over time<sup>122</sup>.

As Louise Rosenblatt suggests: "as soon as one looks for ... a consensus, one finds not one but divergent publics, each achieving its own consensus through commonly held criteria ... [such as] appeals to the common human experiences ... [or] the reactions of a highly selected group of verbally sophisticated readers ... [or] the persistence through time and changing generations of perhaps a limited group of readers for a text"<sup>123</sup>. We live in a situation of many different, overlapping consensuses.

In attempting to 'save' texts from obsolescence and explain how it is that some texts remain 'alive' and meaningful so long after they were written, without diminishing the authorial veto over meaning, Hirsch ends up by reviving the idea of a public consensus establishing meaning that he rejected so firmly at the beginning of his first work on the subject of meaning.

---

<sup>119</sup> See S Fish, 'Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases', *Critical Inquiry* 4:4 (Summer 1978) p632ff, on *Riggs v Palmer* 1889.

<sup>120</sup> Would it need to include everyone who could speak the language, or everyone who lived in the political entity concerned, or everyone who was a citizen, for example?

<sup>121</sup> Or 'lebensform' - 'form of life', for Wittgenstein. *Phil Inv* I §23 p11.

<sup>122</sup> This is the point that M Hesse makes in her 'Reply to Don Hirsch', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) p 58: "we cannot have what Hirsch calls "a principle for putting a limit on accommodation" of theories; we only have the consensus of scientific judgment that one or a few theories are reasonable given all the constraints of simplicity, and so forth, as well as good empirical fit." It is Hirsch's desire for a guarantee that puts him in the same boat as Austin and Vanhoozer.

<sup>123</sup> L M Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional theory of the Literary work*, (Carbondale IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1978) p160.

However, the influence of the community on meaning is indeed ultimately inescapable. This realization leads inexorably to a recognition that genre and context are highly influential in meaning, and are not author-determined.

## 7. Conclusion

It is undoubtedly the case that thus far in this thesis, more time has been spent criticising the hermeneutical positions of others, than advancing anything positive. The thesis has been primarily determined to indicate that Speech Act theory is flawed, both inherently, and as a textual hermeneutical tool, and has not produced any detailed alternative to defend the idea of revelation.

Up to this point, this thesis has demonstrated that the concept of the illocution, which has become for Austin's 'heirs' his principal bequest, is incoherent. It cannot be successfully distinguished from the perlocution, and Austin's attempts to do so lead into incoherence with regard to intention, and must therefore be abandoned. The illocution works effectively as a description of actions that have already been successful, but it obscures the fact that speech acts are only 'successful' if they are recognised in particular ways, and thus that they are in part co-created by the – for want of a better word – audience. The use of the illocution as a descriptive tool, therefore, while on the face of it acceptable, in fact obscures an important truth about all speech acts, even 'illocutionary' ones. In addition to this danger when used as a descriptive analytical tool, the illocution is useless as a predictive one.

This thesis has also demonstrated that Austin's underlying problem, which has been a largely unacknowledged bequest within the illocution, lies in part in his assumption that meaning is begotten not created: that is, that meaning can exist before the utterance is recognised by the audience, and that the audience (which may be hearers or readers) has no part to play in the creation of the meaning of utterances, although he also on occasion disavows, or almost disavows, this belief<sup>124</sup>.

However, this thesis also has a more positive aim: it is designed not merely to demonstrate the inadequacy of using Speech Act theory as a general hermeneutical key, for any purposes outside the assessment of acts within the text, but also to propose an alternative hermeneutical tool, and in conjunction an alternative understanding of revelation itself. I recognise that revelation is an essential concept for Christianity and that revelation requires an understanding of how God can address His children.

---

<sup>124</sup> As when, for example, he concludes his demonstration of the resemblances between constative and performative utterances by observing that "we must consider the total situation in which the utterance is issued – the total speech-act – if we are to see the parallel between statements and performative utterances, and how each can go wrong. Perhaps indeed there is no great distinction between statements and performative utterances": *How To* p52

Accordingly, the succeeding chapters outline the view of hermeneutics and revelation I propose in contradistinction to that previously criticised, which is based initially on the work of the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin and some of his colleagues. Their work and their understanding of meaning, and its relationship to context and understanding, are outlined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: THE HERMENEUTICS OF MIKHAIL BAKHTIN AND VALENTIN VOLOSINOV

### 1. Introduction

I noted at the end of the last chapter that this chapter makes use of the work of the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin and his colleagues. Having been neglected for several generations, the work of this group has been introduced into literary theories and hermeneutics over the last few decades, since the renewal of outside interest in their work began in earnest, in the West, in the 1980's.

Both Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov<sup>1</sup>, the collaborator of principal interest in this thesis, were born in 1895, and were active in Russia in the period of the 1920's and 1930's. They first began to associate in the city of Nevel, moving later to Vitebsk, also in Belorussia, and thereafter to Leningrad (now St Petersburg). Their dates alone indicate that they lived in interesting times in Russian history, and their own careers were subject to the difficulties of those times, with the Communist revolution, the Stalinist terror, and the Nazi invasion.

Volosinov died, apparently of tuberculosis<sup>2</sup>, in 1936, having produced only two books that bear his name, *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* (also translated as *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*) published in Russian in 1927 and translated into English in the 1970's, and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (published in Russian in 1929 and also translated into English in the 1970's). Bakhtin, however, despite suffering from osteomyelitis and having a leg amputated in 1938, only died in 1975, and his bibliography is slightly larger, although most of the work was published posthumously or long after it was written, and some scholars also argue that he was primarily responsible for the work of others in the circle, including Volosinov, although this is much disputed<sup>3</sup>.

Some of the work of Bakhtin and possibly others of the circle has been lost, and many of Bakhtin's manuscripts were, when found, in less than perfect

---

<sup>1</sup> Given the need to translate from the Cyrillic alphabet, various spellings of these names can be encountered, including Baxtin and Voloshinov. I have opted for the spellings that seem most frequently used.

<sup>2</sup> According to the website 'Encyclopedia of Marxism' available at <http://www.marxists.org/glossary/people/v/o.htm#voloshinov-valentin>, viewed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Compare for example the introductions to the two works of Volosinov by I R Titunik, and the introductions to Bakhtin's work published under the auspices of Michael Holquist for the University of Texas – see bibliography. See also the brief mention of the debate in M Lähtenmäki, 'Consciousness as a Social and Dialogical Phenomenon', *Finlance* 14 (1994) p2



condition<sup>4</sup>. There is dispute between modern scholars not just about the authorship of Bakhtin's and his colleagues works, but also concerning the extent to which some of the ideas suggested were deleteriously affected by the conditions of censorship and tyranny under which they were written, and the extent of, for example, Bakhtin's Marxist or Christian beliefs at various times<sup>5</sup>.

Bakhtin's own career is undeniably controversial, even on the evidence that has survived: he and others of the circle<sup>6</sup> were arrested in 1929, on a charge of belonging to an underground association with links to the Russian Orthodox church. Bakhtin spent several years in internal exile in Kazakhstan, having been excused from Siberia on the grounds of his poor health, before resuming his academic career unobtrusively in the republic of Mordovia in central Russia, where he remained until ill-health forced him to return to Moscow for the last few years of his life. His principal published works are *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*<sup>7</sup>; *Art and Answerability*<sup>8</sup>; *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*<sup>9</sup>; *Rabelais and His world*<sup>10</sup>; *The Dialogic Imagination*<sup>11</sup>; and *Speech Genres and other Essays*<sup>12</sup>.

Bakhtin's interests roam over a wide field, including principally language and literature, but also questions of being and identity. His work is a disputed and complex corpus, which shares at least three similarities with the work of Austin: in the first place, it is very concerned with language and speech; secondly it was not for the most part published by the author (and is thus 'fixed' in ways not necessarily intended by them); and finally it is dialogic, both as a concept and in form. Bakhtin stresses often the importance of dialogue and conversation and, very like Austin, often seems to be in dialogue with the reader or some other party.

---

<sup>4</sup> There is a story that he used the original manuscript of his work on German *bildungsroman* as cigarette paper during the Second World War, and the manuscript of *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* is partial and incomplete.

<sup>5</sup> As Vanhoozer also notes (*Remythologizing Theology* p310 footnote 58), where he refers to the overview by the Bakhtin scholar Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Though not Volosinov

<sup>7</sup> Apparently written in 1919-1921 but first published in Russian in 1986 and in English in 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Collecting three essays first written in 1919 and the 1920's, republished in the 1970's in Russian, and collected together into the English book in 1990.

<sup>9</sup> First published in Russian in 1929, and then significantly revised in 1963.

<sup>10</sup> His doctoral thesis, which he defended in 1947, but which as a thesis was not officially approved, and which was thus first published in Russian only in 1965, after the re-issuing of the Dostoyevsky book: this work on Rabelais was the first of his works to be translated into English, in 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Four essays from the 1930's and 1940's first published together in 1975.

<sup>12</sup> generally dating from the last phase of Bakhtin's life, but including a fragment of the work on *bildungsroman* lost when a printers was destroyed during the Second World War, which were first published as a collection in English in 1986.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

I intend to use some elements of Bakhtin's and Volosinov's work to propose a new view of revelation, in a dialogue with them, and criticising the use of Austin made by Searle, as well as by Vanhoozer, Ward and others. The view of revelation I will suggest is, ironically, one that accords with Austin's actual achievements, as against the achievements he perhaps sought. In particular, Bakhtin and Volosinov both help undermine the concept of uptake, and force a recognition of the co-creative role of the reader or hearer in the creation of meaning.

Before outlining my own views on reading and understanding, drawn in part from the Bakhtin circle, and before comparing them with the views of John Searle, I suspect it would be helpful to illustrate my own interpretation of the work of Bakhtin and Volosinov. Accordingly the next several sections are devoted to a personal assessment of their work, before moving on to some suggestions for its use in hermeneutics.

It is in fact hard to know quite where to begin in discussing the work of Bakhtin and Volosinov. This is an appropriate problem since it compels me to begin in a 'Bakhtinian sense' by underlining that any start is not a beginning *per se*, but an entry into an already-existing conversation, or perhaps several, and that dialogue between specific people in social contexts and relationships, and thus a perpetual movement, are inescapable<sup>13</sup>.

With this initial caveat or acknowledgement in place, I will go on to say, firstly that the use of 'I' here is inescapable (since I must be answerable for my particular place in dialogue – as Bakhtin would insist, there is no "alibi in Being"<sup>14</sup>) and secondly that there are a number of themes that are of crucial importance to my interests in this thesis which are all interlinked. To start with any particular issue is problematic, because it is always possible to go from one concept to almost all of the others. Since all the issues are linked, one could start from anywhere. The nature of 'I' and of the self seems the best place to begin.

From the 'I' I will go on to discuss how the contextuality of identity informs inevitably the contextuality of utterance, and how this in turn describes meaning as dialogic, for Bakhtin and Volosinov. This highlights the importance of the activeness and distinctiveness of the act of reading, and leads to an emphasis on the intertwined relationship between the particular and the universal, expressed as a necessary and productive tension between theory and individual experience.

From the foregoing it will be seen that I find less useful some of Bakhtin's specific aesthetics, particularly that relating to the distinctiveness of the

---

<sup>13</sup> See also *Truth and Method* op cit p488-489

<sup>14</sup> M M Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Austin TX, University of Texas, 1993) p42.

novel<sup>15</sup>, and to the place of laughter and comedy.<sup>16</sup> However, Bakhtin's general aesthetics, especially as expressed in *Art and Answerability*, is very useful and will be discussed.

It should also be noted that the various members of what is sometimes called 'the Bakhtin circle', which included among others Matvei Isaevich Kagan, Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev, Lev Vasilievich Pumpianskii, and Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinskii, as well as Valentin Volosinov, are not necessarily systematic in their approach or in their publications, and not necessarily in agreement, and thus anything said is always open to clarification or even contradiction elsewhere. This seems not inappropriate with a philosophy that is, and that demonstrates the inescapability of the condition of being, a 'work-in-progress'.

## 2. The 'social' and dynamic nature of consciousness and identity.

For both Bakhtin and Volosinov, the nature of consciousness is inescapably social: "individualism is a specific sort of 'we-experience'"<sup>17</sup>. It makes no sense to think of oneself as solitary, or of one's individuality as a private or personal attribute, since consciousness and personality have been inherited and developed in dialogue with all of one's quite literally formative influences. One's own sense of self-ness and self-consciousness, although it is culturally customary to see them as 'owned' or as 'personal', are in fact collective, although of course not solely so. Volosinov in *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch* crafts a classic expression of this;

the abstract biological person, biological individual ... does not exist at all. It is an improper abstraction... *Only as part of a social whole ... does the human person become historically real and culturally productive.* In order to enter into history it is not enough to be born physically. Animals are physically born but they do not enter into history. What is needed is, as it were, a second birth, a social birth. A human being is not born as an abstract biological organism... *Only this social and historical localization makes him a real human being* and determines the content of his life and cultural creativity.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> The aspect of his thought, perhaps ironically, that Vanhoozer has adopted in his *Remythologizing Theology*.

<sup>16</sup> I am also less captivated that Bakhtin perhaps was by the 'primacy' of the concept of 'being' itself, in an 'ontological' sense, although Bakhtin's use of the concept is arguably a rather particularized one, so that one gets a kind of pragmatic or contingent ontology, if that is possible! I also find highly suggestive Panikkar's suggestion that "Being is only an image, a revelation of that which, if it were completely unveiled, would not even be, for being is its manifestation, its epiphany, its symbol:" *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) p49.

<sup>17</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p89

<sup>18</sup> *Freudianism* p15. There are interesting echoes here of the notion of being 'born-again' into the New Kingdom, and of the work of the British contemporary of both Bakhtin and Volosinov, John Macmurray (1891-1976), who suggests that "personality is something that only exists between people and which cannot exist in the individual in isolation. It is impossible to integrate an individual person in isolation. The creation of harmonious

This remains accurate even outside the Marxist ideology that inspires it, and outside the rather naïve assumptions about the objectivity of materialism that Volosinov subscribes to in this work<sup>19</sup>.

In his slightly later *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Volosinov notes that “the individual consciousness is a social-ideological fact”<sup>20</sup> and that

consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. The logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication, of the semiotic interaction of a social group. If we deprive consciousness of its semiotic, ideological content, it would have absolutely nothing left.<sup>21</sup>

The basic unit of identity then is not singular but plural. We cannot accurately start with ‘I’ or ‘myself’, but need to begin with at least two poles; ‘I’ and the other<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, this is one of the areas of considerable complexity in Bakhtin’s work, since it could be argued from some of his essays that not merely two, but even three or four poles are the fundamental basis from which we must begin. Bakhtin refers not merely to ‘I’ and ‘the other’, but also ‘I for myself’, ‘I for the other’ and ‘the other’, as well as the author, listener, subject/hero and

---

relationships between children so that the joy of skilful and disciplined co-operation develops is the primary condition of the development of the individual himself”: J Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1995) p51.

<sup>19</sup> See for example *Freudianism* ps77-78

<sup>20</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p12

<sup>21</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p13. As will be noted later, Volosinov’s stress on the social aspect of identity and consciousness does not preclude a recognition of the importance of the uniqueness and particularity of identity, particularly as described by Bakhtin. This dual recognition of both collective and individual aspects to identity illustrates the importance of identifying the dialogue to which utterances are addressed. The direction of a person’s travel has an enormous influence on what they mean in saying or doing something – two people who say the same thing may in fact mean quite different things by it, depending on where this utterance is on the journey they are making, and on the context in which they are speaking, and the people they are speaking to. Bakhtin’s emphasis on ‘particularity’ must be seen in the light of this emphasis on social consciousness, with which the emphasis on ‘particularity’ is in tension and dialogue. See also M Lähteenmäki, ‘Consciousness as a Social and Dialogical Phenomenon’, *Finlance* 14 (1994) 1-21

<sup>22</sup> “‘I’ can realize itself verbally only on the basis of ‘we’”; Volosinov, *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art*, in *Freudianism* p100. See also “the highest architectonic principle of the actual world of the performed act or deed is the concrete and architectonically valid or operative contraposition of *I* and the *other*. Life knows two value-centers that are fundamentally and essentially different, yet are correlated with each other: myself and the other; and it is around these centers that all of the concrete moments of Being are distributed and arranged...this two-plane character of the valuative determinates of the world – for myself and for the other – is much deeper and much more essential than the difference in the determination of another object which we observed within the world of aesthetic seeing etc”: Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* p74

super-addressee<sup>23</sup>, although this set is mostly in relation to a more developed aesthetics<sup>24</sup>.

Nonetheless, the theme that “authenticity and truth inhere not in existence itself, but only in an existence that is acknowledged and uttered” and the idea that “I realize myself initially through others ... just as the body is formed in the womb”<sup>25</sup> is central and basic to Bakhtin’s thought also. Indeed “the plastic value of my outer body has been as it were sculpted for me by the manifold [*sic*] acts of other people in relation to me” and

the words of a loving human being are the first and the most authoritative words about him [the self]; they are the words that for the first time determine his personality *from outside*, the words that *come to meet* his indistinct inner sensation of himself, giving it a form and a name in which, for the first time, he finds himself and becomes aware of himself as a *something*.<sup>26</sup>

Bakhtin can thus assert that we exist for one another as ‘tasks’ set for each other<sup>27</sup>, and that we are responsible for consummating, for giving meaning to, each other<sup>28</sup>. I am not confident that we can experience otherness to the extent Bakhtin appears to envisage on occasion<sup>29</sup>, but I would agree with what Bakhtin calls the notion of ‘transgression’, if its contingency and developing, relational character is stressed<sup>30</sup>.

In *Art and Answerability* and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* in particular, Bakhtin repeatedly stresses the inescapability of one’s unique place in the world, and the inadmissibility of universal systems when they seek to dictate or govern the particularity of individual existence<sup>31</sup> (once conceived of as a part of a society<sup>32</sup>). That he can insist so much on this aspect of selfhood is

---

<sup>23</sup> “whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed” by the speaker – an eschatological fulfilment which is “a constituent aspect of the whole utterance”: M M Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin TX, University of Texas, 1992) p126.

<sup>24</sup> See also M Lähteenmäki, ‘Consciousness as a Social and Dialogical Phenomenon’, *Finlance* 14 (1994) p13-15

<sup>25</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p138

<sup>26</sup> *Art and Answerability* p49-50. Compare this with Gadamer, who notes that “there is no first word and yet, while learning, we grow into language and into world. Doesn’t it follow that everything depends on the way we grow into the pre-schematization of our future orientation to the world when we learn a language and grow into everything we learn by way of conversation? This is the process that is nowadays called ‘socialization’: growth into the social”: *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p570

<sup>27</sup> *Art and Answerability* p51

<sup>28</sup> *Art and Answerability* p24ff, p59/60

<sup>29</sup> *Art and Answerability* p25

<sup>30</sup> For example *Art and Answerability* p90

<sup>31</sup> *Art and Answerability* p41

<sup>32</sup> I should here note that in this thesis, I provide no definition of words such as ‘rule’, ‘convention’, ‘society’ or ‘culture’. For the Bakhtin Circle, society/culture is not an exclusive concept but a pragmatic one, comprising those factors which surround one and with which one is in dialogue. There is thus a chronological, geographical, ideological, class, and religious element to it, and there should be no sense that the concept is prescriptive: each person’s

partly due to his emphasis on the mobility of being, and of his concept of dialogue as mobile and developing rather than static.

In Bakhtin's thought the idea of tradition is clearly always moving, and each self is an instance of a unique interplay between social inheritance and the unique body's relation to it. Persons are realized in relationships; they do not in practice have a form that can be pinned down, nor can their enveloping society or culture – there is no prospect of 'stopping the world' in order to assess it or an individual within it; every assessment must then be to some extent provisional, a dialogue between the forming culture, and the ever-developing individual in dialogue with that culture and with other individuals:

The center of gravity in this world is located in the future ... My relationship to each object within my horizon is never a consummated relationship; rather it is a relationship which is imposed on me as a task-to-be-accomplished, for the event of being, taken as a whole, is an open event; my situation must change at every moment – I cannot tarry and come to rest.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed "the soul is spirit the way it looks *from outside*, in the other"<sup>34</sup> and "the aesthetic vision of the world, its image, is created only by the consummated or consummable lives of other people who are the heroes of this world"<sup>35</sup>, "it is only in the world of others that an aesthetic plot-bearing, intrinsically valuable movement is possible ... To be artistically interested is to be interested, independently of meaning, in a life that is in principle consummated"<sup>36</sup>.

For Bakhtin, activities such as theoretical thinking, historical description and aesthetic intuition "establish a fundamental split between the content or sense of a given act/activity and the historical actuality of its being, the actual and once-occurrent experiencing of it"<sup>37</sup>, since "the act is truly real ... only in its entirety" and not when described in terms of content or sense. He notes that

---

culture will be differently shaded; their place in the dialogues will be different, and they may not share all the dialogues of their neighbour, particularly in these pluralist days: they will inevitably share some, however, if only local-political ones (equable sharing of resources etc).

<sup>33</sup> *Art and Answerability* p98

<sup>34</sup> *Art and Answerability* p100 – see also p110

<sup>35</sup> *Art and Answerability* p111

<sup>36</sup> *Art and Answerability* p112. This idea of consummation is one adopted by Kevin Vanhoozer in his work *Remythologizing Theology*. This work, which is a fascinating study of a new direction for theology, biblically based and grappling with the question of how we are to imagine an recognise God's activity in creation, suggests that one helpful key to understanding the relationship between Creator and Creation is precisely through an understanding of authorship taken from Bakhtin's study of Dostoyevsky and others of his writings, and uses the idea of consummation. I will discuss Vanhoozer's use of Bakhtin in the next section of this thesis.

<sup>37</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p2

“it is only the once-occurrent event of being in the process of actualisation that can constitute this unique unity”<sup>38</sup>, and that an act

must acquire the unity of two-sided answerability – both for its content (special answerability) and for its Being (moral answerability). And the special answerability, moreover, must be brought into communion with the unitary and unique moral answerability as a constituent moment in it. That is the only way whereby the pernicious non-fusion and non-interpenetration of culture and life could be surmounted.<sup>39</sup>

Every act I perform is an inwardly answerable one, but the theoretical ought does not equal the true in my particular moment of being<sup>40</sup> and thus “the ought gains its validity [only] within the unity of my once-occurrent answerable life”<sup>41</sup>. This is so because theories describe us as ‘not living’; as though we, like words, were contained in dictionaries or glass cabinets<sup>42</sup>.

Ethics, then, is simply “a compilation of practically useful propositions that are sometimes not proved”<sup>43</sup> and “this answerability of the actually performed act is the taking-into-account in it of all the factors – a taking-into-account of its sense-validity as well as of its factual performance in all its concrete historicity and individuality”<sup>44</sup>. In fact, “in its answerability, the act sets before itself its own truth as something-to-be-achieved ... This unitary and unique truth of the answerably performed act is posited as something-to-be-attained *qua* synthetical truth”<sup>45</sup>.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p2

<sup>39</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p2-3

<sup>40</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p4

<sup>41</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p5. This echoes Gadamer’s conclusion that “if we start from the fact that understanding is verbal, we are emphasizing ... the finitude of the verbal event in which understanding is always in the process of being concretized. The language that things have ... is the language that our finite, historical nature apprehends when we learnt to speak”: *Truth and Method* op cit p492

<sup>42</sup> There are also some very interesting echoes again here of John Macmurray, who notes that “intellectual knowledge tells us about the world. It gives us knowledge *about* things, not knowledge *of* them. It does not reveal the world as it is. Only emotional knowledge can do that. The use of the senses as a practical means of getting knowledge is thus not a way of knowing the world at all, but only a way of knowing about it. The wider use of the senses for the joy of living in them, is knowing the world in itself and through emotion, not by means of the intellect. This is not to disparage intellectual knowledge but only to insist that it is meaningless and without significance, apart from the direct sensual knowledge which gives it reality. One cannot really know about anything unless one first knows it.” J Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1995) p22. Thus, “The development of *human* nature in its concrete livingness is, in fact, the development of emotional reason” op cit p26.

<sup>43</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p23

<sup>44</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p28

<sup>45</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p29. Compare also: “any human problem which remains abstract and is not concrete and lived in a real and thus limited situation is bound to remain shallow and swim in the muddy waters of sheer generalities:” R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) page vii.

Bakhtin also admits that the answerable performer cannot totally understand everything in the act he performs – “the unitary full word can be answerably valid” but “while full adequacy is unattainable, it is always present as that which is to *be* achieved”<sup>46</sup> – nonetheless “any universally valid value becomes *actually* valid only in an individual context”<sup>47</sup>. The unity-of-being is constancy not to values or principles but is more like “faithfulness” or “being-true-to”<sup>48</sup> and thus

what we shall find everywhere is a constant unity of answerability, that is, not a constancy in content and not a constant law of the performed act (all content is only a constituent moment), but a certain actual fact of acknowledgment, an acknowledgment that is once-occurrent and never-repeatable, emotional-volitional and concretely individual.<sup>49</sup>

But this is being faithful to me, to my being-as-event, a condition where

what underlies the unity of an answerable consciousness is not a principle as a starting point, but the fact of an actual acknowledgment of one’s own participation in unitary Being-as-event, and this fact cannot be adequately expressed in theoretical terms, but can only be described and participatively experienced.<sup>50</sup>

Thus for Bakhtin, “the ought becomes possible for the first time where there is an acknowledgement of the fact of a unique person’s being from within that person; where this fact becomes a center of answerability – where I assume answerability for my own uniqueness, for my own being”<sup>51</sup>. To abdicate or seek an alibi for this is to be impoverished<sup>52</sup>.

His conclusion is that given that there are as many different value-worlds as people, we have to “recognize doubt as a distinctive virtue”<sup>53</sup> but “this doubt does not contradict in any way the unitary and unique truth: it is precisely this unitary and unique truth of the world that demands doubt”, because “the unity of the whole conditions the unique and utterly repeatable roles of all the participants”<sup>54</sup> and moreover

there *is* no contradiction nor does there *have to be* between the valuative world-pictures of every participant ... The truth of the event is not the truth that is self-identical and self-equivalent in its content, but is the rightful and unique position of every participant – the truth of each participant’s actual, concrete *ought*.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p31

<sup>47</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p36

<sup>48</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p38

<sup>49</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p39

<sup>50</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p40

<sup>51</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p42

<sup>52</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p42

<sup>53</sup> So Derrida will be pleased - *Toward a Philosophy etc* p45

<sup>54</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p45

<sup>55</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p46



This is the same phenomenon as the fact that my love for you appears to me to be different to your love for me, but is not, because for each of us it is a truthful relation of embodiment, particularity and otherness. Within this condition of answerability, moreover, we share in our “concretely individual and never-repeatable worlds of actual act-performing consciousness” common moments which are not laws so much as presences and which are “I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for the-other”<sup>56</sup>.

For Bakhtin

aesthetic culture is a culture of boundaries and hence presupposes that life is enveloped by a warm atmosphere of deepest trust. A confident and founded act of constituting and shaping the *boundaries* of man and his world (outer as well as *inner* boundaries) presupposes the existence of a firm and secure position outside of him, presupposes a position in which the spirit can abide for a long time, can be master of its own powers, and can act without restraint. It should be evident that this presupposes an essential axiological consolidatedness of the enveloping atmosphere.<sup>57</sup>

Here, in his early work, the importance of trust in making *life*, rather than merely its individualistic simulation, is enormous, and he goes on to write of the necessity of possessing “*axiological tranquillity*”, indeed of “an answerable, calm tranquillity”<sup>58</sup>, which depends on this trust:

special answerability is indispensable ... [and] can only be founded only upon a deep trust in the highest level of authority that blesses a culture – upon trust, that is, in the fact that there is another – the highest other – who answers for my own special answerability, and trust in the fact that I do not act in an axiological void. Outside this trust, only empty pretensions are possible.<sup>59</sup>

The absolutely essential conditions for true or right living (being without alibi) are love and trust, which alone can make possible the goal, a barely imaginable world in which official consciousness and outer speech are united with the unique particularity of each individual without diminution or blurring<sup>60</sup>.

This is a world where everyone is absolutely themselves, absolutely answerable for themselves, but also absolutely realized and consummated as that individual in a universal social whole, where there is “benevolent

---

<sup>56</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p53-54

<sup>57</sup> *Art and Answerability* p203-204

<sup>58</sup> *Art and Answerability* p205

<sup>59</sup> *Art and Answerability* p206

<sup>60</sup> There is a slight echo here of the Chalcedonian Christological definition that in Christ, divinity and humanity are present without blurring or diminution. See also *Freudianism* p89 “in a healthy community and in a socially healthy personality ... there is no discrepancy between the official and the unofficial conscious”.

demarcation”<sup>61</sup> as the precursor to co-operation: this is – as is the Bakhtin Circle’s philosophy in general – highly eschatological, serving as a description of the New Creation, of the Kingdom of Heaven; one in which everyone can be, as was said of Atticus Finch, “the same in his house as he is on the public streets”<sup>62</sup>; where our desires and our duties are united truly and without compulsion. As Bakhtin puts it:

It is only love (as an active approach to another human being) that unites an inner life (a *subiectum*’s own object-directedness in living his life) as experienced from outside and, in so doing, constitutes a unitary and unique human being as an aesthetic phenomenon. That is, only love unites one’s own *directedness* with a *direction* and one’s own *horizon* with an *environment*.<sup>63</sup>

For Bakhtin, “in relation to the yet-to-be attained fullness of meaning of the *event* of being, the “thisness” of being is only *factual* (obstinately present-on-hand)”<sup>64</sup> and therefore “it is *around* the other ... that present-on-hand being finds its affirmation and positive consummation independently of meaning. The soul is fused and intertwined with the world’s givenness and it consecrates that givenness”<sup>65</sup>.

Even aesthetic seeing does not capture all reality<sup>66</sup> – the key is our relationship to it:

Even if I know a given person thoroughly, and I also know myself, I still have to grasp the truth of our interrelationship, the truth of the unitary and unique event which links us and in which we are participants. That is, my place and function and his, *and* our interrelationship in the ongoing event of Being, i.e., I myself and the object of my aesthetic contemplation must be ... determined within unitary and unique Being ... which encompasses both of us equally and in which the act of my aesthetic contemplation is actually performed; but that can no longer be *aesthetic* being. It is only from within that act as *my* answerable deed that there can be a way out into the unity of Being, and *not* from its product, taken in abstraction.<sup>67</sup>

As he concludes in respect of ethics

As disembodied spirit, I lose my compelling, ought-to-be relationship to the world, I lose the actuality of the world. Man-in-general does not exist: I exist and a particular concrete other exists ... All these are valuative moments of Being which are valid individually and do not universalise or generalize once-occurrent

---

<sup>61</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p136

<sup>62</sup> “Atticus Finch is the same in his house as he is on the public streets”, said by Miss Maudie, in the context of the secrets others hide away, and as description of his integrity: Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, (London, Penguin Books, 1971) p52.

<sup>63</sup> *Art and Answerability* p82-83

<sup>64</sup> *Art and Answerability* p132

<sup>65</sup> *Art and Answerability* p134.

<sup>66</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p14

<sup>67</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p17/18

Being, and they are revealed to me from my unique place in Being as the foundations of my non-alibi in Being.<sup>68</sup>

life can be consciously comprehended only in concrete answerability. A philosophy of life can only be a moral philosophy. Life can be consciously comprehended only as an ongoing event, and not as Being *qua* a given.<sup>69</sup>

For meaning and for ethics, then, for Bakhtin

eternal meaning becomes an impelling actuating value for deed-performing thinking ... only when it is correlated with actuality: the actually valued eternity of *this* thought, *this* book [and more fundamentally] ... what is compellingly valuable in the last resort is the actual eternity of concrete actuality itself in its entirety: of *this* human being, *these* human beings and their world with all its actual moments.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, "only lovingly interested attention, is capable of generating a sufficiently intent power to encompass and retain the concrete manifoldness of Being, without impoverishing and schematising it"<sup>71</sup>, and "the truth of Being-as-event contains within itself totally the whole extra-temporal absoluteness of theoretical truth. The world's unity is a moment in its concrete uniqueness"<sup>72</sup>.

Thus while a cognitively realized system has a validity and a necessity for some purposes, either cognitive or ethical, it has no absolute jurisdiction. To impose an external system onto each person's unique relationship with everyone else would be, particularly for Bakhtin, although perhaps not the apparently more Marxist Volosinov, inadmissible or inauthentic. It would be to seek an "alibi in Being", to evade one's own answerability for oneself and one's actions by hiding behind another and seeking to apply static and abstract rules to the mobile and real, to being-as-event, or the "ongoing event of Being"<sup>73</sup>.

It would be as nonsensical as trying to completely encapsulate and describe a work of art in other words or forms – if this could be done without remainder there would be no work of art left – or of trying to describe an utterance outside its own environment. To describe something is not the same as to participate in it as it is happening: "To depart from the actual into the abstract is to lose any purchase on the actual deed performed"<sup>74</sup> and

---

<sup>68</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p47

<sup>69</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p56

<sup>70</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p59

<sup>71</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p64

<sup>72</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p71

<sup>73</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p42

<sup>74</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p7

insofar as we detach a judgment from the unity constituted by the historically actual act/deed of its actualisation and assign it to some theoretical unity, there is no way of getting out from within its content/sense aspect and into the ought and the actual once-occurrent event of Being. All attempts to surmount – from within theoretical cognition – the dualism of cognition and life, the dualism of thought and once-occurrent actuality, are utterly hopeless.<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, such abstract systems describe us as not living<sup>76</sup>, and “once-occurrent uniqueness or singularity cannot be thought of, it can only be participatively experienced or lived through”<sup>77</sup>. To live, is to be in a permanent, ongoing dialogue between ones own uniqueness, and the society and cultures that envelop.

### 3. The dialogic nature of utterances and meaning

Having discussed what one might call the contextuality of personality, it is only a short step to applying this to the utterance. Bakhtin’s and Volosinov’s emphasis on the dynamic and social development of consciousness also includes a recognition of the linguistic and thus dialogic basis of consciousness and of the social basis of language. As Volosinov notes in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, “the process of a child’s assimilation of his native language is the process of his gradual immersion into verbal communication. As that process proceeds, the child’s consciousness is formed and filled with content”<sup>78</sup>. Or again, as Volosinov notes “inner speech is the same kind of product and expression of social intercourse as is outward speech”<sup>79</sup>.

The utterance was one of the Bakhtin Circle’s principal areas of interest, particularly in the essays published as Volosinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art* (an essay which is included as Appendix I in his book *Freudianism*)<sup>80</sup> and Bakhtin’s *Art and Answerability*. In all of these texts the utterance is repeatedly identified as

---

<sup>75</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p7

<sup>76</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p8

<sup>77</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p13. Compare B J Kallenberg: “thought does not originate from some fixed point but arises simultaneously with the whole hurly-burly of a life shared together.” B J Kallenberg, ‘Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50/2 (1997) p205.

<sup>78</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p81 footnote 16

<sup>79</sup> *Freudianism* p79. Again, compare Kallenberg: “languages do not arise, nor are they learned, privately. Language is a social phenomenon correlative with a shared form of life.” B J Kallenberg, ‘Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck’, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50/2 (1997) p205.

<sup>80</sup> *Freudianism; A Critical Sketch* (Bloomington IA, Indiana University Press, 1987), pages 93-116. This book was first published in this translation as *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* (Academic Press 1976) with a different translator’s introduction and different Appendices, which do not include this essay. The essay, according to the back cover of the title, was first published in Russian in 1926.

being a 'living', contextually understood concept that has no abstract existence. It may be defined as the basic unit of verbal communication.

As Volosinov for example notes, "Every utterance is *the product of the interaction between speakers* and ... of the broader context of the whole complex social situation"<sup>81</sup>. He notes that "*the situation enters into the utterance as an essential constitutive part of the structure of its import*"<sup>82</sup>, giving as an example two people sitting together in a room and one saying simply "well"<sup>83</sup>. In this case, as Volosinov notes, "taken in isolation, the utterance "well!" is empty and unintelligible." Intelligibility is achieved, not through "the phonetic, morphological, and semantic factors of the word *well*", nor even if we know the intonation with which the word was spoken; in this case "indignation and reproach moderated by a certain amount of humor".

Instead, we need to know "the 'extraverbal context' that made the word *well* a meaningful locution for the listener." He defines this, in this instance, as comprising "the *common spatial purview* of the interlocutors", their "*common knowledge and understanding of the situation*, and their *common evaluation* of that situation." In this particular case, it is May, both people are sick of winter and looking forward to the arrival of Spring, and they have seen that snow is falling outside the window, to their great disappointment. When we know all this, then and only then can we understand the meaning of the word *well* in this context.

In *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art* Volosinov notes the contextuality of utterances and their reliance on "*a community of value judgments*"<sup>84</sup> which pre-date the utterance and give it meaning, or rather are the conditions within which utterances are produced. These judgments are identifiable not in word-content but in the intonation of the utterance itself. In Bakhtin this becomes what one might call 'full-blooded dialogism': "speech can exist in reality only in the form of concrete utterances of individual speaking people, speech subjects. Speech is always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist."<sup>85</sup>

Bakhtin goes on to note that utterances are in general distinguishable through having differing speaking subjects<sup>86</sup>, but that all such utterances are inevitably in dialogue with each other: "each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations ... Every utterance must be regarded primarily as a *response* to preceding utterances of the given sphere"<sup>87</sup>, and not merely a response to the

---

<sup>81</sup> *Freudianism* p79

<sup>82</sup> 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art' in *Freudianism*, p100

<sup>83</sup> 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art' in *Freudianism* p99.

<sup>84</sup> 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art' in *Freudianism* p100

<sup>85</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p71

<sup>86</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p71

<sup>87</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p91

past but also an anticipation and pre-emptive response to the future; “an essential (constitutive) marker of the utterance is its quality of being directed to someone, its *addressivity*”<sup>88</sup>.

Both the utterance and the act must then be understood responsively and in their particular context; both are part of what Bakhtin refers to as “*once-occurrent Being-as-event*”<sup>89</sup>, by which he alludes to the idea that selfhood or identity is not a static unalterable property but a collectively given and ever-renewed construct that can alter and change from moment to moment in the context of new relationships and actions<sup>90</sup>. In a phrase with many suggestive echoes of Derrida’s notion of iterability, Bakhtin notes that “the unrepeatability of the whole is reflected in each repeatable element that participates in the whole (it is, as it were, repeatably unrepeatable)”<sup>91</sup>.

Bakhtin and Volosinov do not by any means deny the usefulness of theory or abstraction, nor the existence of language as a system. However, they do deny that language ‘in use’ is meaningful just as part of a system; rather it is, in use, part of a culture and of specific genre-related relationships. In so far as Speech Act Theory is a study of language acts in the abstract, then, this assertion calls all such examinations into question, at least in so far as they claim to be studies of how language is used, rather than of how it *might* be used in a specific (and it must be a specific) imaginary situation.<sup>92</sup>

This might be thought to underestimate the shared systematic nature of language, but this aspect is not something denied by Bakhtin or Volosinov, who notes that “the individual speech act (in the strict sense of the word ‘individual’) is *contradictio in adjecto*”<sup>93</sup>. Bakhtin and Volosinov simply insist that while one can discuss abstractions, and while accepted abstractions exist, these are in fact only examples of utterances associated with genres,<sup>94</sup> and like all utterances, their meaning in use is determined not by a dictionary but by context. This context is not and cannot, of course, be unrelated to systems or dictionary definitions, but these latter are in danger of ossification and can never take account of the changes wrought on language by use and by life and cannot track all its cultural, relational, generational and geographic<sup>95</sup> changes and variations. If one wants to know what was meant by an utterance that was actually used, one must look at the context in which it was

---

<sup>88</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p95

<sup>89</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p34, p36 etc

<sup>90</sup> This is the argument advanced in the whole of the highly intense 75 surviving pages of *Towards a Philosophy of the Act* (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1993).

<sup>91</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p142

<sup>92</sup> This of course is the accusation that I made towards some of the uses of Speech Act theory in Biblical hermeneutics discussed in chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>93</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p98

<sup>94</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p20

<sup>95</sup> to name but a few

spoken, not at *the*, or *a*, context in which it *might* have been spoken; thus meaning has a contextual as well as a systematic element.

Or as Bakhtin himself observes, language includes both centripetal and centrifugal forces, where the centripetal, systematic aspects of 'dictionary' language do not 'guarantee' a minimum level of comprehension but instead participate in and are created by an ideologically-saturated world-view of concrete opinions which thus insures "a *maximum* of understanding in all spheres of ideological life".<sup>96</sup> Thus "the authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogised heteroglossia anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accepted as an individual utterance".<sup>97</sup>

Every word 'aimed' at an object is done so in dialogue, and through a thicket of pre-existing associations<sup>98</sup>; "discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impulse toward the object"<sup>99</sup> and there are no neutral words, but they are all "shot through with intentions and accents"; they have a "taste" or "contextual overtones"<sup>100</sup>. Volosinov, too, notes that shared collective value judgments

determine the author's *selection of words* and the reception of that selection (the coselection) by the listener. The poet, after all, selects words not from a dictionary but from the context of life where words have been steeped in and become permeated with value judgments.<sup>101</sup>

The complex area of the nature of meaning in context and in language is not helped by differences in translation between the work of Bakhtin and Volosinov to which I have had access, so that terms may be translated differently. However, in precisely the same way as identity is constructed in an on-going dialogue between the uniquely positioned physical body of the subject (*subiectum* in University of Texas translations generally) and the forming culture, so meaning is realized in the dialogue of conversation or communication<sup>102</sup>.

There is thus both a systematic, dictionary meaning of words equivalent in some sense to a genre-meaning of utterances, and the meaning of the

---

<sup>96</sup> *Dialogic Imagination* p271

<sup>97</sup> *Dialogic Imagination* p272

<sup>98</sup> *Dialogic Imagination* p276

<sup>99</sup> *Dialogic Imagination* p292

<sup>100</sup> *Dialogic Imagination* p293

<sup>101</sup> 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art' in *Freudianism* p107

<sup>102</sup> Speech genres, the basic building blocks of communication have "a normative significance for the speaking individual, and they are not created by him but are given to him.

Therefore, the single utterance, with all its individuality and creativity, can in no way be regarded as a *completely free combination* of forms of language": *Speech Genres etc* p80-81

utterance in its context of actual specific use, with the meaning of the actual utterance involving both system and particular, to the exclusion or domination of neither, but incorporating both in relationship in time and in the event of being. Volosinov notes that “*listener and hero* [the personification of the object of the utterance towards which utterances tend] *are constant participants in the creative event*, which does not for a single instant cease to be an event of living communication involving all three”<sup>103</sup>.

Volosinov also notes that an utterance has both significance and meaning. Significance he identifies as that which is “individual and unreproducible”<sup>104</sup>, and is the theme or thematic unity of the utterance; while meaning is those elements of the utterance that are reproducible and self-identical in instances of repetition. Meaning is divisible into constituent elements, while theme is not<sup>105</sup> (he thus reverses rather the use which Vanhoozer makes of the words ‘meaning’ and ‘significance’, in this translation). Thus “*theme is a complex, dynamic system of signs that attempts to be adequate to a given instant of generative process. Theme is reaction by the consciousness in its generative process to the generative process of existence. Meaning is the technical apparatus for the implementation of theme*”<sup>106</sup>; they are however, inseparable.

Words have multiple possible meanings, and meaning can be regarded as the first speech genre, in that it, as Volosinov suggests, may have developed out of repeated thematic use of sound-words. He avers, “*theme is the upper, actual limit of linguistic significance; in essence, only theme means something definite. Meaning is the lower limit ... [it] in essence, means nothing; it only possesses potentiality*”<sup>107</sup>, and thus ‘theme’ is contextually based while ‘meaning’ can be identified in the dictionary.

#### **4. ‘Consummation’ and the dialogism of meaning in utterances and in aesthetics**

There are many provocative and useful similarities between Bakhtin’s and Volosinov’s work on utterances, and the work of Bakhtin on Aesthetics. Volosinov, in discussing utterances, notes that the intonation which is based on the “*choral support*”<sup>108</sup> of commonly-held values has “*an inherent tendency toward personification*”<sup>109</sup>, metaphorical or actual, and this clearly echoes Bakhtin’s stress on the importance of the hero in aesthetic activity, the title of an essay in *Art and Answerability*.

---

<sup>103</sup> ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art’ in *Freudianism* p107

<sup>104</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p99

<sup>105</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p100

<sup>106</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p100

<sup>107</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p101

<sup>108</sup> ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art’ in *Freudianism* p103

<sup>109</sup> ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art’ in *Freudianism* p103



Volosinov's suggestion that the utterance is doubly oriented, to the listener and to the object as a third party<sup>110</sup>, echoes both Bakhtin's dialogism of the utterance expressed for example in *Speech Genres etc*;

in each utterance ... we embrace, understand, and sense the speaker's *speech plan* or *speech will*, which determines the entire utterance, its length and boundaries. We imagine to ourselves what the speaker *wishes* to say ... Therefore, the immediate participants in communication, orienting themselves with respect to the situation and the preceding utterances, easily and quickly grasp the speaker's speech plan, his speech will. And from the very beginning of his words they sense the developing whole of the utterance,<sup>111</sup>

and Bakhtin's concept of the superaddressee; "the person who understands inevitably becomes a *third party* in the dialogue", and since "even the closest descendants can be mistaken" the superaddressee is imagined; he "whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed" by the speaker - an instance of eschatological fulfilment which Bakhtin asserts is not metaphysical but is "a constituent aspect of the whole utterance"<sup>112</sup>.

Moreover, Bakhtin clearly identifies Aesthetic meaning as residing in the interplay of contemplator and artist in the artistic object, where the contemplator is by no means the passive entity that the English word might suggest. Bakhtin notes that while *possible* meanings of a sentence could be understood in the abstract, only as an utterance (with an actual meaning) could we respond to it<sup>113</sup>. He notes that

the sentence, like the word, has a finality of meaning and a finality of grammatical form, but this finality of meaning is abstract by nature and this is precisely why it is so clear cut: this is the finality of an element, but not of the whole. The sentence as a unit of language, like the word, has no author. Like the word, it belongs to *nobody*, and only by functioning as a whole utterance does it become an expression of the position of someone speaking individually in a concrete situation of speech communication.<sup>114</sup>

He equates "expressivity" - a property of utterances - with intonation. It is intonation which is and reveals expression, and it is the possession of this quality which allows us to identify an utterance and which bears its meaning: "we repeat, only the contact between the language meaning and the concrete reality that takes place in the utterance can create the spark of expression. It exists neither in the system of language nor in the objective reality surrounding us"<sup>115</sup> and "the meaning of a word in itself (unrelated to actual reality) is, as we have already said, out of the range of emotion... they acquire

---

<sup>110</sup> 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art' in *Freudianism* p105

<sup>111</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p77-78

<sup>112</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p126

<sup>113</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p82

<sup>114</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p83-84

<sup>115</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p86-87

their expressive coloring only in the utterance, and this coloring is independent of their meaning taken individually and abstractedly".<sup>116</sup> Words thus have three owners; the dictionary, the other's as used in conversation, and mine used in response<sup>117</sup>.

Volosinov makes this quite explicit when he suggests that

in poetry, as in life, verbal discourse is a "scenario" of an event. Competent artistic perception re-enacts it, sensitively surmising from the words and the forms of their organization the specific, living interrelations of the author with the world he depicts and entering into those interrelations as third participant (the listener's role)<sup>118</sup>

and that "for living artistic perception, ... relations among people stand revealed in the process of living social communication".

In *Art and Answerability* Bakhtin, in a dialogue with Structuralism's insistence on form to the exclusion of other things, suggests that aesthetic analysis of art has three tasks; the first is to "understand the aesthetic object in its purely artistic distinctiveness" and structure, the second is to understand the object in its "primary, purely cognitive givenness and understand its construction completely apart from the aesthetic object" and the third is to "understand the external material work as that which actualises an aesthetic object, as the technical apparatus of aesthetic execution", a task which can only follow the first two<sup>119</sup>, and which has a goal and is thus different to understanding the aesthetic object in terms simply of its "self-sufficient being"<sup>120</sup>.

This analysis of the architectonics (or process) of structure, though, must recognise the architectonics of structure as related to emotion and as aiming at the artistic consummation of the object.<sup>121</sup> Seen in the light of the continually dialogic nature of being and world, and thus recognised as impermanent outside its moment, this concept of consummation has obvious links not merely with the consummation of oneself that the other can provide, but also with the consummation of the utterance that can only be provided by, and is anticipated within the utterance by, the other.

Consummation should not be seen as a finalized state, and this is made clear when Bakhtin goes on to note that "any creative point of view ... becomes

---

<sup>116</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p87

<sup>117</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p88

<sup>118</sup> 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art' in *Freudianism* p109

<sup>119</sup> *Art and Answerability* p267

<sup>120</sup> *Art and Answerability* p268. Volosinov notes in 'Discourse in life and Discourse in art' that "the meaning, [i.e.] the import of form has to do not with the material but with the content" p108 and thus that the relation of form to content is a matter of ideological evaluation, while the relation of form to the material of art is "the technical realization of that evaluation" of ideology.

<sup>121</sup> *Art and Answerability* p270

convincingly necessary and indispensable only in correlation with other creative points of view"<sup>122</sup> and that culture, which gives value to life and events, is 'all boundaries'; there is nothing fixed or static about it<sup>123</sup>. The interdetermination with culture and reality is what allows art to live<sup>124</sup>. The content of an artistic object is a consummation of "cognition and ethical action in the aesthetic object and is a response of active contemplation"<sup>125</sup>. Content cannot be abstracted from context<sup>126</sup>.

Moreover Bakhtin is clear that the aesthetically valued object is not describable simply on formal, material cognitive or ethical grounds, in precisely the same way as the actual utterance is not describable outside the specific context of its use, and as consciousness and being are not abstractable from their unique and specific place in the "world-as-event"<sup>127</sup>: there is a "*non-alibi in Being*"<sup>128</sup>. Just as is the case for being and uttering, the aesthetic object is always an event<sup>129</sup>.

Bakhtin is therefore insistent that aesthetics is founded on a given human being as basis – the basis for aesthetic determination is what-is-given, and all aesthetics needs a hero in the sense that

language, which the verbal artist finds to an considerable extent as something already on hand, is profoundly aestheticized, profoundly mythological and anthropomorphic, and that it gravitates toward the center of value constituted by a human being. Hence, aestheticism deeply permeates all our thinking, and philosophical thought, even at its loftiest, continues to be human in an intensely partial way even today (this is justified, but only within certain limits, which are often violated). Language or, rather, the world of language also has its own potential hero, as it were, who is actualised in an utterance of lived life within myself and within the other.<sup>130</sup>

He concludes that "a given human being constitutes the center of value in the architectonics of an aesthetic object: it is around him that the uniqueness of every object, its integral concrete diversity, is actualized"<sup>131</sup>.

Vanhoozer, as has been noted earlier, uses this idea of consummation, and explores the clearly theological undertones of the concept. However, I believe that he underestimates the dialogic nature of the concept. He uses Bakhtin's ideas on the relationship between the hero and the author to illustrate the

---

<sup>122</sup> *Art and Answerability* p274

<sup>123</sup> This is here suggested in relation to the boundary of particular and universal.

<sup>124</sup> *Art and Answerability* p275

<sup>125</sup> *Art and Answerability* p281-282

<sup>126</sup> *Art and Answerability* p292

<sup>127</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p32

<sup>128</sup> *Toward a Philosophy etc* p40

<sup>129</sup> *Art and Answerability* p317

<sup>130</sup> *Art and Answerability* p229-230

<sup>131</sup> *Art and Answerability* p230

relationship between God and His creatures<sup>132</sup> and then suggests that “aesthetic consummation – the process by which authors confer wholeness, and therefore meaning, on the lives of their heroes – is to literature as grace is to theology.”<sup>133</sup>

The parallel between God and author is clear to the extent that both see ‘the whole’ of the work from outside. However, Bakhtin would himself insist that the hero is not fully realised without the reader as a participant. Bakhtin notes “it is possible, of course, to make any human document the object of artistic perception ... indeed, the consummation of it in our aesthetic memory is often our obligation”<sup>134</sup>. This prompts the question, ‘where is the reader-equivalent, in grace?’ Meaning is not simply conferred, it is created: is there any parallel here with grace?

Both meaning and grace are known dialogically, and cannot be grasped by the self alone. Both are properties of ‘a work’ that are established in dialogue rather than being doled out to be monologically ‘conferred’. Indeed, the Dominican Cornelius Ernst suggests a very similar thing in regard to grace to that which Bakhtin suggests in respect of meaning, which is that grace is a relationship created between two communicating parties. For Ernst grace is, as it were, a term for the mode of God’s action in creation: gratuitous, beautiful and self-giving:

grace shows itself where we break through despair into the affirmation of praise. This is the fundamental experience of grace ... it is the passage through ultimate negation into the blessed peace beyond the Cross in the exchange of love in Jesus and the Father, the exchange which Christian tradition has called the Holy Spirit ... For if we call destiny the form of a theology of grace, we may call its content transfiguration and transformation.<sup>135</sup>

Grace is “a second-order word, a way of qualifying the whole of God’s self-communication to his creature man as a gift beyond all telling: the transcendent novelty of communion between God and man”, which is “disclosed in our lives as the gift of Jesus Christ communicated”<sup>136</sup>.

Thus “our understanding of ‘grace’ is our continuous reawakening to the infinite inequality of divine and human love”<sup>137</sup>. Grace, then, is a way of describing God’s action in the world, which is an ultimately irresistible activity leading us on towards Him: “the mystery of divine grace and human freedom is that there is always a creative choice which finds and is found by

---

<sup>132</sup> *Remythologizing Theology* p 325

<sup>133</sup> *Remythologizing Theology* p326

<sup>134</sup> *Art and Answerability* p148

<sup>135</sup> C Ernst, *The Theology of Grace, Theology Today Series Number 17* (Notre Dame Indiana, Fides Publishers 1974) p72

<sup>136</sup> *The Theology of Grace* p75

<sup>137</sup> *The Theology of Grace* p92

God's ever-transcendent, ever-new love, the sovereign *mysterion* of his self-giving, its unending spring of life"<sup>138</sup>.

God's grace, then, is the agent of formation, an activity that impels and compels us to turn to Him, and that is hindered but not ultimately prevented, indeed made more glorious, by sin<sup>139</sup>. It might be regarded as the response to, and in a sense the other 'aspect' of the relationship which for us is constituted by, and perceived as being, prayer. Thus while I agree that for Bakhtin the consummation of the hero comes from outside to gives the hero meaning, I would note the importance of the fact that for Bakhtin, this aesthetic consummation comes not from the author alone, but also from readers.

The image of God as a dialogic author is suggestive, but raises the question of the extent to which we, as His subjects in several senses, have any input into our own narrative. It would initially appear that we have a greater degree of independence than do fictional constructs, who are unaware of their own 'fictionality', even allowing for the ways in which characters can 'dictate' to their author, and determine their own plots and development. However, this rather depends on one's view of free will and predestination. In some cases, the parallel becomes quite strong.

It is certainly true that both fictional characters and flesh-and-blood people are consummated from outside dialogically, even if the event of being that is human life is not the same as for a fictional character, where the 'event of being' is only the reader's, and the fictional character is not answerable to us in the same way. However, both the novelistic character, and the flesh-and-blood person, are not for Bakhtin static, and are only consummated at the end of life. Both character and reader are continually 'becoming' in the unique event of being. It may be that dialogically the person is more present than the character. But for the reader as for the character in the novel, our consummation lies beyond this creation<sup>140</sup>.

We alone cannot determine the meaning of creation, as we cannot determine the meaning of our own lives – these are consummated beyond us, with or by others. This is, of course, also the case for the utterance. As I have already argued, meaning and intention can differ in the utterance. It is interesting to ask whether or not this is also the case in respect of our lives, and of creation? Vanhoozer and I, and Bakhtin, would all agree that our meaning is determined beyond us, in dialogue with others; does this further imply that

---

<sup>138</sup> *The Theology of Grace* p84

<sup>139</sup> "sin is the manifest discontinuity in the mystery, grace the victorious reintegration into an ultimate continuity and unity, the climax of the mystery", *The Theology of Grace* p88.

<sup>140</sup> There is in Vanhoozer's use of Bakhtin a dimension of his thought that is absent – that of the importance of the community. Theologically, I would suggest that we do not relate to God primarily as individuals, but as members of the one body.

the meaning of creation is determined beyond creation, and if so, is this in dialogue with God?

The meaning of our life might not be what we thought, or intended – but we cannot determine this alone, and it can only be recognised in the context of the life that is actually lived. Likewise, an utterance has no meaning until it is uttered. Further, the complete meaning of the utterance or act is fully consummated only in the consummation of the entire life. Likewise the meaning of the individual human life is consummated only in the consummation of the creation – of all the lives of which this life (our life) is a part – and the meaning of creation is consummated only in the fullness of all in all.

We can in fact go so far as to say that God is the fullness of meaning, and that creation is consummated in God, (in the eternal perfect dialogue of the Trinity, open and full), but we cannot now know what that will be like; we cannot know the meaning of existence. In that sense, meaning in creation is *becoming*, and the best we can do is enter fully into the dialogue (the answerability). There is a sequential element to meaning, as it were. This insight is far closer to Bakhtin's own position, than Vanhoozer's suggestion that the consummation of life is the work of the Divine author alone<sup>141</sup>.

This implies that just as the Church is unconsummated until the end, when she will be fulfilled in the new Kingdom, so too revelation remains until that point unconsummated. Revelation, in word and sacrament, is mediated. It will only be consummated when creation is consummated, and I "understand fully, even as I have been fully understood"<sup>142</sup>. Until then, its meaning is not determined fully<sup>143</sup>. Revelation is a part of grace – a part of the becoming of being. There is a necessarily provisional element to creation, and to human life and to the utterance; and in this created order, the meaning of utterances begins to be consummated in the life of the Body of which we are a part<sup>144</sup>, but is only finished when the New Kingdom has come in its fullness<sup>145</sup>.

Just as meaning is not the property of the author, so we are not our own property<sup>146</sup>. Divine authorship is dialogic not merely in the sense that characters have a 'life', but (for Bakhtin and for me) in the sense that the

---

<sup>141</sup> Vanhoozer assumes on *Remythologizing Theology* p341 that a character can be consummated before it is finished, which is incorrect – consummation implies finality – though perhaps one can speak of partial or provisional consummation?

<sup>142</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:12

<sup>143</sup> Indeed we see "in a glass, darkly"; *ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> In a sense, the words of revelation are only the seed of the body; the body is the revelation itself.

<sup>145</sup> When we are deified in the Spirit

<sup>146</sup> Hence "revelation has not come to an end with the last apostle, only the writing of which it is a reading": G Loughlin: *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology*, (Cambridge University Press 1996) p119 footnote 42.

readers help make the meaning. We of course do not co-create God, but we do co-create this creation He has given us, although it can only be consummated from outside and at the end of all created things. I agree with Vanhoozer that we should not imagine that God's authorship is in doubt<sup>147</sup>, but authorial agency does not include determination of meaning. God remains in control, because He consummates creation from outside itself. Creation cannot be perfected from within – hence the need for the Incarnation of the Divine from outside.

In *Remythologizing Theology* Vanhoozer writes a great deal about Jesus, but revealingly there is no mention of the role of the Virgin Mary in His revelation of Himself, a prime instance of creative co-operation, nor indeed is there very much on the implications for his thesis of Jesus' humanity<sup>148</sup>. Thus while I agree with Vanhoozer that "the divine-human dialogue is actually a means of divine authoring, that is, an asymmetrical communicative process by which a hero is theodramatically consummated"<sup>149</sup>, I do not agree that this consummation occurs within the bounds of this created order, nor that the asymmetry that is inevitably involved militates against the co-operative nature of consummation.

A religion<sup>150</sup> can claim to have a monologic hermeneutic or a monologic text but it cannot prevent the passage of time and the creation of other contexts and other voices from rendering this claim false. Bakhtin is clear; compositional form (of worked material) becomes architectonic form (of aesthetic consummation) by the response of the contemplator<sup>151</sup>: if religion and the Bible are to be included within the aesthetic aspect of life, within that which involves uniqueness and emotion, not merely with the general and with cognitive and ethical values, it must also require this level of self-involvement. As Bakhtin notes, "it is only in the world of others that an aesthetic plot-bearing, intrinsically valuable movement is possible ... To be artistically interested is to be interested, independently of meaning, in a life that is in principle consummated"<sup>152</sup>.

---

<sup>147</sup> *Remythologizing Theology* p491

<sup>148</sup> To which he refers for the first time on page 504. On p357 Vanhoozer notes that "becoming flesh is ... something that the Son does (in cooperation with the Father and the Spirit)." There is no mention of creation's involvement here, or the Virgin's "yes".

<sup>149</sup> *Remythologizing Theology* p494

<sup>150</sup> It is worth asking here whether religious understanding can be aesthetic? Bakhtin always seems to exclude this, and it of course depends upon one's view of the nature of 'religion'. If one sees it as an inherently doctrinal or cognitive genre aiming towards monologism, the answer is clearly no. Bakhtin seems latterly to have inclined to this view. If, however, religion is stressed more as practice or a liturgical and communal-worship experience, then the answer is not so clear-cut. In either case, the Bakhtin Circle's view of meaning severely undermines the view that any religious text has only one approved meaning.

<sup>151</sup> *Art and Answerability* p304/306

<sup>152</sup> *Art and Answerability* p112

## 5. The nature of 'Understanding'.

### 5a: John Searle's concept of 'the Background'

The above discussions segue neatly into an examination of the nature of understanding, which is of course the fundamental hermeneutical question: how we understand as readers, or as contemplators of any work of art, or as participants in dialogue. As I argue in this thesis, the assumptions made relating to how illocutions are understood represent one of the fatal weaknesses in Speech Act theory, which depends on a passive recognition of authorial intention-as-meaning for its existence.

The Speech Act theorist John Searle's concepts of "the Network" and "the Background" are indeed a partial recognition of the inadequacy of the idea of 'passive' uptake in a guaranteed and inert context<sup>153</sup>. Searle notes that an Intentional state is only "the state that it is – given its position in a *Network* of other Intentional states and against a *Background* of practices and preintentional assumptions that are neither themselves Intentional states nor are they parts of the conditions of satisfaction of Intentional states."<sup>154</sup> Any Intentional state is

---

<sup>153</sup> See M Dascal: "Speech act theory seeks to treat what it calls 'use' by means of strict rules, which can be formalized into a precise illocutionary logic. It seeks to demonstrate that use can be treated as rigorously as meaning has been; that it is no longer the vague notion ...; that it is not a matter of an indefinite number of vaguely defined language games. But it may have gone too far in its reduction of use to meaning, thereby proving rather than disproving the slogan [meaning is use] it originally opposed. The price of this operation is – as usual – the abandonment of those aspects of the phenomena that do not fit the model and the attempted reduction. Those aspects of use that do not readily fit the institutional mould, the rule-based treatment, are either left to be handled by a complementary theory of use *à la* Grice, or else dumped in the ever present Background. To say that conversation or other aspects of use have no 'intrinsic structure' is to say that they do not fit the kind of structure privileged by Searle. But this does not mean that they have no organization whatsoever. It only means that their principles of organization allow for the open-endedness, the vagueness, the defeasibility that, although not easily codifiable, endow the use of language with a measure of creativity well beyond the rule-based creativity permitted by grammar": M Dascal, 'Speech Act Theory and Gricean Pragmatics: Some Differences of Detail That Make a Difference' in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994) p333.

<sup>154</sup> *Intentionality* p19. See also *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, Penguin Books, 1996) p129. For a similar use of the same term see also E Stenius, 'Mood and Language-game', *Synthese* 17 (1967) 254-274: "A linguistic utterance is not as such a symptom of any particular (mental) state of the speaker or anything preceding it – in so far as it is, it is against the background of those conventional rules of language which prevail in the linguistic community. Therefore, the uttering of a sentence does not simply function as a signal for the hearer to react in a certain way. In so far as it does, it is again only against the background of those conventional rules of linguistic usage that prevail in the environment of the speaker and the hearer." p262 – a rather better definition than Searle's, although as D Føllesdal notes in his comments on Stenius, "the notion of 'the rules of the game' is ... much more problematic in the case of languages that in that of ordinary games. While ordinary games are usually based on conventions, agreed upon in advance, it is not equally clear what is meant by 'conventional rules of language'": 'Comments on Stenius's 'Mood and Language-game'', *Synthese* 17 (1967) 277.



located in a Network of other beliefs and desires. Furthermore, in any real life situation, the beliefs and desires are only part of a larger complex of still other psychological states; there will be subsidiary intentions as well as hopes and fears, anxieties and anticipations, feelings of frustration and satisfaction. For short, I have been calling this entire holistic network, simply, the "Network."<sup>155</sup>

He goes on to suggest that

anyone who tries seriously to follow out the threads in the Network will eventually reach a bedrock of mental capacities that do not themselves consist in Intentional states (representations), but nonetheless form the preconditions for the functioning of Intentional states. The Background is "preintentional" in the sense that though not a form or forms of Intentionality, it is nonetheless a precondition or set of preconditions of Intentionality.<sup>156</sup>

Searle then suggests that the Background is necessary in order for there to be meaning<sup>157</sup>, and I would not in the slightest disagree with this: Searle's "Background" is in many respects analogous to the idea of cultural context contained in the work of Bakhtin and Volosinov<sup>158</sup>.

The difference is simply that whereas Searle appears to see the Background as a kind of neutral, shared guarantor of sender's meaning, and puts it in a kind of secondary relation to each separate individual<sup>159</sup>, Bakhtin and Volosinov would want to draw attention to the way in which this "Background" in fact creates the ability to understand, and is much more an active series of relationships and experiences than simply a 'passive presence'.

Our 'Backgrounds' are not "derived" from our relations, as Searle suggests, and are not a kind of internal, "neurophysiological" property of our

---

<sup>155</sup> *Intentionality* p141

<sup>156</sup> *Intentionality* p143

<sup>157</sup> *Intentionality* p147

<sup>158</sup> It also corresponds with for example B J Kallenberg's suggestion that "the term 'mereological' is a useful shorthand for saying that the world is organized according to a hierarchy of systems each of which is constituted by an arrangement of entities from the next rung lower in complexity", and that language is an or the emergent property of the social level: B J Kallenberg, 'Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50/2 (1997) p209

<sup>159</sup> He notes in *Intentionality* that "what I have been calling the Background is indeed derived from the entire congeries of relations which each biological-social being has to the world around itself. Without my biological constitution, and without the set of social relations in which I am embedded, I could not have the Background that I have. But all of these relations, biological, social, physical, all this embeddedness, is only relevant to the production of the Background because of the effects that it has on me, specifically the effects that it has on my mind-brain. The world is relevant to my Background only because of my interaction with the world; and we can appeal to the usual "brain-in-the-vat" fable to illustrate this point": p154. In *The Construction of Social Reality* he describes the Background as consisting of "abilities, dispositions, tendencies, and causal structures generally ... [thus] a certain category of neurophysiological causation." For Searle the Background is a kind of property of each individual separately.

individual minds, but are in fact constitutive of our 'mind-brains', (which phrase of Searle's is an entirely inadequate description of the corporeal, social, self). Our "social relations" are a part of our "Background", not a relationship to it, and 'our' "Background" predates us and is continuously changing. Rather than suggesting that "*the Background structures consciousness*"<sup>160</sup>, it is far more the case that we *learn* a particular form of self-consciousness, which itself forms part of the collective background, or culture, to the further development and expression of that consciousness.

Thus I agree with many of Searle's suggestions about 'the Background' and the existence of a "socially created normative component"<sup>161</sup> to human institutions and life. In many, though not all, respects, I share his view that there is something fundamental about our shared inheritance that forms the basis for meaning and consciousness. However, there is for Searle an unacknowledged difficulty here in maintaining the illocutionary-perlocutionary distinction under any guise,<sup>162</sup> because if 'collective representation' becomes so central, this takes away from the pre-eminence of authorial intention, and thus blurs that distinction.<sup>163</sup>

### **The nature of 'Understanding'.**

#### **5b: Understanding, learning and consciousness in E. D. Hirsch, Bakhtin, Volosinov and Gadamer**

E D Hirsch himself, as I have noted, is like Bakhtin and Volosinov before him aware that 'understanding' is an active rather than a passive process: "in fact, all understanding of cultural entities past or present is 'constructed.' The various languages of a culture ... are acquired through learning, and not inborn."<sup>164</sup> He notes later that "understanding is not an immediate given but is always a construction from physical signs"<sup>165</sup>. However Hirsch, like Vanhoozer and Ward, underestimates the extent to which this learning creates the one who is learning, and like Searle is curiously reluctant to consider learning as a phenomenon.

Hirsch can assert that

since all the various languages of a culture are learned by more than one person, they can, implicitly, be learned by any person who takes the trouble to acquire them. And once a person has truly acquired a language it does not matter how he managed to do so – whether by rote and constant exposure like a three year old

---

<sup>160</sup> *The Construction of Social Reality* p133

<sup>161</sup> *The Construction of Social Reality* p146

<sup>162</sup> Illocutions are scarcely mentioned at all in *The Construction of Social Reality*, and do not figure in the index. Perlocutions are entirely absent.

<sup>163</sup> As he notes: "There is exactly one primitive logical operation by which institutional reality is created and constituted. It has this form: We collectively accept, acknowledge, recognize, go along with, etc., that (S has power (S does A))": p111.

<sup>164</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p43

<sup>165</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p134

or by disciplined application and self-conscious design. There is no immediacy in understanding either a contemporary or a predecessor, and there is no certainty. In all cases, what we understand is a construction, and if the construction happens to be unthinking and automatic, it is not necessarily more vital and authentic for that.<sup>166</sup>

Up to a point, I agree with this. It is certainly the case anyone can “truly” learn<sup>167</sup> a language. But to “truly” acquire a language entails more than simply being able to speak sentences: ‘truly’ implies a sense of ‘to completely inhabit the *culture* of the language’, and the child who, from birth is learning their native tongue, is acquiring with it a complex of assumptions and beliefs that will affect who they grow up to become in a way that will be different for an adult who learns the same language having grown to consciousness in another, no matter how well the adult comes to speak it<sup>168</sup>. Thus the ‘vitality’ and ‘authenticity’ of a speaker’s engagement with a culture will affect their ability to understand and be understood: it will affect their ability to share in the construction of meaning in that language<sup>169</sup>.

An adult may well learn to speak the tongue “like a native”, but the ‘like’ here is significant: this adult is not quite a native: they may not be who they were, but still, they are not quite who ‘we’ are either. As Volosinov notes in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, and as I have already noted, “people

---

<sup>166</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p43

<sup>167</sup> And to ‘truly’ learn is different from simply ‘to acquire a language’.

<sup>168</sup> “It makes no sense to try to ground or derive the mother-tongue in something else, in something non-linguistic. Ordinary language, the everyday language-game, is something given, a datum, a donnée, a gift even, part of our form of life, which must simply be accepted”: F Kerr, ‘Language as Hermeneutic in the Later Wittgenstein’, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 27 (1965) p516. As G S Morson notes: “we don’t learn our native language in that [systematic] way. It’s not as if language is handed down ready-made: instead, we simply enter upon the stream of communication. In fact we learn to speak by learning to participate in particular kinds of basic everyday speech genres” ‘Who speaks for Bakhtin?: A Dialogic Introduction’, *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 229.

<sup>169</sup> This is why I am dubious about Searle’s way of putting this, when he suggests that “the child is brought up in a culture where she learns to treat the sounds that come out of her own and others’ mouths as standing for, or meaning something, or representing something”: *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, Penguin Books, 1996) p73. This is to put a false step in: the child learns that the sound is this word, not that it stands for it: the child learns meaning and relationship and identity, not just ‘symbolic relations’. In the same way I don’t agree with him that “any normal case of perception will be a case of *perceiving as*” (p133), not just because of the hostage to hindsight represented by the word “normal”, but also because a ‘normal’ perception based on ‘the background’ is not a case of perceiving x as y, but simply a case of perceiving x. This is Wittgenstein’s point, which I think Searle has missed: that there is no “as” here. That Searle is aware of this difference is evident when he goes on to note that “the use of this word [interpretation] suggests that there is an act of interpreting whenever we understand something or perceive something, and of course I don’t want to say that. I want to say we normally just see an object or understand a sentence, without any act of interpreting” (p134). I entirely agree with him that there is a difference between ‘seeing’ and ‘seeing as’, although both are I believe acts of understanding; however, I don’t think he is clear enough himself about this usage, nor does he consider the implications of this for ‘illocutionary uptake’.

do not “accept” their native language – it is in their native language that they first reach awareness.” He adds in a footnote “the process of a child’s assimilation of his native language is the process of his gradual immersion into verbal communication. As that process proceeds, the child’s consciousness is formed and filled with content.”<sup>170</sup>

Previously he has noted that

in the speaker’s native language ... signal-recognition is certainly dialectically effaced [“by the new quality of the sign”\*]. In the process of mastering a foreign language, signality and recognition still make themselves felt, so to speak, and still remain to be surmounted, the language not yet fully having become language. The ideal of mastering a foreign language is absorption of signality by pure semioticity and of recognition by pure understanding. [He adds in a footnote] The principle advanced here underlies the practice ... of all sensible methods of teaching living foreign languages. What is central... is that students become acquainted with each linguistic form only in concrete contexts and situations. ... Thanks to this procedure, the factor of recognition of identical word is dialectically combined with and submerged under the factor of the word’s contextual changeability, diversity, and capacity for new meanings. A word extracted from context, written down in an exercise book, and then memorized together with its Russian translation undergoes signalization, so to speak ... To put it briefly ... a form should be assimilated not in its relation to the abstract system of the language, i.e., as a self-identical form, but in the concrete structure of utterance, i.e., as a mutable and pliable sign.<sup>171</sup>

An adult who learns a language needs, to have ‘truly’ learnt it, to think and understand in that language, to ‘pre-verbalize’ in that language. Their stance as a speaker (and their accent) will be affected by their existing linguistic existence, and their total immersion in another language and culture will in turn affect their stance in their ‘birth-culture’. It is possible to ‘truly’ learn another language and be absorbed into another culture as an adult, but to do so changes one, and one’s relationship to one’s birth tongue and culture<sup>172</sup>. ‘True’ learning is a two-way street, and an active engagement. If you have, in adulthood, truly learnt another language, you are unlikely to be the same person you were when you started learning, because of the exposures you have undergone<sup>173</sup>.

---

<sup>170</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p81 and footnote 16

\* These words occur earlier in the paragraph – I add them in here.

<sup>171</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p69 and footnote 3.

<sup>172</sup> “However thoroughly one may adopt a foreign frame of mind [in learning a foreign language], one still does not forget one’s world-view and language-view. Rather, the other world we encounter is not only foreign but is also related to us”: *Truth and Method* op cit p458

<sup>173</sup> Of course, even ‘partly’ learning another language may also affect one’s self – many things will do as one experiences events, whatever one’s exposure to other cultures. There is an echo here of the argument between Graf and Fish as to whether or not reading contexts are fluid, and if so, what the consequences of that are for the ‘development’ of meaning: G Graff, ‘Interpretation on Tlön: A Response to Stanley Fish’, *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 109-117, and S Fish, ‘Resistance and Independence: A Reply to Gerald Graff’, *New Literary*

This touches on the territory of the concept of “competence”, which is what Searle is considering when he suggests that “one can develop, one can evolve, a set of abilities that are sensitive to specific structures of intentionality without actually being constituted by that intentionality”<sup>174</sup>. Competency is rather similar to the theological virtue of wisdom (as opposed to that of knowledge), and has a parallel in Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*<sup>175</sup>.

As Searle goes on to note: “We don’t stop and think, consciously or unconsciously, “Ah ha! ... ‘X counts as Y in C’ and requires collective agreement.” Rather, we develop skills that are responsive to that particular institutional structure”<sup>176</sup>: skills which are developed after they have first been learnt, of course! One of the things that is notable in Searle’s account of ‘the Background’ in *The Social Construction of Reality*, and in which he greatly resembles Hirsch, is his enormous reluctance to use the concept of ‘teaching’ or ‘learning’. He suggests that we “evolve a set of dispositions”<sup>177</sup> and that a person can function in society who “has developed a set of capacities and abilities that render him at home in the society”<sup>178</sup>, but the reason for this, of course, is not random, but because they have learnt and been taught these attributes<sup>179</sup>.

The understanding of any action as an action is not, then, a passive process. Reading or appreciating any action is a skilful activity. It is participating in a dialogue as an actor and not as a passive observer. Indeed, the condition of passive observation hardly exists at all; to understand is already to be involved. Volosinov suggests that “human thought never reflects merely the object under scrutiny. It also reflects, along with that object, the being of the scrutinizing subject, his concrete social existence. Thought is a two-sided mirror, and both its sides can and should be clear and unobscured”<sup>180</sup>.

Indeed, for Volosinov, thought belongs to two systems at once; to an ideological system and to the system of my psyche. Understanding involves both aspects<sup>181</sup>. The individual psyche is socially constructed but also outer ideological signs must be ‘owned’ by the individual psyche if they are to

---

*History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 119-127. See also Gadamer: “you understand a language by living in it”: *Truth and Method* op cit p403

<sup>174</sup> *The Construction of Social Reality* p142

<sup>175</sup> And in *Truth and Method*

<sup>176</sup> *The Construction of Social Reality* p143

<sup>177</sup> *The Construction of Social Reality* p145

<sup>178</sup> *The Construction of Social Reality* p147

<sup>179</sup> It may be that one of the reasons for their shying away from learning, is because this would bring them onto the territory of Gadamer’s learnt, dialogic hermeneutics as depicted in *Truth and Method*

<sup>180</sup> *Freudianism* p26

<sup>181</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p35

work as signs; “between the psyche and ideology there exists, then, a continuous dialectical interplay”<sup>182</sup>.

Moreover, “any act of understanding is a response, i.e., it translates what is being understood into a new context from which a response can be made”<sup>183</sup>. Only abstract systems could be ‘understood’ passively, not actual utterances<sup>184</sup>. Volosinov asserts that “every conscious act is already a social act, an act of communication”<sup>185</sup>. When an utterance is understood, what is understood is not what Bakhtin calls its “*neutral signification*”<sup>186</sup> but its “*actual meaning*”, and the linguistic significance relates to the “background of language” while the actual meaning relates to the “background of other concrete utterances in the same theme, a background made up of contradictory opinions, points of view and value judgments”, the “apperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections”<sup>187</sup>.

This is almost a reversal of Hirsch’s own typology: for Bakhtin, linguistic significance can be determined from a dictionary, but the actual meaning of that particular phrase uttered in that particular context is in part determined by those particular contextual factors<sup>188</sup>.

This means that for Bakhtin “in the actual life of speech ... understanding and response are inseparable”<sup>189</sup>, so that “with explanation there is only one consciousness, one subject; with comprehension there are two consciousnesses and two subjects. There can be no dialogic relation with an object, and therefore explanation has no dialogic aspects ... Understanding is always dialogic to some degree”<sup>190</sup>. Understanding is the active engagement with and realization of something: explanation, which is here opposed to comprehension, is to be able to list the dictionary definition of a word or phrase, but not to be able to use it in conversation. To understand, is to have

---

<sup>182</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p39

<sup>183</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p69 footnote.

<sup>184</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p73

<sup>185</sup> ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art’ in *Freudianism* p114.

<sup>186</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p281

<sup>187</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p281. See also Gadamer: “only if we ‘recognise’ what is represented are we able to ‘read’ a picture; in fact, that is what ultimately makes it a picture. Seeing means articulating”, *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p83, and thus “perception always includes meaning”, *Truth and Method* op cit p84

<sup>188</sup> “a passive understanding of linguistic meaning is no understanding at all, it is only the abstract aspect of meaning. But even a more concrete *passive* understanding of the meaning of the utterance, an understanding of the speaker’s intention insofar as that understanding remains purely passive, purely receptive, contributes nothing new to the word under consideration ... even such an understanding never goes beyond the boundaries of the word’s context and in no way enriches the word.” *The Dialogic Imagination* p281.

<sup>189</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p282

<sup>190</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p111

communicated with something else, and to be able to communicate in future.<sup>191</sup>

It is worth making explicit at this point the remarkable similarities between the hermeneutical work of Bakhtin and Volosinov, and that of Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer has become famous for his hermeneutical *magnum opus* *Truth and Method*<sup>192</sup>, which discusses and reinvigorates hermeneutics, and depicts the nature of understanding as an active, inherently linguistic, event within the dialogue of tradition and lived-experience, which inform one another, very much in accord with the description of understanding, consciousness and language described by Bakhtin and Volosinov. The similarities between the active, involved description of understanding that can be found in Bakhtin, Volosinov, and Gadamer, are marked.

In respect of understanding, Gadamer notes that

just as we were able to show that the being of the work of art is play and that it must be perceived by the spectator in order to be actualized (vollendet), so also it is universally true of texts that only in the process of understanding them is the dead trace of meaning transformed back into living meaning<sup>193</sup>

and thus that

hermeneutics must be so determined as a whole that it does justice to the experience of art. Understanding must be conceived as a part of the event in which meaning occurs, the event in which the meaning of all statements – those of art and all other kinds of tradition – is formed and actualized.<sup>194</sup>

He suggests that ultimately “understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life ... [which Heidegger shows to be] the movement of transcendence ... [and which demonstrates that at a fundamental level] all such understanding is ultimately self-understanding [because] ... in every case .. a person who understands, understands himself (sich versteht), projecting himself upon his possibilities.”<sup>195</sup>

Thus for Gadamer “*understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and*

---

<sup>191</sup> Cf Wittgenstein: “Try not to think of understanding as a ‘mental process’ at all. – For *that* is the expression which confuses you. But ask yourself: in what sort of case, in what kind of circumstances, do we say, “Now I know how to go on.” ... for us it is *the circumstances* under which he had such an experience that justify him in saying in such a case that he understands, that he knows how to go on.” *Phil Inv* I §154-155 p61.

<sup>192</sup> *Truth and Method* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1988), also the revised second edition of 2004 (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), from which all quotes are taken, unless noted otherwise.

<sup>193</sup> *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p163

<sup>194</sup> *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p164

<sup>195</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p261

present are constantly mediated”<sup>196</sup>. Moreover, as for Bakhtin, so for Gadamer “tradition is not simply a permanent precondition; rather we produce it ourselves inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition, and hence further determine it ourselves.”<sup>197</sup>

For Gadamer,

historical tradition is ... not ... an object of historical knowledge or of philosophical conception, but ... an effective moment of one’s own being. The finite nature of one’s own understanding is the manner in which reality, resistance, the absurd, and the unintelligible assert themselves.<sup>198</sup>

In a similar manner to Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘event of being’, Gadamer refers to the “inner historicity of experience”<sup>199</sup> which “is always actually present only in the individual observation. It is not known in a previous universality”<sup>200</sup> and is a process which inclines towards ever new experiences and to forming a person who is “radically undogmatic”<sup>201</sup> and “speculative”<sup>202</sup>.

For Gadamer, as for Bakhtin, the linguistic nature of experience is also crucial: Gadamer insists that “hermeneutical experience is concerned with *tradition*. This is what is to be experienced. But tradition is not simply a process that experience teaches us to know and govern; it is *language* – i.e., it expresses itself like a Thou. A Thou is not an object; it relates itself to us”<sup>203</sup>, although not simply as the opinion of another individual. In words that could equally well be Bakhtin’s, Gadamer suggests that “*a person who reflects himself out of a living relationship to tradition destroys the true meaning of this tradition in exactly the same way*” as one can overwhelm the other by refusing to recognise their difference, or as one can refuse to recognise one’s own nature as “conditioned by historical circumstances”<sup>204</sup>.

This is because for Gadamer “*a language-view is a worldview*”<sup>205</sup>. As he notes, “our verbal experience of the world is prior to everything that is recognized and addressed as existing. *That language and world are related in a fundamental*

---

<sup>196</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p302

<sup>197</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p305

<sup>198</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit page xxxii. See also “long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society and state in which we live”: p289.

<sup>199</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p355

<sup>200</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p360

<sup>201</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit,p364

<sup>202</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p483

<sup>203</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p366

<sup>204</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p369. This is one way of describing my view of the Speech Act claim to a saturated context, or Thiselton’s attempt to distinguish a Speech Act reading context from a reader response one, described in the next chapter.

<sup>205</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p459



*way does not mean, then, that world becomes the object of language.* Rather, the object of knowledge and statements is always already enclosed within the world horizon of language."<sup>206</sup> As Bakhtin would also insist, "we cannot see a linguistic world from above ... for there is no point of view outside the experience of the world in language from which it could become an object."<sup>207</sup>

Gadamer, like Bakhtin, also lays great stress on the importance of genuine dialogue or conversation. He asserts that "*the fusion of horizons [of reader and text] that takes place in understanding is actually the achievement of language*" and that in his work he is "endeavoring to approach the mystery of language from the conversation that we ourselves are", and thus that "the way understanding occurs – whether in the case of a text or a dialogue with another person who raises an issue with us – is the coming-into-language of the thing itself".<sup>208</sup>

### For Gadamer

every conversation presupposes a common language, or better, creates a common language. ... This is not an external matter of simply adjusting our tools; nor is it even right to say that the partners adapt themselves to one another but, rather, in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were.<sup>209</sup>

In conversation, we are led, we do not lead, and we are led in an event of understanding.<sup>210</sup> For Gadamer,

*language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. ... All understanding is interpretation, and all interpretation takes place in the medium of a language that allows the object to come into words and is at the same time the interpreter's own language. ... The hermeneutical phenomenon ... is a circle closed by the dialectic of question and answer ... [which] we can call ... a conversation. ... The linguisticity of understanding is the concretion of historically effected consciousness.*<sup>211</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p466

<sup>207</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p469

<sup>208</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p386. In the *Afterword*, Gadamer admits that "the conceptual language of philosophy cannot be extricated from the whole of the language world and that, even at the expense of delimiting concepts precisely, its living relation to the whole must be preserved. That is the positive implication of the 'indigence of language' inherent in philosophy from its beginnings" (p587-588) because "in the hermeneutic sciences, a verbal formulation does not merely refer to something that could be verified in other ways; instead it makes something visible in the how of its meaningfulness" (p588).

<sup>209</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p386-387

<sup>210</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p401

<sup>211</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p407. Indeed, "the hermeneutical situation is not a regrettable distortion that affects the purity of understanding, but the condition of its possibility. ... The apparently thetic beginning of interpretation is, in fact, a response; and the sense of an

Indeed, Gadamer suggests that

Language is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather, on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature. ... Language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it. Not only is the world world only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is presented in it. Thus, that language is originally human means at the same time that man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic.<sup>212</sup>

There are some clear differences between Bakhtin, Volosinov and Gadamer, particularly in terms of the language they used to describe the shared and inherited aspect of human consciousness, variously for example 'tradition', 'society' or 'culture'. However, since these are in any case translations from the German or Russian whose nuances may not be captured in English, even these distinctions may merely obscure an underlying similarity in their work, all of which undoubtedly stresses the event of understanding and the dynamic nature of life as an ongoing conversation between the individual and their context; between uniqueness and embodiedness.

The dynamic relationship between understanding and meaning shared by the Bakhtin circle and Gadamer demonstrates that meaning will change as and when understanding changes. It is therefore not necessarily the case that, as Hirsch suggests, "my perception of a visible object ... can vary greatly from occasion to occasion, and yet what I am conscious of is nevertheless the same table, the same phoneme"<sup>213</sup>. That this most certainly is a common experience is simply because the table continues to have the same (and therefore unimportant and easily overlooked) value and meaning.

To say, as we might be tempted to, that a table has no meaning, it just is a table, is to put it into the class of 'everyday' or 'ordinary' objects<sup>214</sup>. They

---

interpretation is determined, like every response, by the question asked. *Thus the dialectic of question and answer always precedes the dialectic of interpretation. It is what determines understanding as an event*" : p488 – and this rather echoes Rosenblatt's depiction of the transactional relationship that creates the encounter of meaning.

<sup>212</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p459. Further underlining the similarities with Bakhtin, Gadamer suggests that "every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. The occasionality of human speech is not a casual imperfection of its expressive power; it is, rather, the logical expression of the living virtuality of speech that brings a totality of meaning into play, without being able to express it totally" : p474

<sup>213</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p37

<sup>214</sup> "In other words, while the ordinary and the obvious are always with us, because we are always in the grip of some belief or other, they can change" : S Fish, 'Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases', *Critical Inquiry* 4:4 (Summer 1978) p627

Chapter Seven: The Hermeneutics of Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

appear to have no meaning; they simply 'are what they are'. This, though, is in fact a way of saying that these things are things we have grown up with and are entirely comfortable with. They have no surprises for us, and raise no questions in our minds. We know what tables are, and what they are for, and where this and that particular table have come from, and that they are where they always are<sup>215</sup>.

However, if on the following day, my uncle is found slumped over what was 'just a table', murdered, or if diamonds are found in a hidden drawer, or if I discover that it was at this table that Schleswig was ceded to Prussia, then while the table's 'minimum physical presence'<sup>216</sup> may be constant, it will not thereafter be the same table: its meaning will have altered greatly. It will become, not 'just a table', but 'the table at which ...'. Indeed, to imagine something less dramatic, if I come into a room one day to find a table moved, it may become a new object, while its 'minimum physical presence' is unchanged: it will become an object of fear or suspicion – 'who moved that table, how did it get there', or simply one now more appreciated – 'I never realised before how beautiful that table was'.

That which is just a table, or just a horse, or just a printing-press, to someone used to such things, is something with earth-shattering properties to one encountering the object for the first time. Familiarity alters meaning. All objects have meaning, and this meaning includes an assumption of value: the meaning and value of an object constitutes part of the object's recognized identity, and can change (in just the same way as the meaning and value of an act can change and thus change the nature of the act: what was an act of liberation becomes an act of terrorism in a later text book; the British Government's execution of traitors in wartime Dublin became the murder of martyrs whose deaths became one of the cornerstones in establishing Irish independence<sup>217</sup>).

Hirsch's assertion that "something can remain the same for consciousness even though one's perspective, emotion, state of health may vary"<sup>218</sup> is simply

---

<sup>215</sup> "§602. Asked "Did you recognize your desk when you entered your room this morning?" – I should no doubt say "Certainly!" And yet it would be misleading to say that an act of recognition had take place. Of course the desk was not strange to me: I was not surprised to see it, as I should have been if another one had been standing there, or some unfamiliar kind of object.

§603. No one will say that every time I enter my room, my long-familiar surroundings, there is enacted a recognition of all that I see and have seen hundreds of times before.

§604. It is easy to have a false picture of the processes called "recognizing": as if recognizing always consisted in comparing two impressions with one another... Our memory seems to us to be the agent of such a comparison, by preserving a picture of what has been seen before, or by allowing us to look into the past (as if down a spy-glass)." *Phil Inv* I §602-604 p157.

<sup>216</sup> To adopt a phrase along the lines of Austin's "minimum physical act".

<sup>217</sup> The Allied invasion/liberation of Iraq, or the most recent Ukrainian revolution/coup are examples other such debated acts.

<sup>218</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p37

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

stating that the meaning of an object can be constant over time: this is of course true, but it is not inevitable. If the meaning of an object changes for someone but not for someone else, then they will both be looking at the same physical object, just as a text may remain unvarying as a physical object. But the meaning of that object or text will be different for each, because of the context (the history) in which they realize the object. The physical object may remain unchanged, not so the meaningful object<sup>219</sup>. Physicality and identity are not coterminous or indistinguishable, just as in the case of the 'minimum physical act' and the fully valued and realized act which Austin himself distinguishes and discusses<sup>220</sup>.

This is the same phenomenon as the one in which a phrase has one meaning to 'the public', and another to a group of 'initiates'. When, in *The Construction of Social Reality*<sup>221</sup> Searle suggests that a "physical object" has "intrinsic features" that "do not depend on any attitudes of observers or users", as well as "observer-relative" features<sup>222</sup>, he is in fact identifying the same phenomenon. What he refers to as "ontologically subjective features" that are "observer relative" is the same phenomenon more frequently termed 'meaning' (which as he goes on to note is inextricably linked with "function"<sup>223</sup>), and his subsequent suggestion that recognising meaning is "intrinsic" to the observers<sup>224</sup>, is another way of saying with Wittgenstein, that we simply recognise cutlery as cutlery: we just 'know what it is', because we learn meanings.

Searle errs, however, in suggesting that "*seeming to be F* is logically prior to *being F*",<sup>225</sup> because the nature of understanding is that "*seeming to be*" is "*being*", except in hindsight: the two are simultaneous, co-dependent, and

---

<sup>219</sup> "The obviousness of the utterance's meaning is not a function of the values its words have in a linguistic system that is independent of context; rather it is because the words are heard as already embedded in a context that they have a meaning that Hirsch can then cite as obvious": Fish, 'Is There a Text in This Class?', H A Veese (ed.), *The Stanley Fish Reader*, (Blackwell, Malden MA, 1999) p45. See also S Fish, 'Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases', *Critical Inquiry* 4:4 (Summer 1978) p630.

See also H Dufva and M Lähteenmäki, 'But who killed Harry? A dialogical approach to language and consciousness', *Pragmatics and Cognition* 4:1 (1996) 105-123. They ask "what does it mean to 'see a tree'? in real life, 'seeing a tree' is something meaningful. ... My processing system ... may connect the visual stimulus (which, by the way, does not consist only of the tree but of its background and context as well) to such (possible) concepts, and/or emotions, and/or responses, as; 'beauty', 'forest', 'oak', 'acid rain', 'autumn', 'picture in a book', or 'enjoying a walk in a forest'. ... In real life, trees are not seen without a context, or observed without some relevance. ... The process of understanding is not fundamentally data-driven or form-driven" p116.

<sup>220</sup> See *How To* p110-111 and Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>221</sup> (London, Penguin Books, 1996)

<sup>222</sup> *The Construction of Social Reality* p10

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid* p14

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid* p10-11

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid* p13

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

inseparable, until we wonder if we were mistaken. 'Seeming to be' is therefore, in usage, frequently subsequent to 'being', because it has, at least often, an air of uncertainty about it; sometimes we see a thing and wonder if it is 'F' or not, as it rather seems to be – here, seeming is prior. Sometimes we see 'F', and thereafter begin to wonder if it actually is 'F' or not – here, seeming is subsequent.

Hirsch and Searle are, as I have already suggested, victims of the sender view of meaning. They, with Austin (and along with many other scholars) assume a sender view of meaning and start their ideas of meaning from the standpoint of a single, 'isolated', self or agent. As I suggested in my first chapter, in this view of identity and meaning, communication begins with 'me', the speaker or agent, and is the process whereby I move 'outwards' to another. The starting point for philosophy is the individual adult consciousness, apparently self-contained and fully developed.

This initial assumption as a starting point means that all communication is intrinsically uncertain. How can I be certain that what is in my mind can be understood, or that I can correctly convey my thoughts or meanings to another? It is interesting that it is not merely Vanhoozer or Hirsch who start with this assumption preoccupying their approach: it is a fundamental aspect of the 'post-modern condition' also. If the author's intention is not identical to meaning – if what I say is not correctly recognized – then communication collapses and we are all doomed to remain as we apparently started, isolated individuals stuck in isolated worlds<sup>226</sup>.

So it seems quite plausible that either meaning is the possession of the author and is made by them a property of the utterance, or that meaning is the property of each individual reader and thus collapses into chaos. The idea of the sender view of meaning – the idea that meaning is ascribed to an utterance by the initiator who sends the meaningful utterance out to be recognized (or not) by his or her audience – is coherently seen as a bulwark against a chaos of individualistic, competing, unrecognized meanings.

However, this entire assumption is based on a false model of identity and communication, that ignores the fact that I do not start with my own self-awareness and identity as a given. Instead I acquire a sense (or senses) of myself as I grow, learn and develop. I come to a sense (or senses) of myself as

---

<sup>226</sup> It is this supposition that Wittgenstein is challenging in *Philosophical Investigations* and in his other later work: certainly according to Fergus Kerr: *Theology after Wittgenstein* (London, SPCK, 1997) see for example p100 "the model of the self as an intangible and private object alienates us from ourselves." See also Kerr's 'Language as Hermeneutic in the Later Wittgenstein', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 27 (1965), for example "the programme carried through ... in the Investigations ... is ... the surmounting of a post-Cartesian philosophy of the isolated worldless I by means of a thoroughgoing retrieval of a philosophy in which the human subject is always the participant in a community prior to all objectification and subjectivism" p502.

I come to an awareness of my culture and language, and thus my self-awareness is at the same time an awareness of myself within certain shaping and creating contexts. The question of 'who I am' is determined by the nature of who I am recognised as being, by others and by myself, and this recognition can alter.

My sense of my self is acquired and learned: it is a given gift, one might say, which is not a static intellectual possession but is something fluid and relational. I cannot be an isolated individual, doomed to be forever misunderstood, because my identity as 'I' is itself something communicated and corporate or shared. As G L Bruns notes: "Hermeneutical reflection dissolves the possibility of the solitary investigator modeled on the Cartesian Mind or the Transcendental Ego or the Intentional Consciousness. For hermeneutics, it is not enough to talk of a subject except in the presupposition of dialogue. A subject is always in dialogue and cannot be thought of simply as an agent in cognition."<sup>227</sup>

### **The nature of 'Understanding'.**

#### **5c: The act of reading.**

If understanding is an active participation in creating the act itself from within a community and a context, then reading must also be seen as an active, participatory action, at least in so far as understanding necessarily and simultaneously involves reading (and there may be circumstances in which reading does not include understanding<sup>228</sup>, although it is hard to imagine that the understanding of a text of any sort could occur without reading). Reading is therefore a necessary completion of the creation of authorially-instigated meaning. This will certainly have implications for a view of revelation. Unsurprisingly, it is not a view of reading advocated by Hirsch or the proponents of a Speech Act biblical hermeneutics.

Hirsch's notion of genre<sup>229</sup> is an attempt to create, by suggesting the idea of a 'layering' of context (as with his 'layering' of the idea of meaning), a neutral background reminiscent of Searle's own idea of "the Background" in front of which an individual author can plausibly exercise some control over the intrinsic genre of their utterance, and thus of its meaning. Hirsch is not able to provide, however, convincing examples of what might constitute a 'given', because every aspect of the dialogic or conversational context of a particular utterance, including the utterances which surround it (be they textual or

---

<sup>227</sup> G L Bruns, 'Structuralism, Deconstruction, and Hermeneutics: Review of J Culler's 'On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1982)', *Diacritics* 14:1 (Spring 1984) 13-14, although I think no blame is attributable, and binary oppositions are perhaps too easy.

<sup>228</sup> I have had some such experiences myself.

<sup>229</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* chapter 3, p 68ff.

spoken), are construed and affect the construal of any particular utterance within that on-going dialogue.

In his discussion of genre Hirsch is attempting to isolate the construals or assumptions we learn to make as part of our acquisition of a culture, from the recognition of the meaning of an utterance, in order to preserve the idea that meaning is understood on the basis of the authorially-intended genre intrinsic to the utterance. He denies the extent of the contextuality of the act of recognizing an utterance, because the more contextual acts of realization or recognition are seen to be, the less unanimity between speaker and hearer or reader and writer will seem to be the essence of meaning.

As he later observes: the mistake of

the proponents of "public norms" ... lay not in thinking that there is a supra-individualistic principle which enforces meanings, but in believing that this principle is somehow automatically given to any "competent reader." It is the speaker who wills the particular intrinsic genre and, having done so, is constrained by its proprieties.<sup>230</sup>

For one who is clear on the importance of construal or construction in meaning, Hirsch is peculiarly reluctant to consider the importance of learning or inheriting principles, as we have already noted. The suggestion that either speakers "will" genre, or that they are "somehow automatically given" is, for a professor within an educational system, perverse. Learning is not an automatic given, and it is a relatively universal phenomenon<sup>231</sup>. Hirsch is unable to suggest it as a way in which meaning is collectively authored because he imagines as his starting point individual, isolated adult agents, and because of his concern at every turn to resist any weakening of authorial control.

Hirsch states that we cannot imply "that the meaning represented by the text is not the *parole* of an author, but rather the *parole* of the speech community" because "since only individuals utter *paroles*, a *parole* of the speech community is a non-existent, or what the Germans call an *Unding*. A text can represent only the *parole* of a speaker or author, which is another way of saying that meaning requires a meaner."<sup>232</sup> The fallacy here is to assume again that meaning is an either/or concept. Instead, the concept of *parole* itself (and

---

<sup>230</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p93-94. See the discussion in the previous chapter.

<sup>231</sup> "Let the use *teach* you the meaning" *Phil Inv* Ixi p212. See also J R Hobbs, 'Artificial Intelligence and Collective Intentionality: Comments on Searle and on Grosz and Sidner', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992) p453: "we are born knowing how to suckle and desiring to cuddle. Engaging in this collective behavior establishes a small-scale sense of community, which makes possible further collective behavior and communication. Language is learned, enabling us to learn the rules and conventions of quite complex social activities. And so on, until we arrive at the complex creatures we are."

<sup>232</sup> *Validity in Interpretation* p234

Hirsch is right to see *parole* as the contextually meaningful aspect of language) is a dialogic one: the 'meaner' learns a *parole*, which is far more than just the application of the elements of the *langue*, but which encompasses what is often also called the 'cultural context'. Thus 'the meaning of the text' (to say that the text 'represents' a meaning is again to fall into the sender view of meaning, divorcing meaning from the actual utterance itself) is the *parole* both of an author and a speech community: without the community, there would be no *parole*, and only the community can teach the *parole* to the author, but each author can adapt and evolve the *parole* in conversation<sup>233</sup>.

Bakhtin therefore suggests, in respect of reading, that

everything that is said, expressed, is located outside the "soul" of the speaker and does not belong only to *him*. The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, there are no words that belong to no-one). The word is a drama in which three characters participate (it is not a duet, but a trio). It is performed outside the author, and it cannot be introjected into the author. If we anticipate nothing from the word, if we know ahead of time everything that it can say, it departs from the dialogue and is reified.<sup>234</sup>

Therefore, in Bakhtin's view, the act of reading should seek

to understand a given text as the author himself understood it. But our understanding can and should be better. Powerful and profound creativity is largely unconscious and polysemic. Through understanding it is supplemented by consciousness, and the multiplicity of its meanings is revealed. Thus, understanding supplements the text: it is active and also creative by nature. Creative understanding continues creativity and multiplies the artistic wealth of humanity. The co-creativity of those who understand. Understanding and evaluation. Understanding is impossible without evaluation. Understanding cannot be separated from evaluation: they are simultaneous and constitute a unified integral act. The person who understands approaches the work with his own already formed world view, from his own viewpoint, his own position. These positions determine his evaluation to a certain degree, but they themselves do not always stay the same. They are influenced by the artwork, which always introduces something new. Only when the position is dogmatically inert is there nothing new revealed in the work (the dogmatist gains nothing; he cannot be enriched). The person who understands must not reject the possibility

---

<sup>233</sup> E Weigand: "the basic universal dialogic principle thus rests on the insight that there is no individual speech act which is, taken on its own, communicatively autonomous. The smallest autonomous unit of communication is the sequence of action and reaction": 'The Dialogic Principle Revisited', *Dialoganalyse* III:1 (1991) 77.

<sup>234</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p121-122. There are very strong echoes here of Gadamer, and of Panikkar: "Real words are not mere instruments in your hands or mine, they are part of the human, cosmic, and also divine interplay and they mean what we all agree that they mean in the very act of the dialogical interchange. Otherwise they are no longer living words; they are dead:" *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) page x.



of changing or even abandoning his already-prepared viewpoints and positions. In the act of understanding a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment.<sup>235</sup>

The contemplation of art is necessary for the meaning of the art to be realised, and such also is the case for the meaning of an utterance or of a text. In all cases, it is not the case either that the reader/contemplator creates meaning<sup>236</sup> or that the reader/contemplator passively receives it from another<sup>237</sup>; rather meaning is realized in dialogue, as for Gadamer<sup>238</sup>.

Thus Bakhtin can suggest that while 'formal' meaning is accessible to all readers or contemplators, the evaluative-semantic and symbolic aspect of meaning (that which is alive not dictionary-bound) is accessible "only to individuals who are related by some common conditions of life ... in the final analysis, by the bonds of brotherhood on a high level"<sup>239</sup>, a conclusion that resembles those suggested by Gadamer's consciousness of the tradition in which we are located<sup>240</sup>, the work of Raymond Gibbs<sup>241</sup>, and even Hornsby's conditions for hearing illocutions, as well as John Macmurray<sup>242</sup>.

---

<sup>235</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p142. See also "Not just occasionally but always, the meaning of a text goes beyond its author. That is why understanding is not merely a reproductive but always a productive activity as well": Gadamer, *Truth and Method* op cit p307.

<sup>236</sup> Such an isolated self-contained individual with such a degree of free reign does not in any case exist, for Bakhtin or Volosinov

<sup>237</sup> Such a situation is impossible – it would be an instance of receiving a signal not a sign, as happens when we begin to learn a foreign language: see Volosinov: *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* op cit p69: something we have laboriously to reconstruct 'piece by piece'.

<sup>238</sup> In the words of Mika Lähtenmäki, "understanding is not viewed as a process whereby a listener finds out the thought behind a speaker's words, rather it is regarded as a joint project in which meanings are mutually constructed. Moreover, ... understanding necessarily presupposes answering ... [and is] the listener's active reaction to the speech act of the speaker. Thus understanding and answering are intimately interconnected, since understanding an utterance manifests itself, in one way or another, in the future reaction of the listener": M Lähtenmäki, 'On Meaning and Understanding: A Dialogical Approach', *Dialogism* 1 (1998) 78.

See also "the experimenter constitutes part of the experimental system (in microphysics). One might say, likewise, that the person who participates in understanding constitutes part of the understood utterance, the text (more precisely, utterances and their dialogue enter the text as a new participant)": *Speech Genres etc* p123

<sup>239</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p166.

<sup>240</sup> "once again we discover that the person who is understanding does not know and judge as one who stands apart and unaffected but rather he thinks along with the other from the perspective of a specific bond of belonging, as if he too were affected": *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p332-333

<sup>241</sup> See chapter four

<sup>242</sup> Who suggests that there is a social life based on purposes, and "there is a second way in which we can enter into relationships with one another. We may associate purely for the purpose of expressing our whole selves to one another in mutuality and fellowship. It is difficult to find a word to express this kind of relationship which will convey its full meaning ... what is common to them all [words he suggests] is the idea of a relationship between us

Volosinov also notes that

nothing is more perilous for aesthetics than to ignore the autonomous role of the listener ... The listener never equals the author. The listener *has his own independent place* in the event of artistic creation; he must occupy a special, and, what is more, a *two-sided* position in it – with respect to the author and with respect to the hero – and it is this position that has determinative effect on the style of an utterance.<sup>243</sup>

Thus the listener or reader is “an immanent participant in the artistic event who has determinative effect on the form of the work from within”<sup>244</sup>.

Volosinov describes the dialogism of the book and the utterance on pages 95 and 96 of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Having distinguished between theme and meaning, as discussed previously, he goes on to note that “only active understanding can grasp theme” and that to understand an utterance requires an orientation towards it, and to find the right context for it<sup>245</sup>. Any true understanding must be dialogic in nature, and

therefore there is no reason for saying that meaning belongs to a word as such... Meaning belongs to a word in its position between speakers; that is, meaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding... Meaning is the *effect of interaction between speaker and listener...* [in a collective “ecosystem”], only the current of verbal intercourse endows a word with the light of meaning.<sup>246</sup>

The theme can be understood simply by intonation, and is rooted in collective value judgments, which extend far wider than merely theme and meaning. Meaning, of course, is continually evolving<sup>247</sup>.

As Bakhtin insists, “when a listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude towards it” and

any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any utterance is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker. A passive understanding of the meaning of perceived speech is only an abstract aspect of the actual whole of actively responsive understanding, which is then actualised in a subsequent response that is actually articulated.<sup>248</sup>

---

which has no purpose beyond itself”: J Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, op cit p56. This personal relationship is for Macmurray the purpose of society (op cit p59).

<sup>243</sup> ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art’ in *Freudianism* p112

<sup>244</sup> ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art’ in *Freudianism* p113

<sup>245</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p102

<sup>246</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p102-103.

<sup>247</sup> *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* p106.

<sup>248</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p68

He goes on:

Thus, all real and integral understanding is actively responsive, and constitutes nothing other than the initial preparatory stage of a response ... And the speaker himself is oriented precisely toward such an actively responsive understanding. He does not expect passive understanding that, so to speak, only duplicates his own idea in someone else's mind ... The desire to make one's speech understood is only an abstract aspect of the speaker's concrete and total speech plan. Moreover, any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe. And he presupposes not only the existence of the language system he is using, but also the existence of preceding utterances – his own and others' – with which his given utterance enters into one kind of relation or another ... Any utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances.<sup>249</sup>

Thus, in his description of how to read novels, Bakhtin firstly notes that the reader requires some knowledge of the dialogues and language of the authorial context (perhaps with the aid of "historico-linguistic research"<sup>250</sup>). He identifies two central problems: firstly those of "*canonization*"; the tendency of language to slip from being heteroglossic<sup>251</sup> and other to being 'established' and 'literary', which he suggests is "no obstacle"<sup>252</sup> to one who "grasps the basic orchestrating languages and the basic lines of movement and play of intentions".

Secondly, there is the problem of "*re-accentuation*", where the living word itself can evolve or recall its past meanings and 'fight' against the author, particularly where contextual changes make it impossible to perceive double-voiced authorial strategies such as parody, which may become recognised instead as sincere or as crudely polemical<sup>253</sup>.

Both of these problems are as he notes, affected by and affect the reading context, and moreover these problems are not simply a

crude violation of the author's will. It can even be said that this process takes place *within the image itself*, i.e., not only in the changed conditions of perception. Such conditions merely actualise in an image a potential already available to it. We could say with some justification that in one respect the image has become better understood and better "heard" than ever before.<sup>254</sup>

Indeed, in *Speech Genres etc* Bakhtin notes

---

<sup>249</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p69

<sup>250</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p417

<sup>251</sup> By which he means many-voiced and dialogic

<sup>252</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p418

<sup>253</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p419

<sup>254</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p420

the first task is to understand the work as the author himself understood it, without exceeding the limits of his understanding. This is a very difficult problem and usually requires introducing an immense amount of material. The second task is to take account of one's own position of temporal and cultural outsidership. Inclusion in our (other's for the author) context.<sup>255</sup>

And he concludes "for, we repeat, great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the moment of their creation, they are capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth"<sup>256</sup>, a concept very close to Vanhoozer's and Ward's idea of transhistorical meaning, but which fits into Bakhtin's dialogic hermeneutics far better than into the 'authorial-intentionalistic' hermeneutics of Ward and Vanhoozer.

Indeed as Bakhtin observes, novels exist in "great time" not simply the time of their own epoch, important though that is for understanding them; artists like Shakespeare grow "because of that which actually has been and continues to be found in his works, but which neither he himself nor his contemporaries could consciously perceive and evaluate in the context of the culture of their epoch"<sup>257</sup> so that the author can be seen as a "captive" of his own epoch, 'liberated' by "subsequent times"<sup>258</sup>.

This is complementary with the acknowledgment of meaning as a system because the cultural unity which founds meaning is an "open unity"<sup>259</sup> and thus both semantic depth and material expand. Bakhtin observes, in a way that will be proposed also by Gadamer, that

a meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning; they engage in a kind of dialogue which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths. Without *one's own* questions one cannot creatively understand anything other or foreign (but, of course, the questions must be serious and sincere). Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and *open* totality, but they are mutually enriched.<sup>260</sup>

The echo of Austin's insistence on seriousness is notable here, and bearing in mind Derrida's criticism of Austin in this respect, and indeed Bakhtin's own work on Rabelais and on carnival and comedy, it should be noted that by serious Bakhtin means not po-faced or solemn, but with the orientation

---

<sup>255</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p144

<sup>256</sup> *The Dialogic Imagination* p422

<sup>257</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p4

<sup>258</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p5

<sup>259</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p6

<sup>260</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p7

towards a genuine encounter with 'otherness' and towards engaging in genuine dialogue.

The alternative position to this serious engagement illustrates its meaning (and this whole discussion illustrates how we are inextricably in dialogue with each other and how crucial is context to meaning); it is the dogmatist who only recognises the repeated meaning and not the new and thus "is in no way enriched. In what belongs to others he recognises only his own"<sup>261</sup>. As with selfhood, too, so meaning does not ever finish. Selfhood and meaning cannot be consummated except from the point of view of the outside, and in either case this is still provisional; only the superaddressee could completely consummate.

Bakhtin also notes in respect of texts, which he defines as "any coherent complex of signs"<sup>262</sup> – i.e. anything realized as such – that they have two poles; the systematic and the specifically contextual. He is aware of the existence and specific quality of re-reading; "the reproduction of the text by the subject (a return to it, a repeated reading, a new execution quotation) is a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text, a new link in the historical chain of speech communication"<sup>263</sup> Thus Bakhtin notes that there must be

understanding-recognition of repeated elements of speech (i.e. language) and intelligent understanding of the unrepeatable utterance. Each element of speech is perceived on two planes: on the plane of the repeatability of the language and on the plane of the unrepeatability of the utterance. Through the utterance, language joins the historical unrepeatability and unfinalized totality of the logosphere.<sup>264</sup>

For Bakhtin, "the reproduction of the text by the subject (a return to it, a repeated reading, a new execution quotation) is a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text, a new link in the historical chain of speech communication"<sup>265</sup> and thus the text is not a thing but an event: "the unrepeatable event of the text"<sup>266</sup>.

Thus

contextual meaning is personalistic; it always includes a question, an address, and the anticipation of a response, it always includes two (as a dialogic minimum). This personalism is not psychological, but semantic. There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable ... - they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the

---

<sup>261</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p143

<sup>262</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p103

<sup>263</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p106

<sup>264</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p134

<sup>265</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p106

<sup>266</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p107

dialogue ... Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival.<sup>267</sup>

Reader and author thus “co-create” art, the reader contemplating the object from the position of otherness<sup>268</sup>. Bakhtin suggests that this is analogous to the way in which a spectator creates art from the play of others;

a spectator who contemplates this life event in an aesthetically active manner and, in part, *creates* it (as an aesthetically valid whole, by transposing it to a new plane – the aesthetic plane) ... alters the event as it is initially given: the event becomes enriched with a new moment, new in principle – an author/ beholder, and, as a result, all other moments of the event are transformed as well, inasmuch as they become part of a new whole.<sup>269</sup>

Thus, rather than imagining the act of reading as a passive ‘uptaking’, it should be recognized as an active, dynamic response, one that is both anticipated by the author, and which is necessary for the consummation of the work.

This is at least the case for the activity of reading texts from the genre of ‘literature’ or ‘art’, which are those Bakhtin and Volosinov generally consider. However, as they both argue, the act of understanding, which is included in the act of reading, is always and can only be an active, dynamic one. To read a text is to make many contextual assumptions about its genre, the intentions of its author/s, and its meaning, and none of these are ‘neutral givens’, they are all part of one’s inherited, evolving cultural context<sup>270</sup>.

---

<sup>267</sup> *Speech Genres etc* p169-170

<sup>268</sup> *Art and Answerability* p66

<sup>269</sup> *Art and Answerability* p75 – compare this to Gadamer’s analysis of play in *Truth and Method* op cit page 106ff

<sup>270</sup> As Fish asserts, “a sentence is never apprehended independently of the context in which it is perceived, and therefore we never know a sentence except in the stabilized form a context has *already* conferred ... there is no first place in the sense of a state in which the natural (acontextual) properties of a sentence can be observed and enumerated” (p637): because “no degree of explicitness will ever be sufficient to disambiguate the sentence if by disambiguate we understand *render it impossible to conceive of a set of circumstances in which its plain meaning would be other than it now appears to be*” (p636): S Fish, ‘Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases’, *Critical Inquiry* 4:4 (Summer 1978). This point is also demonstrated by a simple experiment recorded by Sadock involving twenty “subjects” writing sentences and effects of language on separate cards and then trying to imagine a context that would unite sentences and effects randomly selected. “There was only one case where the participants failed to find a context that did the trick, and that was – predictably – one where the intended effect (the christening of a battleship) was of the kind that can only be accomplished by adhering to a prescribed ritual [although in this case Austin himself suggested ways of doing this ‘unhappily’]. In every other case it was a fairly trivial matter to think of a context that worked”: J M Sadock, ‘Comments on Vanderveken and on Cohen and Levesque’, in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992) p258.

Matei Calinescu also suggests that many readings are in fact re-readings, or at least are not “virginal”, and that different assumptions and understandings are thus engaged from those which we imagine to be in the case in an abstracted or idealized ‘act of reading’.

The concept of a virginal first reading, so appealing to our naïve intuition, cannot withstand critical reflection.

Even before I decide to read a book, I have not only certain expectations, shaped by my generic acquaintance with the kind of book I have selected from a great many available books, but quite probably some more specific assumptions about the chosen book itself... So when I make up my mind to read a book ..., I most likely already know something about it: I may have been advised by a friend or a reviewer to read it, or perhaps forbidden to read it by an authority figure or censor; I may have been given reasons why I should, or perhaps should not, read it; or I may have simply heard it mentioned informally as an enjoyable book, or as being original, topical, scandalous, etc... Even when I pick a new book by an unknown author on a whim, I am better informed about it than I might suspect. This information (which may well turn out to have been misleading) is derived from where the book in question is sold ...; from the books that immediately surround it ...; from the title ...; from the book jacket ...; and quite likely from a general impression gained by quickly glancing through the pages.<sup>271</sup>

The act of reading itself thus contains any number of intentional suppositions and part-postulated ‘presences’, the gift of the reader’s own culture and inheritance. When it comes to communication, therefore, it is becoming clear that a communicatory act is considerably more complicated than the production of sounds or signs by an author. A text act or a speech act is an encultured, co-operative activity.

Calinescu briefly imagines some different generic readings. “With great literature, we may justifiably say, each time is the first time”, while

in the matter of poetry the distinction between first reading and rereading is hard to sustain in phenomenological terms and almost naturally tends to acquire a purely methodological-analytical character.

The distinction, in this latter sense, may end up giving rise to a veritable imperative of re-reading: poetry must be reread!<sup>272</sup>

There is the difference, too, that the length of a text makes to our reading, longer texts allowing “anticipations and retrospections”.<sup>273</sup> All of this serves to outline the active role played by the reader in recognising and responding to a written text. As part of the audience, as an encultured reader, the reader has a considerable role in recognizing and realizing genre, and thus at the same time in recognizing and realizing meaning<sup>274</sup>.

---

<sup>271</sup> M Calinescu, *Rereading* (New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1993) p41-42

<sup>272</sup> *Rereading* op cit p43

<sup>273</sup> *Rereading* op cit p45

<sup>274</sup> Thiselton quotes H R Jauss as making the same point: “Jauss distinguishes between the effects and dynamics of successive readings. He calls a “first” horizon of expectation ... projected by the first reading, the horizon of *aesthetic* experience, or sometimes the horizon of

The idea of a guaranteed illocution is incompatible with this view. So, too, is the sender view of meaning. The acts of writing and reading, dialogic and mutually realizing, are like all other sorts of act: they are actively realized by an audience, and without this active understanding, which is never absolutely guaranteed, an act cannot be recognized.

This is also the conclusion of Louise Rosenblatt, who developed her own 'transactional theory of reading', as outlined in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional theory of the Literary work*<sup>275</sup>. She suggests that there are different sorts of reading, in particular the efferent and aesthetic. An act of reading where "the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading", such as the mother frantically reading "the label on the bottle to discover the antidote to be administered" to a child who has swallowed a poison, is an efferent reading, while in an aesthetic reading, "the reader's primary concern is with what happens during the actual reading event."<sup>276</sup> She acknowledges that reading exists on a continuum<sup>277</sup>, but insists that the act of aesthetic reading is always a transactional or dialogic encounter between the reader and what she refers to as the 'poem', which term she uses as a shorthand for any kind of literary work of art<sup>278</sup>.

In direct opposition to the suggestion of E D Hirsch that meaning is 'impersonal' she asserts that

The readers' attention to the text activates certain elements in his past experience – external reference, internal response – that have become linked with verbal symbols. Meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among things symbolised *as he senses them*. The symbols point to these sensations, images, objects, ideas, relationships, with the particular associations or feeling-tones created by his past experiences with them in actual life or in literature. The selection and organization of responses to some degree hinge on the assumptions, the expectations, or sense of possible structures, that he brings out of the stream of his life. Thus built into the raw material of the literary process itself is the particular world of the reader.

But the text may also lead him to be critical of those prior assumptions and associations ... He may discover that he had projected on the text elements of his

---

literary expectation. He calls subsequent horizons, horizons of "lived experience": *Thiselton on Hermeneutics* op cit p42. He himself also recognises different reading contexts: "some approach biblical texts as enquirers; others may exemplify a model of "believing" reading, in which they perceive a personal stake; others may remain immune to the impact or meaning of a text unless existential shock or the seduction of a transforming narrative "world" operates. Further, strategies for reading didactic texts, reading poetic or symbolic texts, reading parables, or reading different types of narrative can and do vary": *Thiselton on Hermeneutics* op cit p349.

<sup>275</sup> L M Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional theory of the Literary work*, (Carbondale IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1978). I am grateful to Dr Stephen Burge of the Institute of Ismaili Studies for this suggestion.

<sup>276</sup> *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional theory of the Literary work*, op cit p24

<sup>277</sup> Op cit p35

<sup>278</sup> Op cit p17



past experience not relevant to it ... Most important at this point in our discussion, however, is the fact that the reader's creation of a poem out of a text must be an active, self-ordering and self-corrective process. ... The text itself leads the reader towards this self-corrective process.<sup>279</sup>

And hence that

the poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experiences and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being.<sup>280</sup>

She insists that reading is not an instance of the dictation of either reader or text/author, and that therefore the term transaction is appropriate for the act of reading because it "designates, then, an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are, one might say, aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other."<sup>281</sup> For her, meaning is "experienced"<sup>282</sup>, and she suggests that "even as we are generating the work of art, we are reacting to it. A concurrent stream of feelings, attitudes, and ideas is aroused by the very work being summoned up under guidance of the text."<sup>283</sup>

She does attempt to identify 'stages' in the reading activity, in which the reader's activity creating the meaning in dialogue with the work, which creates that experienced "work" can be described as "the evocation" which is in turn "what the reader interprets"<sup>284</sup>, interpretation being a secondary stage which "thus paradoxically involves an effort to indicate the sensed, felt, thought, nature of the evocation while at the same time applying some frame of reference or method of abstracting in order to characterize it. The reader

---

<sup>279</sup> Op cit p11

<sup>280</sup> Op cit p12. This has many echoes of Gadamer – see for example *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p279: "a person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there" in the "movement of understanding and interpretation" (p280). Indeed he asks "how do we discover that there is a difference between our own customary usage and that of the text? I think we must say that generally we do so in the experience of being pulled up short by the text": *ibid.* See also pages 318-319.

<sup>281</sup> *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* p17

<sup>282</sup> *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* p43

<sup>283</sup> *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* p48

<sup>284</sup> *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* p70

interprets the evoked work within the context of the total literary transaction."<sup>285</sup>

Finally, she identifies the stage of evaluation, which is a stage of post-reading reflection that includes 'criticism'<sup>286</sup>. Rosenblatt concludes that

the transactional view, freeing us from the old separation between the human creature and the world, reveals the individual consciousness as a continuing self-ordering, self-creating process, shaped by and shaping a network of interrelationships with its enviroing social and natural matrix. Out of such transactions flowers the author's text, an utterance awaiting the readers whose participation will consummate the speech act.<sup>287</sup>

It is a model that shares many similarities with that of the Bakhtin circle and Gadamer, but which is based not on a pre-existing ideology, but on her own experiences as a teacher, and on her research into what readers do actually do when confronted with a poem, as described in her preface and in chapter two ("The Poem as Event") of her book. Unlike Hirsch, and Searle, education is a phenomenon of which she is fully aware, and which she values and incorporates into her scheme. It will not be a surprise that I find her analysis most helpful, and believe that it supports my own assertions about reading, understanding, and consciousness.

## 6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined my own proposals for understanding, reading and the creation of meaning, in dialogue primarily with Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov, as well as with E D Hirsch and John Searle to a degree. I have demonstrated that the meaning of an utterance is dialogic and embedded, and that actual meanings are always created within a context, and in relationships. Meaning is not static and final, but nor is it arbitrary: it is neither the 'possession' of 'authors' or 'recipients'<sup>288</sup>.

As part of this discussion, I have also re-iterated and underlined the now commonly-held<sup>289</sup> view that understanding is learnt, and is not a passive, but

---

<sup>285</sup> *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* p135. In this she again greatly echoes Gadamer; "in a certain sense interpretation probably is re-creation, but this is a re-creation not of the creative act but of the created work, which has to be brought to representation in accord with the meaning the interpreter finds in it ... Aesthetic consciousness is generally able to make the aesthetic distinction between the work and its mediation only in a critical way - i.e., where the interpretation breaks down": *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p123

<sup>286</sup> *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* p152

<sup>287</sup> Op cit p172-173

<sup>288</sup> It is for This reason that Thiselton prefers to talk of preliminary understanding rather than 'presuppositions', because of a reasonable concern that this latter phrase should not be taken as a defence of the refusal to engage in dialogue: A C Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*, (London, SPCK, 2013) p96

<sup>289</sup> Post Gadamer

an active response, even when it is 'invisible' to us. We understand the world around us without realising that we do so: cutlery, tables, the environment<sup>290</sup>, all of this is understood, as are our social conventions, our own place in culture and society, our identity within groupings, and our own uniqueness. All of this is learnt, and understood: all of these understandings and assumptions could be very different, but we have inherited and made them and they have made us.

This understanding, however, is not static, even though so much of it is generally invisible. For one thing, it is always changing as we change, and we understand differently as our circumstances and perspectives change, and as we change through time and experience. Moreover, our understanding can be subject to enormous revolution<sup>291</sup>. Our understanding of our environment, and our understanding of daily life, is not 'conscious', in the sense that it is not the product, usually, of obvious thought or effort. But it is not 'natural' or 'neutral', either. While constitutive of us, it is not simply acquired whole, but acquired through learning, much of which is unacknowledged, and which is a perpetual and dialogic process<sup>292</sup>.

When we understand language, and what is spoken or read, we do so in what looks like an automatic or natural way<sup>293</sup>. Indeed, in a way it is natural,

---

<sup>290</sup> And so much else that is 'common-place'

<sup>291</sup> Conversions on the Damascus Road and many other instances.

<sup>292</sup> As Thiselton notes, "We are not making some kind of special appeal to theology or religion when we assert that the individual does not in fact begin his quest for knowledge *de novo*, as if he were an isolated individual abstracted from history and society. A shared public world pre-exists both him and his own thinking. This public world shapes his thought in such a way that it not only provides and transmits shared resources of knowledge, but also shapes the terms on which he examines and tests that knowledge": *Thiselton on Hermeneutics* op cit p703, also 'Knowledge, Myth and Corporate Memory' in The Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, *Believing in the Church: The Corporate Nature of Faith* (London, SPCK, 1981) p47.

<sup>293</sup> In Wittgenstein's terms, we say 'now I know how to go on', or we just go on doing it effectively. It should also be noted that to recognise something as 'not an act' but rather an accident or a natural phenomenon or whatever, is still to recognise it as something: even 'not-acts' have to be understood. See also R Panikkar: "It is in the symbol that the real appears to us. It is not reality (which never appears naked, as it were) but its manifestation, its revelation. The symbol is not another 'thing', but the epiphany of that 'thing' which is-not without some symbol – because ultimately Being itself is the final symbol. Any real symbol encompasses and unites both the symbolised 'thing' and the consciousness of it.

... The moment that words say only exactly what you mean and do not leave room for what I may also mean, the moment that they become only signs and cease to be symbols, the moment that they only signal something else and are no longer the expression, the manifestation and with it the veil itself of that 'else', in that moment they degenerate even as words. They become mere tools for transmission of coded messages, open only to those who previously possess the clue:" *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) page ix. This is echoed by Rosenblatt, who notes that in the reading process, "what we get is not a seeing-of-the-verbal-signs, plus meanings, but the reading-experience, this reading-effect": *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional theory of the Literary work*, op cit footnote p21. For some reason this also causes me to think of David Jones, quoting Maurice de la Taille about the Crucifixion: "He placed

because we are social and created creatures, and it may be that we have propensities to certain forms of life. In any case, understanding which situates us in our worlds, and establishes the meaning of our interactions from moment to moment, is active, and indeed self-involving! To understand requires our own participation: it is not forced on us from outside, but depends on our own recognition and input<sup>294</sup>.

Understanding exits or occurs on a spectrum: it extends to the more 'conscious' and 'effortful' kind of understanding involved in 'hard sayings' and in confusion or ignorance, when we wonder 'what does that mean'. In this kind of common experience the activity of understanding is visible. Indeed, here we might be at the edges of our experience, participating in creating new meanings<sup>295</sup>. But this is simply the tip of our participation in creating the meaning of everything we inhabit, which of course is mostly not new, but inherited and assumed. Our 'making of meaning' is always around us: we do not always see ourselves doing it<sup>296</sup>. One might say that understanding has a 'volume control': but the 'inaudible' is still understanding: it is all an activity – an active thing in which we as individuals in societies are involved.<sup>297</sup>

---

Himself in the order of signs": 'Art and Sacrament' in *Epoch and Artist* (London, Faber and Faber, 1959) p179

<sup>294</sup> See also E Weigand: "the individual decision for a particular possibility in performance depends essentially on the individual understanding of the circumstances of life", an expression that combines the interests of both Bakhtin and Wittgenstein: E Weigand, 'The Dialogic Principle Revisited', *Dialoganalyse* III:1 (1991) p86.

<sup>295</sup> Here, Weigand's description of the difference between the German *Verständigung* (coming to an understanding) and *Verstehen* (understanding) may be helpful: "coming to an understanding ... presupposes action and reaction ... which creates a dialogue, which makes up coming to an understanding ... While coming to an understanding describes action, understanding represents a mental precondition of linguistic action ... In this sense understanding is the precondition for action" E Weigand, 'The Dialogic Principle Revisited', op cit p87. Weigand notes in footnote 6: "Action theories which ... include conditions of understanding as an element of the analysis of action, do not take account of the fact that understanding only becomes an object of enquiry when it becomes problematical" – footnote reference p86, detailed on p98. Bruns describes *verstehen* as "understanding [which] always has the implication of living through something as against standing outside of it": 'Structuralism, Deconstruction, and Hermeneutics: Review of J Culler's 'On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1982)', *Diacritics* 14:1 (Spring 1984) 16. See also the following: "it is my conviction that the general function of communication must be considered as the function of coming to an understanding/'Verständigung'; by understanding/'Verständigung' I mean not only the understanding/'Verstehen' of the communication partner, not only the making-himself-understood of the speaker, but the complex function of an action game between speaker and communication partner, which in its most general form can be grasped as a clarification of both partners' positions on the level of action, i.e. ... as dialogically oriented action functions" E Weigand, 'Word meaning and utterance meaning', *Journal of Pragmatics* 20 (1993) 260.

<sup>296</sup> Although some of for example G K Chesterton's work, such as *The Man who was Thursday* and *The Poet and the Lunatics*, was designed to awaken us to seeing the meanings we have already made, and polish them up

<sup>297</sup> As Bakhtin notes, "to see something for the first time, to realize something for the first time, already means to assume an attitude towards it: it exists neither within itself nor for

This consideration of the nature of understanding has been undertaken as part of an examination of the use of Speech Act theory as a biblical hermeneutic, and it has demonstrated that one of the reasons for the overall failure of the attempt, is because of its assumption of a sender view of meaning. Such an assumption cannot tolerate the existence of understanding as opposed to 'uptake', as for example E D Hirsch demonstrates, with his own revisions to his work. The preceding chapters have demonstrated the existence of inherent flaws in Speech Act theory itself, concerning agent's intention and the understanding of acts, and have I believe demonstrated that the theory is not a productive hermeneutic tool. Its use should be abandoned.

I do not accept, however, that the failure of Speech Act theory to defend the sender view of meaning, dooms any idea of revelation. It is rather the case that ideas of revelation need to be revised, on the basis of the hermeneutics of Bakhtin and Volosinov, and in ways that are in fact far more theologically coherent. This assertion will be developed in the last chapter of this thesis.

---

itself, but for another (already two correlated consciousnesses). Understanding is a very important attitude (understanding is never a tautology or duplication, for it always involves two and a potential third)" *Speech Genres* etc p115

## CHAPTER EIGHT: COOPERATIVE REVELATION AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

### 1. Introduction: the thesis thus far

This thesis has examined the use of J L Austin's Speech Act theory in Biblical hermeneutics. Specifically, it has examined a way in which Speech Act theory has been used to defend the idea that the author controls the meaning of their text, and can be assured that this meaning will be taken up by the reader.

This idea is important from a particular Christian viewpoint, which needs to be able to defend a traditional idea of revelation which assumes that when God reveals Himself, He does so without the need for human interaction<sup>1</sup>. The idea that Scripture is inerrant or infallible assumes, among other things, that the meaning of Scripture issues unmediated from the perfection of the Divine author: that meaning is made and controlled by the author, and is not dependent on the reader or the community.

Even concepts of revelation that do not explicitly depend on Scriptural infallibility or inerrancy have tended to assume that when God reveals Himself, this is an action that He controls and can underwrite: the alternative is thought to be a kind of relativistic free-for-all, in which everyone creates God in their own image, and the possibility of an authoritative revelation and an authoritative tradition is eliminated.

This thesis has accordingly examined both Speech Act theory as originally presented by J L Austin, and as it is used by biblical hermeneuts, and in each case has found inconsistencies and inadequacies in the theory and the uses of it. It has suggested firstly that the attempt to use Speech Act theory as a literary hermeneutic tool is problematic, and that the theory as Austin and Searle present it cannot be so used. This is a point with which both Austin and Searle would themselves agree. They would argue that literature is "parasitic" upon "normal speech"<sup>2</sup>.

Various attempts have been made to co-opt Speech Act theory for use as a literary hermeneutics and in general, in so far as they have succeeded, they have done so by re-shaping the theory in various significant and often unacknowledged ways. However, this thesis has demonstrated that Jacques Derrida is correct in his assertion that the inability of Speech Act theory to cope with various 'parasitic' and 'exceptional' cases is due to flaws in the

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example the discussion of Barth's theology of the Holy Spirit in D S Cunningham, 'Interpretation. Toward a Rehabilitation of the Vestigia Tradition', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 179-202

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Two

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

theory not in the nature of the various exceptions. These 'exceptions' serve to illustrate a general inadequacy in the principles and assumptions underpinning Speech Act theory itself.

This thesis has also suggested that Speech Act theory is incoherent with regard to the relationship between 'authorial intention' and 'what is done', and the relationship between these two concepts and that of 'meaning'. The unique Speech Act concept of the illocution, the part of speech whose meaning is equivalent to the intention of the author, and which is guaranteed to be taken up by the hearer without the need to be recognised by an 'active understanding', collapses into incoherency under closer examination, such that the supposed immutable relationship between authorial intention and meaning cannot be sustained, nor can the illocution be distinguished from its perlocutionary alternative. The view that the author dictates meaning is incompatible with some of the basic assumptions of Speech Act theory and is inadequate as an approach.

This thesis has gone on to suggest that E D Hirsch's attempt to distinguish between meaning and significance, which is employed by some Biblical hermeneuts who adopt Speech Act theory to further underpin the relationship between authorial intention and meaning, is also flawed. In particular I illustrate that both Speech Act theory and Hirsch rely on the idea of 'uptake' to illustrate how meaning is 'transmitted' to the reader or hearer, and that 'uptake' is an inadequate concept.

Underlying both Speech Act theory and Hirsch's account is an assumption that I describe as "the sender view of meaning". This assumption is by no means limited to the proponents of these two concepts; indeed, Derrida also may be said to be a victim of it. This view starts from the assumption of a 'separated self': an independent, isolated agent, seeking through communication to impart their meaning to another, a meaning which predates any specific utterance, and is thus "begotten, not created".

However, this is inadequate as an account of meaning and identity. Selfhood and identity are constructs; concepts and realities that are created in conversation and that are learnt and developed<sup>3</sup>. Meaning is a co-operative endeavour, created in conversation, formed by encultured (theologically, one might want to say 'gifted') individuals who are formed by and form their cultures and traditions, and who engage with others and with texts, and by their active understanding create meaning.

This however leaves no room for an idea of revelation as something in which only God is active. If meaning is made not dictated, this requires a

---

<sup>3</sup> This can be both negative and positive: it is not necessarily the case that everything we inherit and learn will be, with hindsight, or given a later stance, of benefit to us. We can learn that we are vicious or despicable, just as we can learn that we are valued.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

reconsideration of the role of Scripture in God's revelation of Himself, and certainly undermines the concepts of the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture. If the contention of this thesis is correct, and meaning is created, the only option open to those who seek an authorial guarantee for Scripture would be to claim that reading scripture is not like reading anything else.

Indeed, this has sometimes been suggested<sup>4</sup>; and there is an argument for saying that Scripture requires a special hermeneutic, and should not be included within a 'general' theory<sup>5</sup>. However, no matter what the claims made for experiences of reading Scripture, it cannot be denied that every reader of Scripture, whether a 'first-timer' or an old hand, reads from within a context and a tradition. Not everyone who reads Scripture reads it as infallible or inerrant, and that some do, is a function of their own acquired reading stance. The role of context in the creation of meaning is inescapable.

It is of course possible to accept this and claim to have an infallible reading context. The Magisterium could be identified as an explicit claim for such a context<sup>6</sup>. There are, many would argue, theological problems with this. As an assertion, however, it is internally consistent, and rather resembles Hirsch's assertion that in reading one has a moral choice to make to read the author's meaning: one can choose to adopt the correct reading stance. Neither this 'magisterial reading' nor Hirsch's moral choice can, however, claim to be the only possible reading: merely that they are the right one! Further, as Bakhtin would argue, such an 'absolutist' context cannot easily be "enriched", or grow and learn through conversation, and precisely this objection leads one also to wonder how such a context is created in the first place, and how plausible it is as an account of how the Papacy or the Curia actually reads Scripture: the Magisterium in practice tends to relate to doctrine, rather than to meaning<sup>7</sup>.

One of the prime motivations for those who, like Vanhoozer and Briggs, have sought to use Speech Act theory, is a concern to preserve the "otherness" of Scripture: its ability to 'stand outside' the reader and the reading context and challenge us. I do not believe, however, that this possibility vanishes if the sender view of meaning is replaced by a more cooperative, developing or 'transactional' model<sup>8</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> This is the argument Coleridge puts forward in *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*.

<sup>5</sup> This question is briefly discussed in the final section of this chapter

<sup>6</sup> And it could be argued that many who read Scripture make this claim implicitly: "we read it right - you don't; so you aren't proper Christians".

<sup>7</sup> One could also suggest that within the Magisterium there is debate, and that it does not claim for itself an infallible reading, merely that it identifies and encapsulates the reading of the whole context, the whole church; "that which is always and everywhere believed" (the church reading, encapsulated in one man). Of course, this definition, too, is open to debate: believed by whom, precisely?

<sup>8</sup> As Gadamer notes, "just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is



Although the concept of the illocutionary guarantee must be abandoned, the linguistic philosophy of Bakhtin and Volosinov, which sees meaning as a creative construction, does nonetheless provide an opportunity for a view of revelation which, I believe, is theologically more consistent. This view of revelation fits in better with the nature and activity of God presented in the New Testament through the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, and with the sacramental legacy He is believed to have bequeathed. It provides a far more adequate account of the nature and operations of the Holy Spirit (Himself a revelation, through theology, of unimpeachable orthodoxy, which post-dates the revelation of the New Testament), and gives a description of the role of Scripture in revelation that is both more accurate as a description of how Scripture is already used, and is theologically consistent with the related ideas of Sacramental revelation and Pneumatology.

The idea that there is a simple binary choice between illocutionary meaning or a total, nihilistic free-for-all, where the reader creates everything, so that communication (and any ability to know 'the other') are impossible, is naïve and incorrect. Both of those views are in fact products of the same misconception, which dissipates when it is recognised that we learn meanings as we learn selfhood and many other related concepts, all of which affect and are affected by our existence as relational beings. Therefore, I assert, on the basis of Volosinov's and Bakhtin's ideas, that it is still possible to use a concept of revelation, but one which does not rely on any kind of 'illocutionary' attributes, speaker-based or guaranteed.

---

never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion. The surrounding horizon is not set in motion by historical consciousness. But in it this motion becomes aware of itself." *Truth and Method*, op cit, p315. See also Valliere, who notes, in a manner that answers any suggestion that communities are sealed-in: "Thorough-going pluralism is disaggregating; it assumes that each entity in a series is sufficient for those who have elected or inherited it. Yet as soon as one assumes that the *plures* are somehow insufficient – that they complement or supplement or need each other – one is no longer a radical pluralist ... If within our own little worlds we discover that we can communicate with those who live in other little worlds, and that together we can help each other, challenge each other and enlighten each other, then *by virtue of that discovery alone* we are no longer living in our own little worlds but in a larger one." P Valliere, *Conciliarism: a History of Decision-making in the Church*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 2012) p38. See also "my point is that in dialogue I start questioning my own questions. I look at myself and say 'Is that the obvious or only way of asking the question?' ... In other words, in dialogue I discover the things that are not necessarily at the forefront of my mind. I discover something beyond what suits my 'comfort zone'. I may discover resources within my own language that I didn't suspect and I may discover tensions in my own language that I didn't suspect, as I listen and absorb from another": R Williams, 'Dialogue is a means of 'God-give discovery'; *address at the Christian Muslim Forum Conference of Scholars Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010*, available at <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/926/archbishop-dialogue-is-a-means-of-god-given-discovery#sthash.w3e6YWeu.dpuf>.

Instead, it understands God as revealing Himself in co-operation with His audience/readership. I believe that this enables us to properly understand the action of the Holy Spirit in revelation. This is how the Holy Spirit acts; working with and within His creation, enabling us to realize the presence and purposes of God. Our realization and cooperation is a necessary part of the process of revelation – of God’s revealing activity.

## **2. The Holy Spirit and revelation:**

### **2a. The inadequacies of the sender view of meaning if the Holy Spirit lives**

If this thesis is correct, the Holy Spirit is thrust to the fore as the primary agent of revelation, since it is by His actions that God is generally described as working in creation, and it is through Him that we are united in the Body of Christ. One of the problems with the idea of an unmediated Scriptural revelation, as with Biblical infallibility or inerrancy more generally, is that it effectively neuters the Holy Spirit, and reduces Him merely to a bystander, who has no purpose or role save that of performing what can become seen merely as God’s ‘party tricks’.

As E F Rogers Jr notes in his introduction to *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings*<sup>9</sup> which he has edited, “theology has had trouble ... explaining what the Holy Spirit adds, no matter that pattern and invocation always included it [*sic* – *the Holy Spirit is, of course, not ‘an’ ‘it’, as Thiselton points out*<sup>10</sup>]. In modern Christian theology, anything the Spirit could do, Christ could do better, even if traditional Christians would be surprised to hear it put that way. ... Is the Spirit superfluous? Academic theology has all but answered yes.”<sup>11</sup>

Rogers suggests that this is because many academics have worked with a model that imagines the Spirit as being involved in bridging the gap between “the exterior history of the Son and the interior of the human heart”<sup>12</sup>, exacerbated by the presumption that what in fact crosses the gap is “information”:

---

<sup>9</sup> E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> See his *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*, (London, SPCK, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> E F Rogers Jr ‘Introduction’ in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* op cit p1. See also R Williams, ‘Word and Spirit’ in the same volume, p54. Thiselton quotes Moltmann as suggesting, in A C Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*, op cit p401, that in fact the Holy Spirit has been ‘rehabilitated’ in the last few decades: I suspect that, as Thiselton notes, interest in the Holy Spirit, and on an ecumenical level, has been re-awakened, but without any agreement on how we should understand the action of the Spirit in theology and ethics: without any kind of hermeneutical consideration to His work.

<sup>12</sup> E F Rogers Jr ‘Introduction’ in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* op cit p1

on that view, what Christ brings down from heaven and deposits in the heart is just revelation, the knowledge that saves. ... The distance-crossing model can obscure why the Spirit might be a good thing, especially when its revelation that makes the trip. In that case Christ can bring it better, even into the heart.<sup>13</sup>

As Thiselton asks, while discussing the debate between the followers of Warfield and Orr, is revelation “informational rather than primarily transformative”<sup>14</sup>? This almost seems to hark back to the linguistic debate with which this thesis began, in which Austin demonstrates that language is not simply descriptive but also active: language is not merely ‘informational’ but also ‘*per/transformativa*’!

Rogers instead proposes a model based on incorporation, where “the Spirit introduces the human being into the interior of a relationship among Father, Son, and Spirit”<sup>15</sup> and thus adopts a ‘transformative’ assumption, but this indicates another part of the overall uncertainty about the Spirit’s role: in revelation, that which is revealed is God. There is an element of ‘information’ involved here inevitably, in that what God reveals is His existence and intent. The revelation that ‘God is’, is informative if He was unknown, and the revelation that ‘God is *merciful, jealous* etc’ is informative in that it tells us new things about Him.

However, we must be careful to remember, as Raimundo Panikkar insists, that God’s self-revelation is neither that of an ‘outside agent’, nor indeed of simply another element to be considered in the overall fabric of life. God is not a ‘fact to be considered’, but He is all that is real, and the only reality, and this recognition transforms our own understanding of creation, and ourselves within it.

God *and* the world are neither one nor two. The fact that they are not two is as evident as the fact that they are not one. If they were one, one could not even speak of God, for only the world would then exist. Monism is atheism. If they were two, God would not be the Absolute, for the common ‘element’, the predicate of both, which includes both God and the world, would be superior to and more comprehensive than either – which is contrary to the definition of God as Absolute.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> E F Rogers Jr ‘Introduction’ op cit p2. This concern is also shared by R Williams, ‘Word and Spirit’ op cit

<sup>14</sup> A C Thiselton, ‘Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda’ in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) p111. See also R Williams, ‘Word and Spirit’, in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) p57

<sup>15</sup> E F Rogers Jr ‘Introduction’ in *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* op cit p2

<sup>16</sup> R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) p36. He has previously insisted on “the non-dual character of the Real, the impossibility of adding God to the world or *vice versa*, the impossibility of putting in *dvanva*, in a pair, God and the world”, *ibid*. See also R Norris: “God is not “in” the world (or for that matter “outside” it). On the contrary, the world is “in” God, who is the “place” in which the finite order is set, and is therefore non-mediate

'Information' about God in the Christian tradition (and doubtless others also) is (if it is understood), inevitably transformative, of self and of outlook and of understanding.

This in turn though provides its own problems for hermeneutics. It is easier to conceive of a hermeneutical theory, whether 'special' or 'general', if we are envisaging changes only on an informational level, in knowledge. However, as many hermeneutists have suggested in their own ways, this is not the case: hermeneutics is indeed about the change in self and in relationships<sup>17</sup>. This perhaps opens the door for a broader and deeper understanding of the transformative role of Spirit, but raises questions about the role of Scripture, that are in any case to the fore even if revelation is regarded as more 'informative'.

If revelation is a revelation of information, it would seem that the Spirit has little role to play here<sup>18</sup>. If revelation is more relationally transformative, in a more hermeneutically sophisticated sense, it seems to endanger everything the illocution is one means of defending, by forcing 'meaning' to become much more 'open-ended' and 'relational' (said preferably with a slight sneer!). In particular, the possibility that communities will never hear anything other than their own voice, addressed right at the beginning of this thesis, returns centre-stage, as a necessarily pressing problem.

To some extent, the suggestion that meaning is dialogic or 'transactional' defuses some, though not all, of these concerns. They are present, though, somewhere in the background when, for example, Thiselton notes that

in speech-act theory, the initiating, enabling, or creative act does not originate with the reader, except in the case of such sub-categories as acts of praise, confessions, or prayers. (We leave aside, for the present, the distinctively theological question of whether such acts are responsive components within the frame of a divine-human-divine dialogue).<sup>19</sup>

In part, this is what is so dangerous, because Thiselton is wrong to assume that Speech Act theory divorces the creative act from the reader. Instead, Speech Act theory invents a kind of 'suspension of disbelief' as it were, where

---

present to it ... As the world's medium and context, its ground, God does not belong in the same file-folder with created things – or, for that matter, in any file-folder at all. God is everything's holder and upholder": R Norris, 'Trinity', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) p26

<sup>17</sup> As Gadamer and Bakhtin assert, as well as Ricoeur in *Oneself as Another*. Understanding and dialogue are self-involving because they are active.

<sup>18</sup> D S Yeago, 'The Bible. The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) p62

<sup>19</sup> A C Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London, Marshall Pickering, 1992) p598

the reader denies their own effects, and thus claims a unique sort of reading that otherwise does not take place. Speech Act theory pretends to a kind of 'purity of context' or 'saturation of context' that is in fact illusory<sup>20</sup>.

That this hierarchy exists for Thiselton is demonstrated when he continues

by contrast in reader-response theory the effects are determined by the contingent social horizons themselves which define the community of readers to which a reader belongs. If any act of will is involved, this can be traced only to routinizations which originated in the corporate will of the community; otherwise meaning is either simply causally generated, or count-generated by virtue of conventions alone. But speech-acts entail performance-acts which carry extra-linguistic consequences.<sup>21</sup>

To some extent, what Thiselton has in view here is the kind of 'Fish-y' community where there is no 'outside', to which he is right to object, but of course these are not the only alternatives, as has already been discussed through a consideration of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Louise Rosenblatt<sup>22</sup>. It is also not clear what is meant here by 'conventions alone'. Are these rigid, or fluid: learnt customs, or rigid codes?

Thiselton then goes on to say that speech-act reading is a count-generated act, making the difference again an uncertain one. It is not clear why a 'reader-response reading' cannot generate extra-linguistic consequences, unless the definition of 'reader-response' entails the belief that there is, as it were, 'nothing outside the text'? I would argue that a 'speech-act' reading is a kind

---

<sup>20</sup> As Gadamer demonstrates in respect of Bultmann's "existential fore-understanding": *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p340ff.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Of course, saying that speech-acts entail performance acts sounds rather like Austin's equally suspect perlocution/effects-illocution/uptake distinction, or the causal-illocutionary distinction Evans adopts.

<sup>22</sup> See also Valliere, who notes, in a manner that answers any suggestion that communities are sealed-in: "Thorough-going pluralism is disaggregating; it assumes that each entity in a series is sufficient for those who have elected or inherited it. Yet as soon as one assumes that the *plures* are somehow insufficient – that they complement or supplement or need each other – one is no longer a radical pluralist ... If within our own little worlds we discover that we can communicate with those who live in other little worlds, and that together we can help each other, challenge each other and enlighten each other, then *by virtue of that discovery alone* we are no longer living in our own little worlds but in a larger one." P Valliere, *Conciliarism: a History of Decision-making in the Church*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK, 2012) p38. See also "my point is that in dialogue I start questioning my own questions. I look at myself and say 'Is that the obvious or only way of asking the question?' ... In other words, in dialogue I discover the things that are not necessarily at the forefront of my mind. I discover something beyond what suits my 'comfort zone'. I may discover resources within my own language that I didn't suspect and I may discover tensions in my own language that I didn't suspect, as I listen and absorb from another": R Williams, 'Dialogue is a means of 'God-give discovery'; address at the Christian Muslim Forum Conference of Scholars Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010, available at

<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/926/archbishop-dialogue-is-a-means-of-god-given-discovery#sthash.w3e6YWeu.dpuf>.

of reader-response which, precisely by virtue of its operating assumptions, generates extra-linguistic effects.

In his article , 'Speech-act theory and biblical interpretation'<sup>23</sup>, Brevard Childs notes that "the movement by which scripture becomes the vehicle of divine revelation was by means of the Holy Spirit. ... The human words were not transformed into a new form of illocutionary divine discourse, but were now understood and made alive through a divine activity." Thus for him, it is precisely the case that "the most fundamental flaw in the new hermeneutical theory [Speech Act theory] arises from the failure to understand the role of the church in collecting, shaping and interpreting the Bible, which is the issue of canon"<sup>24</sup>, or in other words, this neglect of a proper consideration of context.

Childs concludes that "the term scripture refers, above all, to the divine authority of these writings. The scriptures derive from the inspiration of God's Spirit in the revelation of God to his people. The scriptures not only are inspired in their origin, but are continuously infused with the promise of divine illumination", and he argues that we should see the canon as part of this infusing of divine illumination:

The apostolic church never claimed to have created its canon of scripture, but understood its formation as a response to the divine coercion of the living Word of God. Thus the concept of canon was a corollary of inspiration. ... Nevertheless, scripture did not fall from heaven, but arose within the bosom of the community of faith, shaped by its usage in worship, preaching, and catechesis.<sup>25</sup>

Thus he concludes that "within the last generation the full hermeneutical significance of the Christian canon has become increasingly clear. The canon not only established the boundaries within which the Word of God was heard, but in addition it provided the context for its interpretation"<sup>26</sup> and thus the context within which revelation occurs and the Spirit works. This question of the reading context, and of the role, if any, of the Spirit in this area, is not one that Speech Act theory addresses, because of its exclusive focus on the speaker.

As a sideline, this question of the reading contexts in which revelation and inspiration occur, reflects also on the related hermeneutic implication of prevenient grace: the idea that the initiative for our response to God, must always come from God, because we cannot take the initiative ourselves. If it is the case that any response made by a believer is only possible because of prior (prevenient) divine initiative, does this imply passivity or activity on the part

---

<sup>23</sup> B S Childs, 'Speech-act theory and biblical interpretation', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:4 (2005) 375-392

<sup>24</sup> B S Childs, 'Speech-act theory and biblical interpretation', op cit p380

<sup>25</sup> Childs op cit p381

<sup>26</sup> Ibid p382

of the believer? Is this operation of grace in the believer, an activity of the believer, or simply of an outside agent? This, of course, is tied up with ideas of predestination and free will, but it is interesting to ask what the implications of this debate are on the activity of the Holy Spirit as anything other than an appendix or appendage to the Word?

D S Cunningham suggests that “revelation is not revelation unless it is revealed *to* someone; this, in turn, requires active *reception* on the part of the recipient. Revelation cannot bypass the human will, as though it were medicine injected with a syringe”<sup>27</sup>, and he goes on to note

But if the reception of revelation is an *active* endeavor, requiring considered judgments of the heart and mind on the part of the recipient, then it cannot be a private affair. It is less analogous to taking a prescription drug, and more analogous to some form of physical therapy ... Similarly, in the theological context, a person’s formation in and by the community of belief becomes an essential and critical aspect of the process of revelation and interpretation. One cannot be expected to “hear” the revelatory Word rightly, nor to “read the signs of the times”, unless one has already been formed by the Christian narratives and habituated into certain ecclesial practices, such as baptism, worship, and mutual care.<sup>28</sup>

This might imply that the question of prevenience is simply a misunderstanding of how we learn anything, theological, revelatory, or mundane: everything is learnt by relationships, and we learn to recognise God through these relationships: it is not innate, but God operates through creation. On a deeper level, one must also ask to what extent are we capable of doing anything, even existing, thinking, or understanding, without the grace of God, and thus at what point is it possible to draw a line between His grace, and our response?<sup>29</sup>

It is in any case noteworthy that several scholars have identified the place of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics as problematic in the work of others. Indeed, in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and*

---

<sup>27</sup> D S Cunningham, ‘*Interpretation. Toward a Rehabilitation of the Vestigia Tradition*’, in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p194.

<sup>28</sup> D S Cunningham op cit p194-195

<sup>29</sup> In the case of a child, it may be that the influence of their parents – genetic and social – can never be entirely eliminated, but that as we attain adulthood we become answerable (in Bakhtin’s phrase), for our own contributions. This metaphor may have an application here. Alternatively, as S L Stell suggests: “true human understanding of God is itself thoroughly the work of God, and therefore appropriately named revelation. Nevertheless, such understanding does not entail a suspension of our human capacities, but their fulfilment by the inclusion of human reality within the divine life of God’s covenantal creation, redemption, and sanctifying communion”: ‘Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and Tracy’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64:4 p698

*Hermeneutics Series 2*<sup>30</sup>, W Olhausen has responded to Thiselton's article 'Behind' and 'In Front Of' the Text<sup>31</sup> by suggesting that

the difficult task of developing a hermeneutic model that integrates an understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit still remains to be done within Thiselton's programme. While his chapter continues to affirm the Spirit's significance, it is not immediately clear why or in what way. In light of this, I conclude the response by drawing attention to the need for an integrated approach to the work of the Spirit,<sup>32</sup>

an observation which might perhaps have contributed to Thiselton's 2013 *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*<sup>33</sup>. In this work Thiselton begins by identifying seven aspects of the biblical testament to God's Spirit<sup>34</sup>, in a work which is primarily a dialogue with the Pentecostal and Renewal Movements.

Thiselton traces the ways in which the Holy Spirit has been received and described in Christian history, with a special interest in how to relate Pentecostal and 'Third Wave' Renewal understandings to other particularly Western and protestant Christian pneumatologies.<sup>35</sup> After his extensive and detailed survey of many theologians, he concludes by identifying seven fundamental themes<sup>36</sup> that he regards as "starting points" around which ecumenical agreement could be coalesced before further work might be undertaken, and then six issues on which further dialogue with Pentecostals

---

<sup>30</sup> *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001)

<sup>31</sup> Op cit pages 97-116, reprinted in *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: the collected works and new essays of Anthony Thiselton (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on Religion. Collected works)*, (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006) chapter 33 pages 607-624

<sup>32</sup> W Olhausen: 'A 'Polite' Response to Anthony Thiselton', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) p122

<sup>33</sup> London, SPCK, 2013

<sup>34</sup> These are His creative transcendence; His anointing of individuals for tasks in the community; His being an 'extension' of God, revealing and inspiring (including a distinction made by Orr between revelation as "the provision of truth about God" and "inspiration [which] lies in the use made of it" p14); His being discerned only by His effects; His being creative ; His giving life; and His being able to be shared from one to another.

<sup>35</sup> Interest in the Orthodox theologians jumps from the Cappadocians to Lossky, and in the West 'Catholic' thought leaps from Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross to John Henry Newman.

<sup>36</sup> These are that the Holy Spirit is at least a person (if not "suprapersonal" p470), and never an 'it'; that He is transcendent and 'other - "the beyond who is within" (p470); that the Spirit is part of a Trinitarian narrative in which all three 'persons' are inseparably involved; that the Spirit "is shared out as a common possession of the whole people" (p475) for the good of the whole; that the Spirit is Holy because He is a person of the Holy Trinity - all holiness relates to and flows from the Trinity who alone is the holy God; that He is discerned in His effects, but only with care - not everything is 'of the Spirit', and we must find a balance between tradition and personal revelation; and that the Holy Trinity alone should be worshipped and revered: *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*, (London, SPCK, 2013)



and the Renewal Movement is required. Finally, Thiselton identifies “five issues in hermeneutics and two in New Testament Exegesis”<sup>37</sup> that he offers up for further reflection by Pentecostals and the Renewal Movement, as areas in which, though he does not say this explicitly, he feels that their experience and theology needs refining.

The last of these, which he admits might on first sight seem a little “prosaic”<sup>38</sup>, is the question of the Holy Spirit and inspiration. He suggests that we should refer “inspiration and authority not directly to the Bible as such, but to God and to God the Holy Spirit through the Bible.” In this he echoes rather the Church of England’s own *Windsor Report*<sup>39</sup> which suggests that “the phrase ‘the authority of scripture’, if it is to be based on what scripture itself says, must be regarded as a shorthand, and a potentially misleading one at that, for the longer and more complex notion of ‘the authority of the triune God, exercised through scripture’.”<sup>40</sup>

Thiselton concludes that “the Holy Spirit persists with us through ordinary everyday situations” and is as present in the “ascending ministry” of prayer as in the “descending” one of blessing<sup>41</sup>. I entirely agree with this, and would merely note that it simply establishes again the sense in which the work of the Spirit is easier to point to when encountered in people and situations, than to describe in theory. I don’t think that Thiselton ever quite establishes in a consistent account, his theological-hermeneutical understanding of the role that the Spirit plays in revelation.

## 2. The Holy Spirit and revelation:

### 2b. The inadequacy of Kevin Vanhoozer’s account of the Spirit’s work

By way of underlining the difficulty, Thiselton himself has suggested that Vanhoozer’s work has ‘pneumatological deficiencies’<sup>42</sup>, and I think that this is perhaps an understatement, since Vanhoozer very clearly illustrates the assault on the understanding of the Holy Spirit that is required by the illocutionary elevation of Scripture as primary agent of revelation.

---

<sup>37</sup> *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*, (London, SPCK, 2013) p492

<sup>38</sup> Op cit p499

<sup>39</sup> *The Windsor Report 2004*, The Lambeth Commission on Communion, (London, The Anglican Communion Office, 2004). Available at <http://www.aco.org/windsor2004/downloads/index.cfm> on the Anglican Communion website, and free to download: site visited 21<sup>st</sup> February 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Windsor Report paragraph 54

<sup>41</sup> *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*, (London, SPCK, 2013) p500.

<sup>42</sup> He refers to hesitating over the “neat polarities, over-exclusive alternatives, and uniformly triadic patterns to be correlated with Trinitarian modes of action” in *Is There?*, see *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: the collected works and new essays of Anthony Thiselton (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on Religion. Collected works)*, (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006) p616

For example Vanhoozer asks

Is meaning “in” the text, or is it the product of the encounter between the text and the Spirit-led reader? More pointedly: Should the meaning of a text include the history of its effects? The oddness of the question surfaces when one rephrases and refines it: Does the meaning of a communicative act include its unintended effects? If “what it means” is only discerned in the light of Spirit-led tradition, how should we explain the response of the readers in Nehemiah 8, who no longer belonged to a living tradition, or the responses of the readers in Acts 2, whose reception inaugurated a new tradition? Furthermore, how can we distinguish Spirit-guided community interpretation and practice from other, more mundane, interpretive practices, imposed perhaps, by less holy spirits?<sup>43</sup>

As I have already argued at length, it makes no sense to isolate meaning from effects, nor is it simply that a list of effects equals meaning. Indeed, I do not accept the validity of the suggestion that there is a sort of ‘either-or’ situation present. Therefore, to seek to distinguish “Spirit-guided community interpretation and practice from other, more mundane, interpretive practices, imposed perhaps, by less holy spirits” is, sadly, not possible without hindsight. There is no guarantee in the living of the Christian life, only the hope of the presence of God<sup>44</sup>.

Identifying the work of the Spirit is notoriously difficult, and has always been so; perhaps the most we can hope for, is to remember

that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.<sup>45</sup>

As St Paul goes on to note, there is one pre-eminent gift, that enables us to live for one another, the “still more excellent way”<sup>46</sup> of love, and “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

---

<sup>43</sup> *Is There?* p412.

<sup>44</sup> It is worth recalling that it was not given to everyone who saw Jesus of Nazareth to recognise Him, indeed the religious authorities of the day did not. Not everyone who is baptised, or comes to a communion service, or reads the Bible, recognises God there either. It is only possible for us to recognise God if we learn to in love from our parents, our teachers, our families and friends, and from the Church. The realization of God is given to us by those who teach us, and this means that it is given to us by the Holy Spirit Himself, entering into and using mortal and imperfect things, using all those around us. The Holy Spirit always acts in co-operation with mortal things, transforming them with their permission, and we cannot say of something ‘this is Revelation’ unless we have been made able to recognise it. God’s Real Presence in the things He sanctifies may be absolute, but someone has to come to recognise it and show it to other people, before we are able to see it ourselves.

<sup>45</sup> I Corinthians 12:3-7. As Thiselton notes – it might be better to read verse 3 as “May Jesus curse”.

<sup>46</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1

gentleness, self-control"<sup>47</sup>. If we seek for an assurance, this may be the best we can get.

I would suggest that there are a variety of ways in which the Church as a whole and her individual members are helped, through the Spirit, to remain faithful to her/their calling: these are all interrelated and have, I think, no particular priority<sup>48</sup>. They are; Holy Scripture; the Creeds; the Sacraments (Mysteries); the Ordained Ministry; and Prayer and Thought<sup>49</sup>. The same list applies to us as individuals, as to the Church as a whole body. All of them are gifts shared within and for the Community, who has in turn created and adapted them and been changed by them in return.

However, I think that the closest we can come to a guarantee of the sort that Vanhoozer here desires, is to recognise that "God makes himself known to the believer not by telling us new information about himself, and not even or not only by revealing a law, but by making us able to enter into a relationship with him in which we have confidence and intimacy – like the intimate relationship a child has to a parent"<sup>50</sup>. It is through living with God that we learn about and from Him, just as the most profound lessons we learn from our parents are those we learn simply from the manner of their being with us. It is also worth bearing in mind Paul Valliere's observation about fourth century Christian Conciliarism and the search for 'orthodoxy':

It was the conciliar process, a process belonging to no one in particular but to the catholic network as such, which produced a lasting consensus. The shouting and shoving, the dead ends and switchbacks, the factions, rivalries and animosities – these were part of the story, and not a peripheral part... But fourth-century Conciliarism was a Christian story, which is to say a divine-human story. Grandeur collaborated with misery in it.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Galatians 5:22-23

<sup>48</sup> It should be noted that all of these are of course central in worship, through which as S K Wood observes we acquire "kinesthetic knowledge" of God in the liturgy by communal participation. We 'do', and we acquire knowledge of not about God. This is "an expansion of relationship, a broadening of horizon, a creation of something new within us": S K Wood, 'The Liturgy. Participatory Knowledge of God in the Liturgy', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p96.

<sup>49</sup> Consistent and systematic thought is usually called theology, and may issue in doctrine. "Doctrine does not fall from the sky: it develops. ... Doctrine is a theoretical construct, but consensus is a communal achievement": P Valliere, *Conciliarism: a History of Decision-making in the Church*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012): p81.

<sup>50</sup> Archbishop Rowan Williams, 'How does God reveal himself? A Christian Perspective', *Lecture given by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the World Islamic Call Society Campus, Tripoli, Libya on Thursday 29 January 2009*, available at <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/833/how-does-god-reveal-himself-a-christian-perspective>.

<sup>51</sup> P Valliere, *Conciliarism: a History of Decision-making in the Church*, op cit p83. Perhaps the Holy Spirit can even work through politics!

With regard to the specific instances of textual illocution which Vanhoozer cites, it is worth observing that in both cases the communities concerned had already gathered together, in Nehemiah 8 to hear the Law which Ezra was to read, and in Acts 2 for worship or fellowship, and that in both cases there would seem thus to be a tradition of sorts already established. Vanhoozer is not clear on whether a living tradition is identical with a Spirit-led one, nor on how one might identify a dead tradition. However, it seems likely that the readers in Nehemiah 8 did indeed belong to a tradition, merely one that needed re-shaping. A dead tradition could perhaps be one that was no longer practised, or more controversially, one that occurs without true life: though here, the pressing question is, who defines whether life is present, and on what basis?<sup>52</sup>

Indeed, leaving aside the question of the historical veracity of the events recounted<sup>53</sup>, Nehemiah 8 also seems likely to have occurred, if historical, after Ezra's arrival and reforms<sup>54</sup>, while the 'new tradition' inaugurated in Acts 2 had arguably already been inaugurated<sup>55</sup> and in any case was quite clearly a continuation to some degree of the previous Jewish tradition; it was after all 'The Messiah' who had come. Neither of these events is thus the "freeze-frame" moment of a-traditional response Vanhoozer suggests. In both cases, it is simply a question of the development of tradition that, Vanhoozer has already recognised, occurs in respect of meaning.

Vanhoozer also suggests that

illocutionary efficacy is a matter of meaning. The effect in question concerns the reader's recognition of the author's illocutionary intent. Another word for this is simply "understanding" (e.g., a metaphor is recognised as a metaphor, a warning as a warning, etc.).... The "communicative presumption" – namely, that illocutionary intent is usually recognizable – is something shared by all texts, not only the Bible. The suggestion that either the church *magisterium* or the Spirit's illumination is a prerequisite for understanding would call this presumption into question. On the level of meaning, then, the Spirit renders the Word efficacious by impressing on us the full force of a communicative action: its illocution. In so doing, the Spirit does not alter the literal meaning but brings it home to the reader.<sup>56</sup>

Vanhoozer here quite explicitly confuses the contextual conventions that make acts understandable as acts, with the illocutionary efficacy of the

---

<sup>52</sup> Some Christians might, for example, argue that Judaism is a dead tradition now that the Messiah has come, but this is not an argument that would go unopposed, either by other Christians or of course by Jews. Moreover, the prophet Ezekiel's experience with the dry bones might suggest that no tradition can ever be said to be dead beyond recall.

<sup>53</sup> And the historicity of the Ezra-Nehemiah-Esdras corpus is complex

<sup>54</sup> D L Smith-Christopher, '15. Ezra-Nehemiah', in J Barton and J Muddiman (eds.), *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001) p308ff.

<sup>55</sup> At the Crucifixion/Resurrection, the Last Supper, the Road to Emmaus, the Ascension, take your pick.

<sup>56</sup> *Is There?* p427

‘communicative presumption’. His concept of illocutions is also undermined by the word “usually”, since if illocutionary intent is not recognizable due to something other than wilfulness, this misunderstanding must have an effect on the existence of illocutions seen as drawing their force from recognised intention. If even sometimes an honest reader can fail to recognise illocutionary intent, then this must mean that illocutions are not guaranteed, but require the right circumstances to be effective (the right context).

Aside from these flaws in the idea of the illocution already addressed elsewhere, it is noticeable that the Spirit here becomes a kind of second-order operative. As Vanhoozer notes: “the Spirit’s agency consists, then, in bringing the illocutionary point home to the reader and in achieving the corresponding perlocutionary effect – belief, obedience, praise, and so on. The Word is the indispensable instrument of the Spirit’s persuasive (perlocutionary) power”<sup>57</sup>. He elaborates: “the Spirit, then, is a witness to what is other than himself – to the Logos, to meaning *accomplished* – and enables readers to respond to this Word so that it can achieve its intended effect: significance, meaning *applied*. It follows that the Spirit’s work is not to supplement the author’s intention, but rather to sustain and to fulfil it”<sup>58</sup>.

In all of this, the Spirit of necessity does nothing new. There is no ‘guiding into truth’<sup>59</sup> here. The Spirit does not help us understand the meaning of the Bible, but rather provides a kind of additional, secondary impetus towards a response. The initial relationship is between reader and Word<sup>60</sup>, to which the Spirit adds merely the reader’s desire to respond: the Spirit is relegated to the level of significance alone. The glory and authority belong to the Father and the Word: the Spirit is relegated to the level of perlocutionary effects: to the secondary arena of response, not the primary arena where the illocutionary Word is ‘uptaken’.

The content of revelation is a matter solely of the Word revealing Himself in Scripture: the Spirit’s only involvement in this revelation is to persuade us of its reality: the revelation *per se* does not require His involvement. This is another example of an all-too-easy trend: the overshadowing and overlooking of the Spirit, and His unconscious ‘relegation’ within the Trinity: ‘binitarianism’. In this scheme, the Spirit doesn’t have any creative or innovative role, but is just reactive – to do with the effect, not content, of revelation<sup>61</sup>.

---

<sup>57</sup> *Is There?* p428

<sup>58</sup> *Is There?* pp429

<sup>59</sup> John 16:3

<sup>60</sup> Who has become dangerously dis-incarnated, or rather ‘in-logated’: indeed, it is precisely the case that the Word became flesh, not text, and the Word is of course the Second person of the Trinity: the Son, not Scripture.

<sup>61</sup> Effect here is nothing to do with content, as the illocutionary scheme demands. It is interesting that my concern is almost the opposite of that voiced by B D Ingrassia, who notes of Vanhoozer’s scheme “I am troubled by his assertion that the understanding of any

By contrast, an understanding of revelation as an unfolding dialogue, a co-operative endeavour, allows us to truly understand the role, dignity, power and responsibility of the Spirit in these 'post-Messianic' times. The Triune God acts within Creation and with created things primarily as the Holy Spirit<sup>62</sup>. As the Spirit, God breathed life into everything<sup>63</sup>, and as the Spirit, God guides and moulds His creation, co-operating with Creation to bring it to fullness. The Spirit is Love, and the goal of this love is to restore all things to perfection in God.

Christians are vessels of the Spirit because they are members of the Church, the child of the Spirit, and are given life and breath by Him. The Spirit inspires His Church in her Worship, in her praying<sup>64</sup>, in her theologians and people, and in the Sacraments and Scriptures that He co-operates with us in creating and re-creating within the Spirit-filled community that is the Church<sup>65</sup>. In the words of the World Council of Churches:

A variety of factors are woven into that fullness [which is "the fullness of the experience of the interpreting community"], and these compose the hermeneutical locus within which Scripture is interpreted. These factors include oral tradition, narratives, memories and liturgies, as well as the life, teachings, and ethical decisions of the believing community. Thus, many dimensions of the life of the community are part of the context for interpreting the scriptural texts. Scripture emerges from episodes of life, a calendar of feasts, a scheme of history, and the witnessing account of the living people of God. In addition, Scripture becomes alive once again as it engages the life, feasts, history, and witness of faith communities today. From this perspective, the praxis of the Christian communities and people in different particular cultural and social contexts is itself a reading and an interpretation of the scriptural texts and not simply a position from which to approach the texts.<sup>66</sup>

---

communicative action is possible only with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Surely non-Christians understand communicative actions all the time, without the aid of the Holy Spirit?" B D Ingrassia and T E Pickett, 'Reviving the Power of Biblical language: The Bible, Literature and Literary Language', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) p245.

<sup>62</sup> Although, of course, no person of the Trinity can ever be truly said to act alone: the Trinity is always a Unity.

<sup>63</sup> Genesis 2:7 "Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

<sup>64</sup> "The Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" – Romans 8:26.

<sup>65</sup> And part of our vocation is to learn to tell a new story about ourselves, which accepts the reality of sin, repentance and forgiveness, admits our interdependence as members of one another in Him, and recognises our sharing in the mission of God, in His work to restore the Kingdom and make all things new and perfect in Him. This new story of our humanity gives us and all creation a new identity and meaning, and a hope for the future.

<sup>66</sup> WCC Report "A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical reflection on Hermeneutics" paragraph 23.

Chapter Eight: Cooperative revelation and the work of the Holy Spirit

### 3. The Holy Spirit and revelation: a cooperative 'sacramental' account

Therefore, my final conclusion, to which the work of this thesis has lead, is that we should understand that revelation occurs in the same way as does meaning, that is, both are the products of understanding, which is the product of and creator of co-operative relationships. Not only is this logically necessary if my assertions about the cooperative nature of meaning are correct, but it is also more theologically consistent. This is the case because the model for all Christian revelation is provided in God's incarnation in which, according to the modern English language translation of the Nicene Creed, the Word "was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary", a description intended to stress the willing co-operation between God and creation in creating a meaningful revelation.

Revelation, as perfected and typified in the incarnation, is not a process by which God sends Himself unilaterally, unmediated by that which He has made. Rather, personified primarily in the Holy Spirit, He at every stage works within and co-operates with His creation, exposing Himself to the risks inherent in that act of submission or self-emptying<sup>67</sup>. Revelation always contains the possibility of misunderstanding and miscommunication, both a mistake of information, and a misconception of personality and identity, as does any human act. The Word, indeed, does not remain inviolate or abstracted, (a mere 'grammatical possibility'), but becomes flesh (an 'actualized', 'particular' meaningful expression – an utterance!), inheriting all the vulnerabilities and abuses to which our flesh is heir. It is in flesh that God is primarily revealed, a flesh which required human cooperation to mould and nurture.

Christians should, indeed, understand even God's act of creation itself as self-giving, because as a consequence of it God elects to be potentially misunderstood. In the Divine act of creating that which was 'not-God', and therefore not perfect, just as in the act of choosing for Himself a people, there was and is always the risk of misunderstanding. This risk is minimized<sup>68</sup> not by a Divine authorial fiat but by our attentiveness, listening to and living in the Holy Spirit, sent to us as Counsellor and Guide<sup>69</sup>.

---

<sup>67</sup> "In the Father the apophatism (the *kenosis* or emptying) of Being is real and total. This is what elsewhere I have called 'the Cross in the Trinity' i.e. the integral immolation of God, of which the Cross of Christ and his immolation are only the images and revelations": R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) p46. See also R Williams, 'Word and Spirit', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) p61

<sup>68</sup> but not eliminated

<sup>69</sup> As S L Stell puts it: religious understanding is "constituted by the intrinsic interplay of tradition, experience, and their creative conjunction through human insight/imagination/inspiration. This alternative structure for understanding is thus not a method imposed upon one's interpretive endeavours, but is itself determined by the internal perichoretic relationships which compose tradition, experience, and the creative imagination:" S L Stell,

God's revelation is a co-operative endeavour, and as His creatures we create it with the Word, in the power of the Holy Spirit who animates and guides us. As Panikkar puts it:

God and man are, so to speak, in close constitutive collaboration for the building-up of reality, the unfolding of history and the continuation of creation. It is not a case of man toiling here below and God surveying him from on high, with a view to giving reward or inflicting punishment. There is a movement, a dynamism, a growth in what Christians call the mystical Body of Christ ... God, man and the world are engaged in a unique adventure and this engagement constitutes true reality.<sup>70</sup>

Every way in which God reveals Himself to us, is through the Holy Spirit entering into and using mortal and imperfect things<sup>71</sup>. If the Incarnation was God becoming flesh, bone and sinew "from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary", then the Church, Christ's Body present here and now, is flesh, bone and sinew slowly being changed into the perfect image of His body by our participation in Christ through our baptism into His life in the Spirit<sup>72</sup>.

The Sacraments are God present, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayer of His people, in bread and wine or other created things<sup>73</sup>. And the Bible is God present, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in human words and languages. Revelation occurs when Scripture is read within the

---

'Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and Tracy', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64:4, p697.

<sup>70</sup> R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, op cit p75.

<sup>71</sup> As Stell puts it, using his own, slightly I think over-egged, Trinitarian terms, "Christian experience is the human experience of the divine reality pointed to in tradition, structured according to God's work in creation, and enabled by God's presence in the Holy Spirit; Christian tradition is the historical recollection (and enabling) of the human experience of God's presence in Jesus Christ and the living tradition of the Risen Lord who continues to be experienced through his present Spirit; and creative inspiration is the human ability gifted by the gracious God who enables human experience and shapes human tradition specifically for the purpose of being present with humanity through the Holy Spirit" S L Stell, 'Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and Tracy', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64:4, p698.

<sup>72</sup> "The Spirit bears witness, and the church is the witness the Spirit bears ... It is within this context that we must locate the biblical texts if we are to understand them as "inspired": D S Yeago, 'The Bible. The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) p63

<sup>73</sup> R Williams, 'Word and Spirit', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) p63. See also B R Brinkman: "in sacramental realities man is drawing upon himself and his most intimate human experiences, and ... in the long run it is in the experience of himself, as an experience of himself and of his world, that man allows the sacramental hinge of salvation to operate": 'On Sacramental Man: IV The Way of Interiorization', *Heythrop Journal* 14:3 (1973) p282



worshipping, believing community that is the Body of Christ, the Church<sup>74</sup>. In the words of Gerard Loughlin "in the sense that the Church's reading of Scripture is part of God's whole work, we can say that revelation has not come to an end with the last apostle, only the writing of which it is a reading."<sup>75</sup>

Our realization and cooperation is a necessary part of the process of revelation – of God's revealing activity. Revelation is therefore a doctrine not so much about how God speaks, as how we hear Him. It relates to Ecclesiology and to Biblical scholarship (which examine our culture of listening), and to Pneumatology (how God helps us read and hear): to the actions we hear now, and our ability to hear them. Of course, as a part of this, and in the same way as our cultures teach us and are changed by us, God forms His own audience by His past action of creating a culture of listening, and His present action of maintaining it<sup>76</sup>.

It is in respect of God's making of a culture that the role of the Sacraments comes to the fore. They are not merely the primary way in which the Holy Spirit creates this necessary culture of listening, but they are of course another example of the way in which God habitually reveals Himself: through the things of creation. The sacraments, however one might define them, are at least instances in which God is revealed through human prayer and human activity or making.

The sacraments require bread, wine, and oil, and human actions and prayers, in order to become vessels of revelation, and of course, they need to be recognized as sacraments for God to be revealed in them. A marriage is only a sacrament in a believing context: for a company of atheists, the sacrament that a Christian might recognize is simply not there. Likewise Melchizedek and the gift of manna become significantly revelatory only in the context of the Christian Eucharist. Moreover, the revelation of God that occurs sacramentally through His presence in bread and wine can only happen not merely through recognition<sup>77</sup> but if we thresh and mill and bake the bread

---

<sup>74</sup> As Brevard Childs would seem to suggest: this is certainly the focus of the work of James A Sanders, who argues that the establishment of the Canon is an instance of the co-creation of Revelation: see for example *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text: Canon as Paradigm* (Eugene OR, Wipf and Stock, 1987) p4: the "Holy Spirit should be viewed not only as working with the individual contributors to the Bible, but also as working all along the path of its formation".

<sup>75</sup> G Loughlin: *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology*, (Cambridge University Press 1996) p119 footnote 42.

<sup>76</sup> B D Marshall argues that the truth of gospel is witnessed by the Spirit making the community a 'habitable' repository of its own truth-claims: B D Marshall; 'The Epistemic Role of the Spirit', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 316-321

<sup>77</sup> "The Church confesses Christ's real, living and active presence in the eucharist. While Christ's real presence in the eucharist does not depend on the faith of the individual, all agree that to discern the body and blood of Christ, faith is required" (World Council of Churches Lima Document: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Eucharist paragraph 13).

and press and ferment the wine, so that our cooperation extends, as in the case of Mary's womb, a long way into the process of revelation.

As Robert Jenson suggests, while discussing Barth,

if the Pentecostal creation of a structured continuing community were identified as the "objectivity" of the gospel's truth *pro nobis*, then this community itself, in its structured temporal and spatial extension, would be seen as the *Bedingung der Möglichkeit* (condition of the very possibility) of faith. Or again, if the Community between the Father and the Son were himself an *agent* of their love, immanently and economically, then the church, as the community inspired by this Agent, would be the active *mediatrix* of faith.<sup>78</sup>

The realisation of the depth of the integration between revelation on the one hand, and the Spirit-guided or filled Church on the other, lies behind many of the contributions to *Knowing the Triune God*<sup>79</sup>, a work produced from a self-described "catholic and evangelical" theological background. As the editors claim in the introduction, "the Christian knowledge of God, though it is communicable and therefore 'saleable' knowledge, cannot be grasped or shared in abstraction from the web of concrete practices from which it arises and in which it lives."<sup>80</sup> Thus they suggest that their

mode or style of theological reflection must begin *both* from God's always-precedent action and grace ... *and* from the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, which is likewise also always prior to the thinking and pondering of the individual theologian. ... And it must begin from these two as, in some proper sense, *one single starting point*: in the Spirit, beginning with God's action and beginning with the Church and its practices are one beginning, in a unity in which the divine and the human are neither divided nor confused. ... The assumption in these essays is that the action of the Spirit has already united divine and human, inner and outer, public and private, soul and body, in the communion of the Church and in the distinctive discourse, institutions, and practices that make up its life. This precedent action of the Spirit is discerned and followed, but not constructed or constituted, by theology.<sup>81</sup>

One of the lessons of any hermeneutical appreciation of the contextual nature of understanding and thus of meaning is that there can be no avoiding the importance of the Church, where 'Church' denotes the context of 'family of believers' and 'household of God' with an inherited Tradition, rather than any particular, hierarchical or structural sense of specific denominational

---

<sup>78</sup> R Jenson, 'You wonder Where the Spirit went', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) p16. He notes in footnote 16 attached to the word 'agent' that "I do not yet know how to work out this proposition conceptually" p18.

<sup>79</sup> J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001)

<sup>80</sup> J J Buckley and D S Yeago, 'Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p9.

<sup>81</sup> J J Buckley and D S Yeago, 'Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p17-18.

traditions, important though they may be<sup>82</sup>. The Church is where we learn of God, and thus of what it is to be human, and we pass her on as we received her<sup>83</sup>.

Indeed, I would suggest that hermeneutics is a secular word that covers the same ground as does a theology of the Holy Spirit, so that rather as we imagine that a doctrine of atonement concerns the Son, so a philosophical hermeneutics in fact concerns inevitably the action of the Spirit<sup>84</sup>, since it must concern questions of communication, understanding, society and selfhood which overlap significantly with their theological *alter egos* revelation, wisdom, the Church, and vocation/theosis.

I should note at this point that Gadamer finds the doctrine of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity and the relationship between the divine and human natures of Christ helpful as a sign of the relationship between the 'word' and the 'thing': in both cases there is a relationship in which neither vanishes in the other, but they are inextricable<sup>85</sup>.

---

<sup>82</sup> It is because I prefer to think of 'the Church' as a body and as a family filled with the Spirit, rather than in terms of particular structures or traditions, that I prefer to speak of her in personal rather than impersonal terms: 'her', rather than 'it', where the Church is by theological tradition feminine (the bride of Christ) rather than masculine. One of the questions posed by a strongly pneumatological sense of the Church, though, is the question of how her divisions relate to the work of the Spirit. Reinhard Hütter's description of Luther's "*pneumatological ecclesiology*" helps here: he suggests that Luther tells us "that the church is to be understood as a web of core practices which at the same time mark and constitute the church. These practices are the Spirit's works through which the Holy Spirit enacts his sanctifying mission in the triune economy of salvation." He lists these core practices on pages 34-35 of his '*The Church. The Knowledge of the Triune God: Practices, Doctrine, Theology*', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit. (The quote is from p35).

<sup>83</sup> In a suggestive phrase, Hütter writes that "the church is the end of the subject": R Hütter, '*The Church. The Knowledge of the Triune God: Practices, Doctrine, Theology*', op cit p26. I like this phrase, though don't agree with his direction of travel exactly: I think he starts from the individual and relates them to the Church, whereas in a 'Volosinovian' sense, I suspect that 'the Church', and possibly also churches, come first.

<sup>84</sup> One might speculate that if the Word is implicated in human language and thought as *logos* and reason, then perhaps in the same way the Spirit is implicated in that which makes it possible to talk: in shared consciousness and context. In the same way perhaps rationality is a question of perceived relations that can be debated, and of knowledge, and is of the Word, while creativity, which leads us into the unknown and unpredictable, is of the Spirit? Panikkar puts it differently, and more profoundly: the Trinity is "*Epi pántōn* – over all, *super omnes*, the Source of Being, which is not Being, since, if so, it would be Being and not its source: the ultimate *I*. *Dia pántōn* – through all, *per omnia*, the Son, Being and the Christ, he through whom and for whom everything was made, beings being participants in Being: the *Thou* – still scattered in the many *thous* of the universe. *En pásin* – within all, *in omnibus*, the Spirit, divine immanence and, in the dynamism of pure act, the end (the return) of Being": *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* op cit p68-69.

<sup>85</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p434ff. See for example p438: "this is more than a mere metaphor, for the human relationship between thought and speech corresponds, despite its imperfections, to the divine relationship of the Trinity. The inner mental word is just as consubstantial with thought as is God the Son with God the Father."

I entirely agree that “the subject matter that is thought (the species) and the word belong as closely together as is possible. Their unity is so close that the word does not occupy a second place in the mind beside the ‘species’; rather, the word is that in which knowledge is consummated – i.e., that in which the species is fully thought”, and thus that “the proclamation of salvation, the content of the Christian gospel, is itself an event that takes place in sacrament and preaching, and yet it expresses only what took place in Christ’s redemptive act”. This certainly, I agree, implies that for both word and Word their meaning “cannot be detached from the event of proclamation. *Quite the contrary, being an event is a characteristic belonging to the meaning itself*”<sup>86</sup>.

However, there is no mention anywhere here of the third person of the Trinity. While it may be true that there is a link between on the one hand words and thought, and on the other the Word and the Father, as Panikkar for example suggests in describing the Son as that which is revealed<sup>87</sup>, the neglect of the Spirit does seem pressing. I would certainly argue that in the case of both words and the Word – that are both undoubtedly events in which meaning is made – there is nonetheless a here unreflected-upon, but crucial, involvement of ‘those who recognise’ and ‘He who makes pregnant with possibility’. Theologically, as I suggested a moment ago, these latter two entities, the community and the Counsellor, may be themselves suggestively linked in both the sacred and secular contexts.

It would certainly seem possible that the first four concepts of communication, understanding, society and selfhood previously mentioned involve the action of the Spirit just as the last four (revelation, wisdom, the Church, and vocation/theosis) do, but undeniably all of these latter four concepts are traditionally and inextricably linked to the Spirit’s work: this may have implications for the relationship between a general and a special Biblical hermeneutics discussed in the next section. For the moment, however, I can at least assert that since revelation involves understanding meaning, and communication, it is certainly a work of the Spirit with and through the Church<sup>88</sup>. Thus it is impossible to separate a community’s experience of the

---

<sup>86</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p444

<sup>87</sup> “Nothing can be said of [‘if’ is printed] the Father ‘in himself’, of the ‘self’ of the Father. Certainly he is the Father of the Son and Jesus addresses him as Father, but even ‘Father’ is not his proper name, though he has no other. In begetting the Son he gives up everything, even, if we may dare to say so, the possibility of being expressed in a name that would speak of him and him alone, outside any reference to the generation of the Son” (p46) and “any attempt to *speak* about the Father involves almost a contradiction in terms, for every word about the Father can only refer to the one of whom the Father is Father, that is, to the Word, to the Son. It is necessary to be silent”: p47: from R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973)

<sup>88</sup> See also Stephen Fowl ‘How the Spirit Reads and How to Read the Spirit’, in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* op cit p304: “the Spirit’s activity is no more self-interpreting than a passage of Scripture is. Understanding and interpreting the Spirit’s movement is a matter of communal debate and discernment over time. This debate and discernment is itself often shaped both by prior interpretations of scripture and by

Spirit and her interpretation of the scriptures, just as word and thought are inseparable.

This imagining of the role of the Spirit in a sacramental sense, and of the 'sacramental' nature of hermeneutics, properly understood, links to the idea of the artefact. The cultural processes by which humanity creates things of cultural significance that are more than purely functional tools, and thereby creates and develops a conception of the meaning of creation, and human life, (including the creation of narratives) are themselves a constituent part of God's revelation, and are works of the Holy Spirit. This theme is outlined both in the work of Cornelius Ernst:

Just as St Thomas, say, ordered the whole indefinite range of being by referring to *substances*, independently existing entities, we in our turn need to locate the whole indefinite range of *meaning* by referring to some privileged locus and original instance. The proposed instance here runs as follows: meaning is that praxis, that process and activity, by which the world to which man belongs becomes the world which belongs to man. We may particularize this instance still further by seeing meaning as a kind of game. We transform the world to which we belong by taking it up into the world of the games we play. Meaning, that is to say, is historical; it assumes a world prior to man into a world of human communication, by work, play, dance, travel, love, conversation, reflection - the totality of human life and death, in the continuity of a humanity which inwardly transforms the biological into the historical order. The possibilities of meaning are indefinite, which is not to say that they are infinite, but only that they have no ascertainable bound, each particular realized possibility being of course finite (compare 'being')<sup>89</sup>

and also that of the poet and theologian David Jones, with his idea of *homo faber*: man the maker<sup>90</sup>.

The emphasis on humanity as being essentially meaning-creating is implicit also in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, when he depicts "the linguistic constitution" of humanity's world as allowing us to be freed from merely

---

traditions of belief and practice." See also: "Scripture functions as a quasi-sacramental instrument of the Holy Spirit, through which the Spirit makes known the mystery of Christ in order to form the church as a sign of his messianic dominion": D S Yeago, 'The Bible. The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p51.

<sup>89</sup> *The Theology of Grace*, Theology Today Series Number 17 (Notre Dame Indiana, Fides Publishers 1974), p 68, compare also C Ernst, *Multiple Echo: Explorations in Theology* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd 1979) p55. See also S Fish: "the most remarkable of [man's] ... abilities [is] the ability to give the world meaning rather than to extract a meaning that is already there" S Fish, 'What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973) p134. See also M Holquist "the body answers the world by authoring it ... authorship is a means for shaping meaning in a long and complex chain of interactions", 'Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Trans-Linguistics', *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 317.

<sup>90</sup> See for example the essays 'Art and Sacrament' and 'The Utile' in D Jones, *Epoch and Artist* (London, Faber and Faber, 1959), p147 footnote 2, and p184.

existing in an “environment”<sup>91</sup>. ‘Environment’ here has a similar meaning for Gadamer as does the word ‘event’ for me, when it is compared with an ‘act’<sup>92</sup>: the distinction is that the ‘world’ of humanity is linguistic and meaningful, whereas an ‘environment’, like an ‘event’, in this sense is simply stimuli<sup>93</sup>.

This is also the reason why the apparent dichotomy between Natural Law and revelation as means of discovering or knowing God, is non-existent. It has for a long time been clear that before one can say ‘this instance of order or beauty or selflessness is a way in which we can learn about God indirectly’, one must have an idea that God is involved in, or properly represented by, concepts such as order, beauty, or love. Otherwise, one could equally well claim to discern a Creator in works of cruelty, despair or violence<sup>94</sup>.

However, we are only able to understand concepts such as order, beauty and love, through our own created and encultured understandings and personalities, and in the world around us, itself a doubly created artefact; created as matter, and by us created as meaningful. Moreover, all revelation, as I have argued, is to a degree sacramental: it all occurs within nature, rather than externally, and it all requires creative recognition. Thus both Natural Law and revelation are as categories inseparable<sup>95</sup>. Indeed, part of our cultural context is the narratives that we are a part of, and that we reshape in our own lives as they shape us and our expectations: we understand the meaning of utterances and actions, within the larger narratives of selfhood and culture that we inherit and shape, in a way that combines our own creativity and, perhaps, divine intervention in our story. As Gadamer and Bakhtin suggest, what makes ‘nature’ itself a meaningful concept, are the stories we learn and retell of which we and nature are a part: stories of order or magic, of purpose or chance, of redemption or entropic decay.<sup>96</sup>

The link between revelation and human imagination and artistic endeavour identified by Ernst and Jones is further strengthened if art is understood to be,

---

<sup>91</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit p460

<sup>92</sup> See chapter five of this thesis

<sup>93</sup> Gadamer goes on to note that “language has its true being only in dialogue, in *coming to an understanding*. This is not to be understood as if that were the purpose of language. Coming to an understanding is not a mere action, a purposeful activity, a setting up of signs through which I transmit my will to others. Coming to an understanding as such, rather, ... is a life process in which a community of life is lived out. [And] ... human language must be thought of as a special and unique life process since, in linguistic terms, ‘world’ is disclosed”: p462

<sup>94</sup> See for example the Monty Python parody of the hymn ‘All things bright and beautiful’, with lines such as “All things sick and cancerous, All evil great and small, All things foul and dangerous, The Lord God made them all.”

<sup>95</sup> This is the argument of D S Cunningham also: “There can be no purely natural knowledge of God, for there is no pure nature; ... Nature is always graced, always *being* graced, by God. So any knowledge of God that we can glean from the world is also graced, and continues to be graced, by God:” ‘*Interpretation. Toward a Rehabilitation of the Vestigia Tradition*’, in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p182.

<sup>96</sup> These are not necessarily oppositional concepts

in part, the genre of human activities that consist in listening to indeterminate possibility<sup>97</sup>. In this case, there is a link between human creativity in Art, which is a dialogue where the meaning is not finite, and the Divine revelation (in Creative, generative actions), whose meaning Christians are living and uncovering. Both are allied, in comparison to other genres of communication, such as Public Notices or Manuals, where there is far less an expectation of permanent potential to be uncovered or explored but never exhausted.

It is suggestive to recall that in his first definition of 'utterance acts', discussed in some detail in chapter four of this thesis, Austin himself uses a phrase that is taken from the Book of Common Prayer catechism definition of a sacrament. As I noted in chapter one of this thesis, the Christian tradition has engaged in long debate over whether or not Sacraments are valid or effective "by virtue of the 'work' having been done"<sup>98</sup>, or by virtue of the worthiness of the minister or congregation. The suggestion that sacraments are valid if the work is done properly is directly analogous to the idea that a Speech Act is effective if the "accepted conventional procedure" is adopted, while the suggestion that sacraments depend on the Minister or congregation, is directly analogous to the idea that Speech Acts depend on the interior intention of the speaker.

My own definition, both for sacraments and 'speech acts', is that they are effective 'by virtue of the 'work' having been recognized as having been done'. In both cases – the existence of the sacrament and the meaning of a phrase – there is the necessity that there should be a 'collective' recognition, which does not depend solely on the (apparent) agent: both are part of a continuing dialogue, and ultimately both involve the co-operation of Divine and human creativity<sup>99</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusion of the thesis

The subject of this thesis has been one specific hermeneutic approach to the Bible, and the linguistic theory that underpinned it. One possible effect of this thesis, therefore, might be to discourage continuing use of Speech Act theory as a literary hermeneutic and, indeed, as a theory of language. This is

---

<sup>97</sup> As Gadamer and Ricoeur have argued, for example.

<sup>98</sup> A Loades, 'Sacraments', in A Hastings, A Mason and H Pyper (eds.) *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000) p634-637, quote taken from first column on p636 - where the 'work' is the proper form of the sacrament – the correct words or rituals.

<sup>99</sup> I would also observe that this has implications not merely for Biblical hermeneutics, but also for our understanding of authority: Jesus taught, and "the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes" (Matthew 7:28-29), and the difference in part lay in the fact of His being outside authoritative structures, but nonetheless being recognized by the crowd as having authority: it is the recognition by the governed of the rightful nature of authority that distinguishes it from the exercise of mere power.

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

certainly one of its aims! However, this thesis also has wider aims. The work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Valentin Volosinov has been used to demonstrate that the Christian concept of revelation does not depend on any kind of authorial guarantee, or on the sender view of meaning, but that it can be maintained using a conversational concept of meaning.

Indeed, this thesis has argued that a view of meaning and of revelation as collaborative undertakings is more consistent, theologically, with the idea of a God who reveals Himself sacramentally, and with a God who is three persons, rather than merely two. A view of meaning as created in conversation gives far more room for an appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit within the Divine life.

This thesis began more as a 'general' hermeneutic than a 'special' one. This was despite the fact that although the hermeneuts who have adopted Speech Act theory have done so with a special hermeneutics of the Bible in view, they have been prepared, or even keen, to expand their conclusions outwards to defend not merely divine revelation, but also the authority of the author more generally. Moreover, I have every sympathy with those<sup>100</sup> who object to a world-defining narrative being uneasily shoe-horned into existing 'secular' categories, and thus with the opposite move from 'general' to 'special Biblical'<sup>101</sup>. I am also unhappy with the kind of 'ghetto-isation' which insists that a special Christian hermeneutics must remain solely 'special'; inviolate and uncorrupted. I believe – as all Christians must – in the incarnation. If we believe in that narrative, it has implications for everything<sup>102</sup>.

Nonetheless, I had no particular theological suppositions in view at the start of this argument which, in its inception was simply an examination of the flaws in a theory of language, and in its applicability as a textual hermeneutic. Looking back now, it seems to me that I followed threads, and have come to a conclusion that these 'general' observations are also inevitably 'special'.

In other words, I suggest that the only general hermeneutical theory that makes sense, is to investigate and consider all the different special

<sup>100</sup> Such as Kevin Vanhoozer in *Remythologizing Theology*, and Hans Frei more generally  
<sup>101</sup> For example B D Ingrassia, who objects that "the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Biblical writers is present with us, guiding us in our interpretation of Scripture. This is an astounding claim, whose power should not be diminished by being applied to the reading of literature": B D Ingrassia and T E Pickett, 'Reviving the Power of Biblical language: The Bible, Literature and Literary Language', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation* op cit p247.

<sup>102</sup> "Theology can assume philosophy into itself because God can assume flesh. Only because God takes on flesh can it be again truly human. Only because logic wittingly or unwittingly participates in the Logos is it truth-bearing. Only because demonstrations participate, wittingly or unwittingly, in the demonstration of the Father by the Son can they be valid. Only when the five ways participate wittingly or unwittingly in the Way can they lead to God": E F Rogers, 'The Stranger. The Stranger as Blessing', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p282-283.



## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

hermeneutics that are appropriate and/or adopted in different contexts, some of them religious, some of them not; to elucidate, recognise, and test them. The general theory is the pragmatic one that there are lots of special hermeneutics! It is a theory of dialogues, horizons, or transactions. This may be tied in to my slight scepticism about the usefulness of theory more generally, although of course, simply to describe is not without theoretical assumptions: theorising is inherent in language<sup>103</sup>.

Certainly, I believe that I have demonstrated that meaning is created in context, so every reading is new, and special, and answerable, and engaged. One of the special hermeneutic contexts involves the action of the Holy Spirit in revelation. He enables us to know God and be addressed by Him, reading these canonical texts in the context of His presence, which presence is achieved through the relationships I have noted already<sup>104</sup>.

As with the idea of prevenient grace noted earlier, it is a moot point perhaps, whether the Spirit is always present when we read in the ecclesiological context, and indeed, whether He is present in other contexts also. Without wanting to go too far at this point into arguments on this score, my suspicion would be that the Spirit is present in every context<sup>105</sup>, but we may not listen, or the context might prevent us from hearing, and from engaging in a genuinely open dialogue. Thus not every context in which the Spirit is present will be revelatory, because not every context involves the reading of canonical scripture with the aim of knowing God<sup>106</sup>.

---

<sup>103</sup> As Thiselton himself notes, "The problem is not that the hermeneutical theorist should refrain from offering general hermeneutical models. ... The problem is that such models are sometimes treated as overarching interpretive keys rather than as exploratory or functional working models. The search for pluriform models that relate to different texts and different genre remains a fundamental and indispensable part of hermeneutics": *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: the collected works and new essays of Anthony Thiselton (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on Religion. Collected works)*, (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006) p401.

<sup>104</sup> Scripture, Sacraments, Ordained Ministry, Prayer and Thought, and the Creeds: all of these together might qualify as the Tradition with a capital T. And all of these allow us to meet Ingraffia's objection to involving the Spirit in every action of understanding, unless we want to argue for His presence outside Christendom, which we might, of course!

<sup>105</sup> As Kallenberg suggestively puts it: "the effects (and affects) of God's immanence occur at the same mereological level as other aspects of communal life such as language. To put it elegantly, 'Thou ... inhabitest the praises of Israel' Psalm 22:3": B J Kallenberg, 'Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50/2 (1997) p213, where he has defined 'mereological' as being the realisation that "the world is organized according to a hierarchy of systems each of which is constituted by an arrangement of entities from the next rung lower in complexity" p209. Gadamer suggests that "understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself" which Heidegger revealed to be "the movement of transcendence, of moving beyond the existent": *Truth and Method* (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013) p260, which includes the awareness of self-identity in one's historical rootedness and finitude, in dialogue with conversation partners and one's context. One might say that the Holy Spirit is ever-present in this encounter.

<sup>106</sup> It is possible to read Canonical Scripture without that aim, and of reading other texts, especially devotional and theological ones, with that aim.

It is interesting to note here that Panikkar suggests that

the revelation of the Father is the revelation of God transcendent – of such a transcendence that, strictly speaking, even the name of God cannot be attributed to him. Thus, for us, pilgrims as we are in space and time, it is the Logos that is God. The revelation of the Spirit, on the other hand, is the revelation of God immanent. ... the divine immanence is not simply a negative transcendence ... Essentially it signifies the ultimate inner-ness of every being, the final foundation, the *Ground* of Being as well as of beings.

Properly speaking, the concept of revelation can be applied only to the Son. Transcendence as such cannot reveal itself ... since that which reveals itself is no longer transcendence but the revelation *of it*, i.e. God, the Son, the Logos, the Icon. Transcendence needs to reveal itself in order to manifest itself, [which I would suggest is why creation presupposes incarnation] to make itself known, but for that precise reason when it manifests itself it ceases to be transcendence and becomes revelation, the manifestation of the transcendent. In a way that is analogous, revelation of immanence has no meaning at all, strictly speaking, for if immanence is to reveal itself, that implies that it is not immanent but underlying (since it had to be revealed). Transcendence ceases to be when it reveals itself: immanence is incapable of revealing itself, for that would be a pure contradiction of terms; an immanence which needs to reveal itself, to manifest itself, is no longer immanent.

Divine immanence is first of all a *divine* immanence: God is immanent to himself, and it is only God who can be immanent to himself.<sup>107</sup>

The Spirit in that sense is ‘too close to see’, as we cannot see the air we breathe<sup>108</sup>.

However, the context of reading Scripture as part of the Canon, in the context of the Church, in the context of the sacraments, of prayer and of thought, communally, is one that is ‘set up’ or given, with a pledge of His revelatory presence, in the same way that Christians believe that there is a pledge or promise of His presence, indeed of the Triune presence, in Baptism and in the Eucharist. It is perhaps a question of obedience as ordered listening to and sharing in a conversation. This underlies the point that Valliere makes when he suggests that “the New Testament is conciliar in a deeper sense: it serves the conciliar principle by embodying it. ... The New Testament is the textual icon of the church-in-council, or if one prefers, of churches-in-council. More

---

<sup>107</sup> R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973) p58. I think that Panikkar’s ideas suggest that the answer to B D Marshall’s question about the exact relationship between the God worshipped by Christian and by Jews is to suggest that both of us can only know the Son/Word: B D Marshall, ‘Israel: Do Christians Worship the God of Israel?’, in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 231-264

<sup>108</sup> Of course, if immanence is not underlying, it paradoxically is a form of transcendence: a kind of through-transcendence or ‘intranscendence’: this is where spatial metaphors cease to be of any use at all!

than that, it is the church's only permanent council, the council that never adjourns."<sup>109</sup>

It must on this point be accepted that, in practice, this thesis will not change the way in which the Bible is read<sup>110</sup>. As Gadamer himself has argued, however, sometimes it is not necessary that a thesis will change things, merely illuminate what is already done: "if there is any practical consequence of the present investigation, it certainly has nothing to do with an unscientific 'commitment'; instead, it is concerned with the 'scientific' integrity of acknowledging the commitment involved in all understanding"<sup>111</sup>. And as Mary Hesse notes, sometimes travelling is all, arriving nothing!<sup>112</sup>

But it is an aim of this thesis that although our approaches to and readings of the Bible will not change, nonetheless if our understanding of Biblical hermeneutics and of the concept of meaning alters, perhaps so too will our understanding of those with whom we differ over such matters of interpretation. I would hope that we might be encouraged to pronounce with greater humility and attentiveness because we recognise that we are bringing some of our own gifts to the table, rather than merely regurgitating what we have been fed. Perhaps we might also more readily accept that other meanings are not simply the result of wilful ignorance, but the consequence of different conversations, in which the Spirit is also a participant, as we hope He is with us<sup>113</sup>.

Every Christian already reads in different contexts, creating a different meaning in the Biblical text in liturgical worship, private study, and prayerful meditation using *lectio divina* or a similar method. This thesis will not change that, but it might help to bring our *understanding* of what we are doing and of the role of the Holy Spirit therein, into line with what we already do, and the belief we express in our hermeneutic practices. If this thesis encourages a realisation that there is no such thing as a neutral reading of Scripture, even within the Anglican Communion, it will have achieved one goodly aim! Moving on from that, might be the recognition that revelation is a revelation

---

<sup>109</sup> P Valliere, *Conciliarism: a History of Decision-making in the Church*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012) p42

<sup>110</sup> As Mary Hesse remarks, "philosophical theories usually leave ordinary practice as it is": 'Reply to Don Hirsch', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 59.

<sup>111</sup> *Truth and Method* op cit, Foreword to the Second edition page xv. As he suggested in a letter to Emilio Betti, which he quotes in the first supplement to *Truth and Method* (Hermeneutics and Historicism), "Fundamentally, I am *not proposing a method*; I am describing *what is the case*": op cit p534, but of course, this description will, as Gadamer notes, have implications for how we then recognize and conceive what we are doing.

<sup>112</sup> 'Reply to Don Hirsch', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 60.

<sup>113</sup> "if the Church is understood ... primarily in terms of the singular practices through which it [she] is formed and bound to God, then theology which is oriented to those practices can share in that which unifies the Church even when the Church is divided." J J Buckley and D S Yeago, 'Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God* op cit p11

## USES OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

not merely of facts or knowledge, but of a relationship that, as the term 'understanding' itself implies, involves personal effort, and personal change, within changing contexts.

One of the reasons underlying the use of Speech Act theory, as acknowledged in the first chapter of this thesis, was a concern to preserve the idea that we can engage with an 'other', and be challenged by that which we have not made ourselves. I entirely agree that this is an important, indeed a vital, consideration.

However, the very existence of a notion of selfhood, whatever that might be, has been learnt from others, and presupposes their existence: all of our experience is a continuing conversation in which we learn from others. The 'solution' variously offered by those who adopt the illocutionary speech act is in fact simply the privileging of one particular context and position, which is declared to be neutral and to some degree or other reified, without sufficient recognition of the contingency and change of all conventions and conversations.

Those hermeneuts who adopt the idea of the 'revelatory illocution' all fail to recognize the extent to which they have assumed that their own reading context and their assumptions about the nature of meaning and genre are universal. They fail to recognize that the protection of meaning's ability to be 'other' lies not just in the authority of an author but in the multitudinous variety of his attentive, continually engaged and debating, readership, which in God's case, translates into the Spirit-filled fullness of His Body, the "mystical company of all faithful people"<sup>114</sup>. Illocutionary 'uptake' requires collective participation and recognition, a process in which the individual is formed conversationally, and thus ceases to be 'uptake' at all, but becomes simply an understanding that is developed and deepens over time, particularly through an experience of that greatest of the Spirit's gifts, a relationship of self-giving love.

As the World Council of Churches puts it:

1. The unsearchable mystery of God's love was made manifest, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the covenant with Israel and fully revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This mystery has been proclaimed in the

---

<sup>114</sup> Quoting the Book of Common Prayer. Or, in the words of the WCC: "As the churches engage in dialogue in the growing communion of churches in the ecumenical movement, a further and wider hermeneutical community is created. As it engages in ecumenical dialogue each church and tradition opens itself to being interpreted by other churches and traditions. To listen to the other does not necessarily mean to accept what other churches say, but to reckon with the possibility "*hermeneutics of confidence*". A hermeneutics for unity should entail an ecumenical method whereby Christians from various cultures and contexts, as well as different confessions, may encounter one another respectfully, always open to a *metanoia* which is a true "change of mind" and heart": WCC Report "A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical reflection on Hermeneutics" Paragraph 8.

Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Christian faith is the saving gift from God, which enables believers to receive the good news of God's love for all human beings and to become children of God and members of Christ's body the Church. Faith in Christ gives life to the communion (*koinonia*) of the Church. This faith has been handed on and received since apostolic times, from one generation to the next and from culture to culture.

2. This transmission takes place within the ambiguities of human history and the challenges of daily Christian life. So Paul can speak of us as having "this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7). Thus faith also relies upon human forms of expression and interpretation, dialogue and communication, all of which are fragile and all too often fragmented embodiments, none of which is completely adequate, of the mystery which has been revealed. These manifold human forms of expression include not only texts but also symbols and rites, stories and practices. Only at the end of time will the Church's contemplation of God's revealed mystery go beyond a partial knowledge and arrive at that "knowing even as we are known" of which Paul writes in 1 Cor 13: 9-12. ...

37. Yet ultimately, amid the many ecclesial traditions, the one Tradition is revealed in the living presence of Christ in the world, but is not something to be captured and controlled by human discourse. It is a living, eschatological reality, eluding all attempts at a final linguistic definition and conceptual disclosure. One way of describing the one Tradition is by speaking about the ecclesial capacity of *receiving* revelation. This capacity is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit, received by the apostles at Pentecost and given to every Christian community and to every member of the community in the process of Christian initiation. This capacity is the gift of the Holy Spirit who "will guide you into all the truth" (Jn 16:13), who is the Spirit of truth; that truth is Jesus Christ himself (Jn 14: 6), the perfect image of the Father from whom the Spirit proceeds. The capacity to receive the fullness of revelation is actualized in the Church's celebration of the eucharist, which involves both a hearing and an embodying of the Word of God, a participation in the eschaton, the feast of the kingdom<sup>115</sup>.

---

<sup>115</sup> WCC Report "A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical reflection on Hermeneutics", paragraphs 1, 2 and 37.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Legal Cases

*Hyam and Director of Public Prosecutions* on appeal to the House of Lords from *Regina v Hyam* [1975] A.C. 55.

*Plessy v Ferguson* 1896, Supreme Court of the United States, 163 US 537. The Opinion of the Court, given by Brown, J., can be found at [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0163\\_0537\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0163_0537_ZO.html).

The Dissenting Opinion of Harlan, J., can be found at [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0163\\_0537\\_ZD.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0163_0537_ZD.html).

Provided by the Legal Information Institute, part of Cornell University Law School, at <http://www.law.cornell.edu/lii.html>.

*Brown v Board of Education of Topeka* 1954, Supreme Court of the United States, 347 US 483.

The opinion of the Court, given by Warren, C.J., is at [http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC\\_CR\\_0347\\_0483\\_ZO.html](http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0347_0483_ZO.html).

Provided by the Legal Information Institute, part of Cornell University Law School, at <http://www.law.cornell.edu/lii.html>.

### Books and Articles

- M H Abrams, 'How to do things with texts', *Partisan Review* (1979) 566-588
- J W Adams, *The Performative Nature and Function of Isaiah 40-55. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 448* (New York, T&T Clark, 2006)
- J F Allen, 'Two views of Intention: Comments on Bratman and on Cohen and Levesque', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.) *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- W P Alston, 'Review of J R Searle 'Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language'', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) 172-179
- W P Alston, 'Illocutionary acts and Linguistic meaning', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- W P Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 2000)
- G E M Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1957)
- G E M Anscombe, 'On Brute Facts', *Analysis* 18 (1958) 69-72
- K-O Apel, *Towards a transformation of philosophy* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
- K-O Apel, *From a transcendental-semiotic point of view* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998)
- R E Aquila, 'De Re, De Dicto, and Naturalism,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 78:11 (November 1981) 718-719

- C E Armerding, 'Faith and Method in Old Testament Study: Story Exegesis', in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) pp 31-49
- J L Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1964).
- J L Austin, *How to do things with Words* [First edition, edited by J O Urmson: (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970)], [Second edition: edited by M Sbisà and J O Urmson (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1975)], [Second Edition 1980 impression: edited by M Sbisà and J O Urmson (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009) - with an index compiled by P H Nidditch.]
- J L Austin, *Philosophical Papers: Third Edition* (Oxford, Clarendon Paperbacks, 1979, Third edition).
- P Avis, 'In the Shadow of the Frankfurt School: from 'Critical Theory' to 'Critical Theology'', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35, (1982) 529-540
- A J Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic* (London, Victor Gollancz, 1951)
- K Bach, 'Semantic slack: What is said and more', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- K Bach, 'Communicative Intentions, Plan Recognition, and Pragmatics: Comments on Thomason and on Litman and Allen,' in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- M M Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin TX, University of Texas, 1992)
- M M Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Austin TX, University of Texas, 1993)
- M M Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability* (Austin TX, University of Texas, 1995)
- M M Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin TX, University of Texas, 2000)
- Th T Ballmer, 'The Position of Argumentation in the Framework of a Text Linguistics, Speech Act Theory, and Lexicology', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 9-29.
- R Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', published in *Aspen* 5 & 6 (1967) - translation referred to made by Richard Howard and available at: <http://www.ubu.com/aspens/aspens5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes>, courtesy of UbuWeb (who describe themselves as a completely independent resource dedicated to all strains of the avant-garde, ethnopoetics, and outsider arts: see <http://ubu.com>).
- R Barthes, 'From Work to Text', published in *Image, Music, Text*, 1977, but also available on-line at <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/barthes05.htm>, courtesy of the Athenaeum Library of Philosophy available from the Evans Experientialism home page at <http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/index.htm>.
- C G Bartholomew, 'Three Horizons: Hermeneutics from the Other End - an Evaluation of Anthony Thiselton's Hermeneutic Proposals', *European Journal of Theology* 5 (1996) pp121-135
- C G Bartholomew, 'Introduction', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) xxi-xxxvi

- C G Bartholomew, 'Before Babel and After Pentecost: Language, Literature and Biblical Interpretation', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 131-170
- R Bartsch, 'Norms, Tolerance, Lexical Change, and Context-dependence of Meaning', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 367-393.
- Sir I Berlin, 'Austin and the Early Beginnings of Oxford Philosophy', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973)
- M A Bernstein, 'When the Carnival Turns Bitter: Preliminary Reflections upon the Abject Hero', *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 283-305
- R Bertolet, 'Are there indirect speech acts?', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- G H Bird, 'Relevance Theory and Speech Acts' in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- M Black, 'Austin on Performatives' in K T Fann (ed.), *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 401-411
- M Black, 'Meaning and Intention: An Examination of Grice's Views', *New Literary History* 4:2 (1973) 257-279
- C L Blomberg, 'Critical Issues in New Testament Studies for Evangelicals Today' in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) pp 51-79
- C L Blomberg, 'The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization', in D A Carson & J D Woodbridge (eds.) *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986) pp 135-174
- D Bolinger, *Meaning and Form* (London, Longman 1977)
- J E Botha, 'The potential of speech act theory for New Testament Exegesis', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47:2 (1991) 277-293.
- J E Botha, 'Speech act theory and New Testament Exegesis', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 47:2 (1991) 294-303.
- J E Botha, *Jesus and the Samaritan woman: A Speech Act Reading of John 4:1-42* (*Supplements to Novum Testamentum Volume 65*), (Leiden, E J Brill, 1991).
- M E Bratman, 'What is Intention?', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- H Brent, 'Comment on Beyond Student-Centred Teaching', *College English* 34:2 (November 1972) 212-214
- R S Briggs, *It's been a Quiet Week in the Global Village*, (London, SPCK, 1999)
- R S Briggs, 'The Uses of Speech Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation', *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 9 (2001)
- R S Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2001).
- R S Briggs, *Reading the Bible Wisely*, (London, SPCK, 2003)
- R S Briggs, *Light to Live By*, (Bletchley, Scripture Union, 2005)
- B R Brinkman, 'On Sacramental Man: I Language Patterning', *Heythrop Journal* 13:4 (1972) 371-401



- B R Brinkman, 'On Sacramental Man: II The Way of Intimacy', *Heythrop Journal* 14:1 (1973) 5-34
- B R Brinkman, 'On Sacramental Man: III The Socially Operational Way', *Heythrop Journal* 14:2 (1973) 162-189
- B R Brinkman, 'On Sacramental Man: IV The Way of Interiorization', *Heythrop Journal* 14:3 (1973) 280-306
- B R Brinkman, 'On Sacramental Man: V The Way of Sacramental Operationalism', *Heythrop Journal* 14:4 (1973) 396-416
- B R Brinkman, 'Notes and Comments: Sacramental man and Speech Acts again', *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975) 418-420
- S Brown, *The Bible and the Alchemy of Language; The Guild of Pastoral Psychology Lecture Number 279* (Harrow, Abacus Meadows, 2002)
- G L Bruns, 'Intention, Authority, and Meaning', *Critical Inquiry* 7:2 (Winter 1980) 297-309
- G L Bruns, 'Structuralism, Deconstruction, and Hermeneutics: Review of J Culler's 'On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1982)', *Diacritics* 14:1 (Spring 1984) 12-23.
- J J Buckley and D S Yeago, 'Introduction: A Catholic and Evangelical Theology?', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 1-20
- M Calinescu, *Rereading* (New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1993)
- J R Cameron, 'Sentence-Meaning and Speech Acts'. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) 97-117
- P N Campbell, 'A Rhetorical View of Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Acts', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59:3 (1973) 284-296
- D A Carson, 'Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture', in D A Carson & J D Woodbridge (eds.) *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986) pp 5-48
- F Carter, *The Education of Little Tree* (Albuquerque NM, University of New Mexico Press, 1976).
- S Cavell, 'Austin at criticism,' in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 59-75
- W Cerf, 'Critical Review of How to Do Things with Words', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 351-379
- S Chatman, 'Foreword', in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973)
- B S Childs, 'Speech-act theory and biblical interpretation', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58:4 (2005) 375-392
- R M Chisholm, 'Austin's Philosophical Papers', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 101-126
- H H Clark and D Wilkes-Gibbs, 'Referring as a Collaborative Process', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)

- K Clark & M Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1984)
- D J A Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53 (JSOT Supplement Series 1)*, (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1983).
- S Coakley, *Powers and Submissions; Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2002)
- S Coakley, 'Living into the Mystery of the Holy Trinity: Trinity, Prayer, and Sexuality', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 44-52
- L J Cohen, 'Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 14:55 (1964) pp118-137, also in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 420-444.
- L J Cohen, *The Diversity of Meaning* (London, Methuen, 1966)
- L J Cohen, 'Note', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 468.
- P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack, 'Introduction', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- P R Cohen and H J Levesque, 'Persistence, Intention, and Commitment', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- P R Cohen and H J Levesque, 'Rational Interaction as the Basis for Communication', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- T Cohen, 'Illocutions and Perlocutions', *Foundations of Language* 9 (1973) pp 492-503
- T Cohen, 'Sports and Art: Beginning Questions' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) pp 258-273
- S T Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (London, George Bell & Sons, 1904)
- S T Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria, or biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions* (London, J M Dent & Sons, 1967)
- S T Coleridge, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (New York, Chelsea House, 1983)
- J Coulson, *Religion and Imagination; 'in aid of a grammar of assent'* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981)
- J Crewe, 'Toward Uncritical Practice', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 748-759
- W Croft, 'Speech Act Classification, Language Typology and Cognition' in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- J Culler, *Structuralist Poetics; Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975)
- J Culler, 'Convention and Meaning: Derrida and Austin', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 15-30.
- J Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983)
- J Culler, 'Problems in the Theory of Fiction: Review of M L Pratt: Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse (Bloomington/London, Indiana University Press, 1977), and S S Lanser: The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction

(Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1981)', *Diacritics* 14:1 (Spring 1984) 2-11

- D S Cunningham, 'Interpretation. Toward a Rehabilitation of the Vestigia Tradition', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 179-202
- M Dascal, 'Speech Act Theory and Gricean Pragmatics: Some Differences of Detail That Make a Difference' in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- D Davidson, 'True to the Facts', *The Journal of Philosophy* 66:21 (November 1969) 748-764
- D Davidson, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme', *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973-74) 5-20.
- H M Davidson, 'Sign, Sense, and Roland Barthes,' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973)
- O Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, (London, SCM Press, 2001).
- S Davis, 'Perlocution' in J R Searle, Keifer & Bierwisch (eds.), *Speech-Act Theory and Pragmatics*, (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1980).
- S Davis, 'Anti-individualism and speech act theory', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- S Davis, 'Utterance acts and speech acts', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series* 77 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 135-150.
- J Derrida, *Limited Inc* (Evanston IL, Northwestern University Press, 1988)
- J Derrida, Interview with Nikhil Padgaonkar, available at <<http://www.csun.edu/coms/grad/jd>>.
- C J de Sousa Melo, 'Possible Directions of Fit between Mind, Language and the World', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series* 77 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 109-117.
- R Detweiler, 'Speaking of Believing in Genesis 2-3,' *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 135-141
- M Dominicy and N Franken, 'Speech Acts and Relevance Theory', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series* 77 (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 263-283.
- E Dop, 'A Dialogic Epistemology: Bakhtin on Truth and Meaning', *Dialogism* 4 (2000) 7-33.
- W C Dowling, 'Intentionless Meaning', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 784-789.
- T F Driver, *The Magic of Ritual* (San Francisco CA, HarperSanFrancisco, 1991)
- H Dufva and M Lähteenmäki, 'But who killed Harry? A dialogical approach to language and consciousness', *Pragmatics and Cognition* 4:1 (1996) 105-123
- D G Dunbar, 'The Biblical Canon', in D A Carson & J D Woodbridge (eds.) *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986) pp 295-360.

- J G du Plessis, 'Pragmatic meaning in Matthew 13:1-23', *Neotestamentica* 21 (1987) 33-56.
- J G du Plessis, 'Why did Peter ask his question and how did Jesus answer him? Or: Implicature in Luke 12:35-48', *Neotestamentica* 22 (1988) 311-324.
- M Eaton, 'Speech Acts: A Bibliography', *Centrum* 2 (1974) pp57-72
- Sr Edmee, *The critics can't help* (SLG Pamphlets)
- C Emerson, 'The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language', *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 245-264.
- C Ernst, *The Theology of Grace*, Theology Today Series Number 17 (Notre Dame IN, Fides Publishers, 1974)
- C Ernst, *Multiple Echo: Explorations in Theology* (London, Darton, Longman and Todd 1979)
- D D Evans, *The Logic of Self-Involvement* (London, SCM Press, 1963).
- P Farb, *Word play: what happens when people talk* (New York, Vintage, 1993)
- K T Fann (ed.), *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969)
- H Field, 'Realism and Relativism', *The Journal of Philosophy* 79:10 (October 1982) 553-567.
- R Finnegan, 'How to Do Things with Words: Performative Utterances among the Limba of Sierra Leone', *Man, New Series* 4:4 (December 1969) 537-552.
- S Fish, 'What Is Stylistics and Why Are They Saying Such Terrible Things About It?' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973)
- S Fish, 'How Ordinary is Ordinary Language?', *New Literary History* 5 (Autumn 1973) pp 41-54.
- S Fish, 'How to do Things with Austin and Searle: Speech Act Theory and Literary Criticism', *MLN* 91:5 (October 1976) 983-1025.
- S Fish, 'Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases', *Critical Inquiry* 4:4 (Summer 1978) 623-644
- S Fish, 'A Reply to John Reichert: Or, How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love Interpretation', *Critical Inquiry* 6:1 (Autumn 1978) 173-178
- S Fish, 'One More Time', *Critical Inquiry* 6:4 (Summer 1980) 749-751
- S Fish, 'Resistance and Independence: A Reply to Gerald Graff', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 119-127.
- S Fish, 'Not so Much a Teaching as an Intangling' [including the essay 'Surprised by Sin'], 'Is there a Text in This Class', 'With the Compliments of the Author: Reflections on Austin and Derrida', 'Consequences', 'Rhetoric', 'There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too', 'The Law Wishes to Have a Formal Existence', 'The Young and the Restless', 'Why Literary Criticism is Like Virtue', 'No Bias, No Merit: The Case Against Blind Submission', and 'Anti-Professionalism', in H A Veese (ed.), *The Stanley Fish Reader*, (Malden MA, Blackwell, 1999)
- M Fisk, 'The Instability of Pragmatism', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 23-30
- D Føllesdal, 'Comments on Stenius's 'Mood and Language-game'', *Synthese* 17 (1967) 275-280.

- L W Forgyson, 'In Pursuit of Performatives' in K T Fann (ed.), *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 412-419
- L W Forgyson, 'Austin's Philosophy of Action', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 127-147
- L W Forgyson, 'Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts' in I Berlin et al, *Essays on J L Austin* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973)
- S E Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1998)
- S E Fowl, from 'How the Spirit Reads and How to Read the Spirit', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 301-315
- J M Frame, 'The Spirit and the Scriptures', in D A Carson & J D Woodbridge (eds.) *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986) pp 213-236
- D Franck, 'Speaking about Speech Acts', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 87-92.
- H W Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1974)
- H W Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven CT, Yale university Press, 1992)
- H W Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, (New York NY, Oxford University Press, 1993).
- M Furberg, 'Meaning and Illocutionary Force', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 445-468
- H-G Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London, Sheed and Ward, 1988), also the revised second edition of 2004 (New York NY, Bloomsbury Academic, 2013)
- R N Gaines, 'Doing By Saying: Toward a Theory of Perlocution', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 65:2 (1979) pp207-217
- H Gardner, *The Limits of Literary Criticism; Reflections on the Interpretation of Poetry and Scripture*, Riddell Memorial Lectures 28<sup>th</sup> Series (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1957)
- N L Geisler, 'Methodological Unorthodoxy', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26/1 (1983) pp 87-94
- N L Geisler, 'Is there madness in the method? A rejoinder to Robert H Gundry', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26/1 (1983) pp 101-108
- R Gibbs Jr, *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- B Gilfillan Upton, *Hearing Mark's Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts through Speech Act Theory: Biblical Interpretation Series Volume 79*, (Leiden, Brill, 2006)
- J H Gill, 'J L Austin and the Religious Use of Language', *Sophia* 8 (1969) 29-37.
- R Gill ed., *Readings in Modern Theology* (London, SPCK, 1995).
- D Glaister, "Million Little Pieces may cost publishers millions in refunds" *The Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2006,  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/sep/08/books.usa>> (13<sup>th</sup> March 2013)
- G Graff, 'The Pseudo-Politics of Interpretation', *Critical Inquiry* 9:3 (March 1983) 597-610

- G Graff, 'Interpretation on Tlön: A Response to Stanley Fish', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 109-117.
- B Green, *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction: Semeia Studies Number 38* (Atlanta GA, Society of Biblical Literature, 2000)
- C J D Greene, "'Starting a Rockslide" - Deconstructing History and Language via Christological Detonators', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 195 - 223
- H P Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1989)
- J A G Griffith, *The Politics of the Judiciary*, (Glasgow, Fontana Press, 1985)
- R L Grimes, 'Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 103-122
- Y Gu, *Towards a Model of Conversational Rhetoric: An Investigation of the Perlocutionary Phenomenon in Conversation*. Unpublished Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD, Department of Linguistics and Modern English Language, University of Lancaster November 1987
- Y Gu, 'The Impasse of Perlocution', *Journal of Pragmatics* 20 (1993) 405-432
- G Guiver, *Faith in Momentum* (electronic copy provided privately by author).
- R H Gundry, 'A Response to "Methodological Unorthodoxy"', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26/1 (1983) pp 95-100
- R H Gundry, 'A Surrejoinder to Norman L Geisler', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26/1 (1983) pp 109-116
- E T Hall, *The Silent Language* (New York, Doubleday, 1990)
- S Hampshire, 'J L Austin; 1911-1960', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 33-48
- M L Hancher, 'Understanding Poetic Speech Acts', *College English* 36:6 (February 1975) 632-639
- M L Hancher, 'Beyond a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse', *Modern Language Notes* 92 (1977) 1081-1098
- M L Hancher, 'Pragmatics in Wonderland', *Bucknell Review* (1983) 165-184
- M L Hancher, 'Performative Utterance, the Word of God, and the Death of the Author', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p27-40
- G Harman, 'Metaphysical Realism and Moral Relativism: Reflections on Hilary Putnam's Reason, Truth and History', *The Journal of Philosophy* 79:10 (October 1982) 568-575.
- R M Harnish, 'Mood, meaning and speech acts,' in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- B Harold, 'Beyond Student-Centered Teaching: The Dialectical Materialist Form of a Literature Course', *College English* 34:2 (November 1972) 200-212
- B Harold, 'Reply to Harold Brent', *College English* 34:3 (December 1972) 470.
- D Harrah, 'On the vectoring of speech acts', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)

- J F Harris, 'Speech Acts and God Talk', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11 (1980) 167-183
- J Haugeland, 'The Intentionality All-Stars', in J E Tomberlin (ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives 4: Action Theory and Philosophy of Mind* (Atascadero CA, Ridgeview Publishing Co, 1990) 383-427
- M Hesse, 'Texts without Types and Lumps without Laws', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 31-48
- M Hesse, 'Reply to Don Hirsch', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 57-60.
- M Hesse, 'How to Be a Postmodernist and Remain a Christian: A Response to Nicholas Wolterstorff', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 91-96
- E D Hirsch Jr, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven CT and London, Yale University Press, 1976).
- E D Hirsch Jr, *The Aims of Interpretation*, (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1978)
- E D Hirsch Jr, 'The Politics of Theories of Interpretation', *Critical Inquiry* 9:1 (September 1982) 235-247
- E D Hirsch Jr, 'Against Theory?' *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 743-747.
- E D Hirsch Jr, 'Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted', *Critical Inquiry* 11:2 (1984) 202-225.
- E D Hirsch Jr, 'On Theories and Metaphors: A Comment on Mary Hesse's Paper', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 49-55
- E D Hirsch Jr, 'Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory', *New Literary History* 25:1 (1994) 549-567
- J R Hobbs, 'The Pierrehumbert-Hirschberg Theory of Intonational Meaning Made Simple: Comments on Pierrehumbert and Hirschberg', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- J R Hobbs, 'Artificial Intelligence and Collective Intentionality: Comments on Searle and on Grosz and Sidner', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- D Holdcroft, 'Indirect speech acts and propositional content', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- M Holquist, 'Answering as Authoring: Mikhail Bakhtin's Trans-Linguistics', *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 307-319.
- J Hornsby, 'Things Done with Words', in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) pp 27-46
- J Hornsby, 'Illocution and its Significance', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994) 187-207
- W Houston, 'What did the Prophets think they were doing? Speech Acts and Prophetic Discourse in the Old Testament', *Biblical Interpretation* 1, 2 (1993) 167-188

- M Huntley, 'The Semantics of English Imperatives', *Linguistics and Philosophy* 7 (1984) 103-133.
- R Hütter, 'The Church. The Knowledge of the Triune God: Practices, Doctrine, Theology', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 23-47
- B D Ingraffia and T E Pickett, 'Reviving the Power of Biblical language: The Bible, Literature and Literary Language', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 241-262
- C E Jarrett, 'Philosophy of Language in the Service of Religious Studies', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 143-159
- W Jeanron, 'Hermeneutics', in Coggins, R J and Houlden, J L, *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London, SCM Press, 1990)
- R W Jenson, 'You wonder Where the Spirit went', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 9-18
- A F Johnson, 'The Historical-Critical Method: Egyptian Gold or Pagan Precipice?', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26/1 (1983) pp 3-16
- A J I Jones, 'Toward a Formal Theory of Communication and Speech Acts', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- C Jones, G Wainwright, E Yarnold SJ and P Bradshaw (eds.), *The Study of Liturgy revised edition* (London, SPCK, 1992)
- D Jones, *Epoch and Artist* (London, Faber and Faber, 1959).
- J Kagan, *Hellspark* (Decatur GA, Meisha Merlin Publishing, 1998)
- B J Kallenberg, 'Unstuck from Yale: Theological Method After Lindbeck', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50:2 (1997) 191-218
- P Kamuf (ed.), *A Derrida Reader; Between the Blinds* (Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991)
- D Kaplan, 'On the Logic of Demonstratives', *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8 (1978) 81-98
- A Kasher, 'Are speech acts conventional', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 65-69
- A Kasher, 'Modular speech act theory', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- H Kautz, 'A Circumscriptive Theory of Plan Recognition', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- J T Kearns, 'Meaning, Structure and speech acts', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- D H Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine; The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg PA, Trinity Press, 1999)
- J E Kennard, 'Convention Coverage or How to Read Your Own Life', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 69-88



- F Kermode, 'The Use of the Codes', in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973)
- F Kerr, 'Language as Hermeneutic in the Later Wittgenstein', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 27 (1965) pp 491-520
- F Kerr, 'Politics and Theology: Retrospect and agenda', *New Blackfriars* 49:579 (1968) 572-581
- F Kerr, 'Frei's Types', *New Blackfriars* 75:881 (April 1994) 184-193
- F Kerr, *Theology after Wittgenstein* (London, SPCK, 1997)
- P Kivy, 'Live Performance and Dead Composers: On the Ethics of Musical Interpretation' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) pp 219-236
- S Knapp & W B Michaels, 'Against Theory', in *Critical Inquiry* 8:4 (Summer 1982) 723-742, and in W J T Mitchell, *Against Theory: Literary Studies and the New Pragmatism* (Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 1985)
- S Knapp and W B Michaels, 'A Reply to Our Critics', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 790-800
- S Knapp and W B Michaels, 'A Reply to Richard Rorty: What is Pragmatism?' *Critical Inquiry* 11:3 (March 1985) 466-473
- S Knapp & W B Michaels, 'Against Theory 2: Hermeneutics and Deconstruction', *Critical Inquiry* 14 (Autumn 1987) 49-68
- S Kubo, 'Illocutionary Morphology and Speech Acts', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 209-224.
- E D Kuhn, Review of J R Searle, F Kiefer & M Bierwisch (eds.), *Speech-Act Theory and Pragmatics* (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1980), *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 139-154
- M La Fargue, 'Are Texts Determinate? Derrida, Barth, and the Role of the Biblical Scholar', *Harvard Theological Review* 81 (1988) 341-357
- M Lähteenmäki, 'Consciousness as a Social and Dialogical Phenomenon', *Finlance* 14 (1994) 1-21
- M Lähteenmäki, 'On Meaning and Understanding: A Dialogical Approach', *Dialogism* 1 (1998) 74-91.
- M Lähteenmäki, 'On rules and rule-following: obeying rules blindly', *Language and Communication* 23 (2003) 45-61
- M Lähteenmäki, 'On the interpretation of Baxtin's linguistic ideas: the problems of the texts from the 1950's-60's', *Russian Linguistics* 27 (2003) 23-39.
- A N S Lane, 'Sola Scriptura? Making Sense of a Post-Reformation Slogan' in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) pp 297-327
- S S Lanser, *The Narrative Act: Point of View in Prose Fiction* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1981)
- S S Lanser: '(Feminist) Criticism in the Garden: Inferring Genesis 2-3', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p67-84

- G J Laughery, 'Language at the Frontiers of Language', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 171-194
- L Lawlor, 'Dialectic and Iterability: The Confrontation between Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida', *Philosophy Today* 32:3 (1988) 181-194
- A Leclerc, 'Verbal Moods and Sentence Moods in the Tradition of Universal Grammar', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 63-84.
- P Leonardi, 'On conventions, rules and speech acts', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1994) 71-86
- P Leonardi and M Sbisà, 'Introduction', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1994) 1-7
- F Lerner, 'John Myers Myers: The Man Behind Silverlock', in *Silverlock, including the Silverlock Companion* (Framingham MA, NESFA Press, 2004),
- H-H Lin, 'The Relevance of Hermeneutical Theory in Heidegger, Gadamer, Wittgenstein and Ricoeur for the Concept of Self in Adult Education', *unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nottingham 1998*
- G A Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine; Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Louisville KY, Westminster John Knox, 1984)
- D Lodge, *After Bakhtin: Essays on fiction and criticism* (London, Routledge, 1990).
- G Loughlin, *Telling God's Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999)
- A Louth, *Discerning the Mystery* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1983)
- N B MacDonald, 'Illocutionary Stance in Hans Frei's *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: An Exercise in Conceptual Redescription and Normative Analysis*', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 312-328
- W B MacDonald, 'How to catch Fish with Words', *Texte* 3 (1984) 29-41.
- J Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1995)
- S Mailloux, 'Truth or Consequences: On Being against Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 760-766
- E S Malbon, 'Echoes and Foreshadowings in Mark 4-8: Reading and Rereading', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 112/2 (1993) pp 211-230
- L Manley, 'Concepts of Convention and Models of Critical Discourse,' *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 31-52
- J Margolis, 'Meaning, Speakers' Intentions, and Speech Acts', *The Review of Metaphysics* 26:4 (1973) 681-695
- J Margolis, 'Literature and Speech Acts', *Philosophy and Literature* 3:1 (1979) 39-52
- B D Marshall, from 'The Epistemic Role of the Spirit', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 316-321
- A P Martinich, 'Sacraments and Speech Acts', *Heythrop Journal* 16 (1975) 289-303, 405-417
- J G McConville, 'Metaphor, Symbol and the Interpretation of Deuteronomy', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and*

*Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 329-351

H McDonald, "Support for author accused of lying", *The Observer*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 2006, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2006/sep/24/booksnews.ireland>> (13<sup>th</sup> March 2013)

T M McNulty, 'Pauline Preaching: A Speech-Act Analysis', *Worship* 53 (1979) pp 207-14

A Merin, 'Algebra of elementary social acts', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)

R B Meyers & K Hopkins, 'A Speech-Act Theory Bibliography', *Centrum* 5 (1977) 73-108

J H Miller, *Speech Acts in Literature* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 2001)

J H Miller, 'Derrida's Desterrance', *MLN* 121 (2006) 893-910

C Milmo, "Bloomsbury withdraws paperback accused of plagiarising 'Jane Eyre' and 'Brighton Rock'" *Independent newspaper*, 13<sup>th</sup> August 2005 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/bloomsbury-withdraws-paperback-accused-of-plagiarising-jane-eyre-and-brighton-rock-502659.html>> (8<sup>th</sup> January 2010).

J Moeschler, 'Speech act theory and the analysis of conversations: Sequencing and interpretation in pragmatic theory', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 239-261.

J N Mohanty, 'Intentionality and Noema', *The Journal of Philosophy* 78:11 (November 1981) 706-717.

K Möller, 'Words of (In-)evitable Certitude? Reflections on the Interpretation of Prophetic Oracles of Judgement', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 352-386

J M E Moravcsik, 'Introduction' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) pp 1-10

J Morgan, 'Comments on Jones and on Perrault', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)

G S Morson, 'Who speaks for Bakhtin?: A Dialogic Introduction', *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 225-243

B Moulin and D Rousseau, 'An approach for modelling and simulating conversations', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 175-205.

C Myers, 'John Myers Myers: The Last Goliard', in *Silverlock, including the Silverlock Companion* (Framingham MA, NESFA Press, 2004),

J Myers Myers, 'Silverlock', in *Silverlock, including the Silverlock Companion* (Framingham MA, NESFA Press, 2004),

J Myers Myers, 'The Inside Scoop on John Myers Myers by Himself', in *Silverlock, including the Silverlock Companion* (Framingham MA, NESFA Press, 2004),

- J Narveson, 'The Agreement to Keep Our Agreements', *Philosophical Papers* 23:2 (1994) 75-87
- A Nehamas, 'Convergence and Methodology in Science and Criticism', *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 81-87
- A Nehamas, 'What an Author Is', *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986) 685-691
- B Nerlich & D C Clarke, 'Language, Action and Context: Linguistic Pragmatics in Europe and America (1800-1950)' *Journal of Pragmatics* 22 (1994) 439-463
- D Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts: An Analysis of 1 John* (Biblical Interpretation Series volume 7) (Leiden, E J Brill, 1994)
- D Neufeld, 'Acts of Admonition and Rebuke: A Speech Act Approach to 1 Corinthians 6:1-11', *Biblical Interpretation* 8:4 (2000) 375-399
- C G New, 'A Plea for Linguistics', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 148-165
- C A Newsom, 'Bakhtin, the Bible, and Dialogic Truth', *The Journal of Religion* 76:2 (1996) 290-306
- R Norris, 'Trinity', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 19-43
- C D Novaes, "The different ways in which logic is (said to be) formal", *Academia.edu* <[http://www.academia.edu/906786/The\\_different\\_ways\\_in\\_which\\_logic\\_is\\_said\\_to\\_be\\_formal](http://www.academia.edu/906786/The_different_ways_in_which_logic_is_said_to_be_formal)> (4<sup>th</sup> March 2013)
- P H Nowell-Smith, 'Ifs and Cans', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 166-181.
- M Nussbaum, 'Sophistry about Conventions', *New Literary History* 17: (Autumn 1985) 129-139.
- S Obitts, 'A Philosophical Analysis of certain assumptions of the Doctrine of the Inerrancy of the Bible', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 26/1 (1983) pp 129-136
- D T O'Hara, 'Revisionary Madness: The Prospects of American Literary Theory at the Present Time', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 726-742
- R Ohmann, 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 4 (1971) 1-19
- R Ohmann, 'Speech, Literature and the Space between', *New Literary History* 4 (1972) 47-63
- R Ohmann, 'Literature as Act' in S Chatman (ed.) *Approaches to Poetics* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1973) 81-108
- W Olhausen, 'A 'Polite' Response to Anthony Thiselton', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 121-130
- S H Olsen, 'The "Meaning" of a Literary Work', *New Literary History* 14 (1982) pp 13-32
- E Padučeva, Review of W Klein and W Levelt (eds.), 'Crossing the boundaries in linguistics: studies presented to M Bierswisch (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1981), *Journal of Pragmatics* 8:1 (February 1984) 149-154.

- R Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery*, (London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973)
- H Parker, 'Lost Authority: Non-Sense, Skewed Meanings, and Intentionless Meanings', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 767-774
- D Patte, 'Speech Act Theory and Biblical Exegesis', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) p85-102.
- I Paul, 'Metaphor and Exegesis', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 387-402
- D Pears, 'An original philosopher', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 49-58
- C R Perrault, 'An Application of Default Logic to Speech Act Theory', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- S Petrey, *Speech Acts and Literary Theory* (New York, Routledge 1990)
- J Pierrehumbert and J Hirschberg, 'The Meaning of Intonational Contours in the Interpretation of Discourse', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- M Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge; Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 1974)
- T Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self* (JSOT Supplement Series 32), (Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1984).
- M E Pollack, 'Plans as Complex Mental Attitudes', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- M L Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington IN/London, Indiana University Press, 1977)
- M L Pratt, 'The Ideology of Speech Act Theory', *Centrum* NS 1.1 (1981) 5-18
- H Price, 'Semantic minimalism and the Frege point', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- S Prickett, *Words and The Word: Language, poetics and biblical interpretation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986)
- H-J Prosman, 'Review of The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology (ed.) K Vanhoozer (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004)', *Ars Disputandi*, <<http://www.arsdisputandi.org>> H Putnam, 'Convention: A Theme in Philosophy', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 1-14.
- H Putnam, 'Reply to Two Realists,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 79:10 (October 1982) 575-577.
- H Putnam, 'The Craving for Objectivity', *New Literary History* 15:2 (Winter 1984) 229-239.
- H Putnam, 'A Comparison of Something with Something Else,' *New Literary History* 17:1 (Autumn 1985) 61-79.
- H S Pyper, 'When I say what I mean, do I mean what I say? J L Austin in Biblical Theology' (copy provided privately by author)
- H S Pyper, 'Forgiving the unforgivable: Kierkegaard, Derrida and the scandal of forgiveness', copy provided privately by author

- H S Pyper, 'Jesus Reads the Scriptures', copy provided privately by author
- H S Pyper, 'Scripture and Dialogue: Bakhtin and the Reading of the Hebrew Bible', copy provided privately by author.
- H S Pyper, 'Reading in the Dark: Zechariah, Daniel and the difficulty of Scripture', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29.4 (2005) 485-504.
- H S Pyper, 'Surviving Writing: The Anxiety of Historiography in the Former Prophets', copy provided privately by author
- W V Quine, *Quintessence: Basic Readings from the Philosophy of W V Quine*, (Cambridge MA, The Belknap Press, 2004)
- J Ransdell, 'Constitutive Rules and Speech-Act Analysis', *The Journal of Philosophy* 68:13 (July 1971) 385-400.
- F Recanati, 'Some Remarks on Explicit Performatives, Indirect Speech Acts, Locutionary Meaning and Truth-value', in J R Searle, Keifer & Bierwisch (eds.), *Speech-Act Theory and Pragmatics*, (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1980)
- F Recanati, *Meaning and Force; the Pragmatics of Performative Utterances* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987)
- F Recanati, 'Contextualism and Anti-Contextualism in the Philosophy of Language', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- F Recanati, *Oratio Obliqua, Oratio Recta* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 2000)
- F Recanati, *Literal Meaning* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004)
- J Rehbein, 'Remarks on the Empirical Analysis of Action and Speech: The case of question sequences<sup>1</sup> in classroom discourse,' *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1994) 49-63
- J Reichert, 'But That Was in Another Ball Park: A Reply to Stanley Fish', *Critical Inquiry* 6:1 (Autumn 1978) 164-172
- J Reichert, 'Making Sense of Interpretation', *Critical Inquiry* 6:4 (Summer 1980) 746-748
- J Reichert, 'Do Poets Ever mean What They Say?', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 53-68.
- P Ricoeur, 'The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text', *New Literary History* 5 (Autumn 1973) pp 91-117
- P Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Texas Christian University Press 1976)
- P Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* (London, SPCK, 1981)
- P Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor* (London, Routledge, 2003)
- P Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the human sciences: Essays on language, action and interpretation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992)
- P Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another* (Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 1992)
- P Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis MN, Fortress Press, 1995)

---

<sup>1</sup> This should read "sentences", according to an erratum on p304 of the same volume of the *Journal of Pragmatics*, and the page heading of the article refers to "Empirical analysis of question sentences".

- E F Rogers Jr, 'The Stranger. The Stranger as Blessing', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 265-283-202
- E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009)
- R Rorty, 'Deconstruction and Circumvention', *Critical Inquiry* 11:1 (September 1984) 1-23.
- R Rorty, 'Philosophy without Principles,' *Critical Inquiry* 11:3 (March 1985) 459-465.
- R Rorty, 'The Pragmatists Progress', in U Eco, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992)
- M Rosaldo, 'The Things We Do with Words: Ilongot Speech Acts and Speech Act Theory in Philosophy', *Language in Society* 11:2 (August 1982) 203-237.
- L M Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: the Transactional theory of the Literary work*, (Carbondale IL, Southern Illinois University Press, 1978)
- M Roskill, 'A Reply to John Reichert and Stanley Fish', *Critical Inquiry* 6:2 (Winter 1979) 355-357
- A Rosmarin, 'On the Theory of "Against Theory"', *Critical Inquiry* 9:4 (June 1983) 775-783
- E Roulet, 'Speech Acts, Discourse Structure, and Pragmatic Connectives', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 31-47.
- J M Sadock, *Toward a Linguistic Theory of Speech Acts*, (New York, Academic Press, 1974)
- J M Sadock, 'Comments on Vanderveken and on Cohen and Levesque', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- J M Sadock, 'Toward a Grammatically Realistic Typology of Speech Acts' in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- E P Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996)
- M Sbisà, 'On Illocutionary Types', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1984) 93-112.
- J Schleusener, 'Convention and the Context of Reading', *Critical Inquiry* 6:4 (1980) 669-680
- R Scholes, 'Who Cares about the Text' (a review of Fish, S, 'Is There a Text in This Class?'), *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 17:2 (Winter 1984)
- J R Searle, 'Assertions and Aberrations,' in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 205-218
- J R Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969).
- J R Searle, 'What is a Speech Act', in J R Searle (ed.), *The Philosophy of Language* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1971)
- J R Searle, 'Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973)
- J R Searle, 'Reiterating the Differences: A reply to Derrida', *Glyph* 1 (1977) 198-208.

- J R Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979)
- J R Searle, F Kiefer & M Bierwisch, 'Editors Introduction', in J R Searle, F Kiefer & M Bierwisch (eds.), *Speech-Act Theory and Pragmatics* (Dordrecht, Reidel, 1980)
- J R Searle, 'Intentionality and Method', *The Journal of Philosophy* 78:11 (November 1981) 720-733
- J R Searle, 'The Word Turned Upside Down: Review of J Culler's 'On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism (Ithaca NY, Cornell University Press, 1982)', *New York Review of Books* 30:16 (27<sup>th</sup> October 1983) 74-79.
- J R Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983)
- J R Searle & D Vanderveken, *Foundations of Illocutionary Logic* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985)
- J R Searle, 'Collective Intentions and Actions,' in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- J R Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, Penguin Books, 1996)
- J R Searle, 'How Performatives Work', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 85-107.
- D Shwayder, 'A semantics of utterance, formalized', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- H Silverman, 'Authors of Works/Readings of Texts', *Journal of Philosophy* 83:11 (1986) pp 691-692
- Q Skinner, 'Conventions and the Understanding of Speech Acts,' *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) 118-138
- B Smith, "Towards a History of Speech Act Theory",  
<<http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/articles/speechact.html>>, also in A. Burkhardt (ed.), *Speech Acts, Meanings and Intentions. Critical Approaches to the Philosophy of John R. Searle*, (Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 1990), 29-61.
- B H Smith, 'Poetry as Fiction', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 259-281
- J M Smith and J W McClendon Jr, 'Religious language after J L Austin', *Religious Studies* 8:1 (March 1972), p 55-63.
- J M Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2002)
- D Springorum, 'Review of Knuk, J, and Schmitz, H W,' 'Ritualisierte Kommunikation und Sozialstruktur' (Hamburg, Helmut Buske Vrelag, 1980), *Journal of Pragmatics* 8:1 (February 1984) 146-149
- G Steiner, *Real Presences: Is there anything in what we say?* (London, Faber and Faber 1990)
- M Steinmann Jr, 'Cumulation, Revolution, and Progress', *New Literary History* 5:3 (Spring 1974) 477-490.
- S L Stell, 'Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and Tracy', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64:4, 679-703
- E Stenius, 'Mood and Language-game', *Synthese* 17 (1967) 254-274.
- M Stenmark, *Rationality in Science, Religion, and Everyday Life; A critical evaluation of four models of Rationality* (Notre Dame IN, University of Notre Dame Press, 1995)



- M Stenmark, *Scientism: Science, Ethics and Religion* (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001)
- S Stewart, 'Shouts on the Street: Bakhtin's Anti-Linguistics', *Critical Inquiry* 10:2 (1983) 265-281
- D R Stiver, 'Ricoeur, Speech-act Theory, and the Gospels as History', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 50-72.
- J Stout, 'What is the Meaning of a Text?', *New Literary History* 14 (1982) 1-12
- J Stout, 'The Relativity of Interpretation', *Monist* 69 (1986) 103-118
- P F Strawson, 'Intention and Convention in Speech Acts,' in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 380-400
- P F Strawson, 'Austin and 'Locutionary Meaning'', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973)
- J Streeck, 'Embodied Contexts, Transcontextuals, and the Timing of speech acts', *Journal of Pragmatics* 8 (1994) 113-137
- P Suppes and C Crangle, 'Context-fixing Semantics for the Language of Action' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) pp 47-76
- I Thalberg, 'Austin on Abilities,' in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 182-204
- A C Thiselton, 'The Parables as Language Event', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23:4 (1970) 437-468.
- A C Thiselton, 'The Use of philosophical Categories in New Testament Hermeneutics', *The Churchman* 87:2 (1973) 87-100.
- A C Thiselton, 'The Supposed Power of Words in the Biblical Writings', *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 25:2 (1974) 283-299.
- A C Thiselton, *Language Liturgy and Meaning. Grove Liturgical Study no. 2* (Bramcote, Grove Books, 1975)
- A C Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Exeter, Paternoster Press, 1980).
- A C Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London, Marshall Pickering, 1992).
- A C Thiselton, 'Christology in Luke, Speech-Act Theory, and the Problem of Dualism in Christology after Kant' in J B Green and M Turner (eds.) *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994) 453-472
- AC Thiselton, 'Authority and Hermeneutics: Some Proposals for a More Creative Agenda' in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) 107-141
- A C Thiselton, 'The Logical Role of the Liar Paradox in Titus 1:12,13: A Dissent from the Commentaries in the light of Philosophical and Logical Analysis', *Biblical Interpretation* 2:2 (1994) 207-223

- A C Thiselton, Review Article: 'Speech Act Theory and the Claim that God Speaks: Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Divine discourse*', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 50 (1997) 97-110
- A C Thiselton, *Thiselton on Hermeneutics: the collected works and new essays of Anthony Thiselton* (Ashgate contemporary thinkers on Religion. Collected works), (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006).
- A C Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).
- A C Thiselton, *The Holy Spirit: In biblical teaching, through the centuries, and today*, (London, SPCK, 2013)
- R H Thomason, 'Accommodation, Meaning, and Implicature: Interdisciplinary Foundations for Pragmatics', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- C Travis, 'On being truth-valued', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- A Trognon, 'Speech Acts and the logic of mutual understanding', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 121-133.
- S L Tsohatzidis, 'Ways of doing things with Words: an Introduction', 'The gap between speech acts and mental states', and 'Speaker meaning, sentence meaning and metaphor' all in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)
- J O Urmson, 'Austin's Philosophy', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 22-31
- J O Urmson, W V O Quine and S Hampshire, 'A Symposium on Austin's Method,' in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 76-100.
- J O Urmson, 'Performative Utterances', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* II (1977) 120-127.
- J O Urmson, 'Prichard and Knowledge', in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) 11-24
- P Valesio, 'On the Unconventional', *New Literary History* 13:1, (Autumn 1981) 161-169.
- P Valliere, *Conciliarism: a History of Decision-making in the Church*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- A G van Arde, 'Narrative point of view: An ideological reading of Luke 12:35-48', *Neotestamentica* 22 (1988) 235-252.
- D Vanderveken, 'On the Unification of Speech Act Theory and Formal Semantics', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- D Vanderveken, 'A complete formulation of a simple logic of elementary illocutionary acts', in S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)

- D Vanderveken and S Kubo, 'Introduction', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 1-21.
- D Vanderveken, 'Universal Grammar and Speech Act Theory', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 25-62.
- K J Vanhoozer, 'The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms', in D A Carson & J D Woodbridge (eds.) *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press, 1986) 53-104
- K J Vanhoozer, 'A Lamp in the Labyrinth: the Hermeneutics of "Aesthetic" Theology', *Trinity Journal* 8:1 (1987) 25-56.
- K J Vanhoozer, *Biblical Narrative in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur: a study in hermeneutics and theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990)
- K J Vanhoozer, 'God's Mighty Speech Acts: The Doctrine of Scripture Today', in P E Satterthwaite & D F Wright (eds.) *A Pathway into the Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1994) 143-181
- K J Vanhoozer, *Is there a meaning in this text? The Bible, the reader and the morality of literary knowledge* (Leicester, Apollos, 1998)
- K J Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics*, (Downers Grove IL, InterVarsity Press, 2002).
- K J Vanhoozer, 'Discourse on Matter: Hermeneutics and the 'Miracle' of Understanding', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 7:1 (2005) 5-37
- K J Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic approach to Christian Theology*, (Louisville KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2005)
- K J Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- R C Van Leeuwen, 'On Bible Translation and Hermeneutics', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 284-311
- H A Veaser (ed.), *The Stanley Fish Reader*, (Malden MA, Blackwell, 1999)
- B Vermazen, 'Aesthetic Satisfaction' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) 201-218
- V N Volosinov, *Freudianism; A Critical Sketch* (Bloomington IN, Indiana University Press, 1987), first published in this translation as *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* (Academic Press 1976) with a different translator's introduction and different Appendices.
- V N Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2000) first published in this translation by Seminar Press 1973 without the author's introduction of 1929.
- K L Walton, 'The Presentation and Portrayal of Sound Patterns' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) 237-257

- T Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002)
- G Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1987)
- G J Warnock, 'John Langshaw Austin; a Biographical Sketch', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 3-21
- G J Warnock, 'Some Types of Performative Utterance', in *Essays on J L Austin by Sir Isaiah Berlin and others*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press 1973)
- F Watson, *Text, Church and World; Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (London, T & T Clark 1994)
- E Weigand, 'The Dialogic Principle Revisited', *Dialoganalyse* III:1 (1991) 75-104
- E Weigand, 'Word meaning and utterance meaning', *Journal of Pragmatics* 20 (1993) 253-268.
- E Weigand, 'Review of M Sbisà, *Linguaggio, ragione, interazione. Per una teoria pragmatica degli atti linguistici* (Bologna, Il Mulino, 1989),' *Journal of Pragmatics* 20:4 (1993) 385-390.
- E Weigand, 'The State of the Art in Speech Act Theory (Review Article of S L Tsohatzidis (ed.), *Foundations of Speech Act Theory: Philosophical and Linguistic Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1994)' in *Pragmatics and Cognition* 4 (1996) 367-406
- A R White, 'Mentioning the Unmentionable', in K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969) 219-225
- A R White, review of K T Fann (ed.) *Symposium on J L Austin* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), *The Philosophical Quarterly* 20:79 (April 1970) 181-182.
- H White, 'Conventional Conflicts', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 145-160.
- H C White: 'Introduction: Speech Act theory and Literary Criticism', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 1-24
- H C White: 'The value of Speech Act theory for Old Testament hermeneutics', *Semeia* 41: *Speech Act theory and Biblical Criticism* (1988) 41-63
- C Williams, *Selected Writings* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1961)
- C Williams, *Essential Writings in Spirituality and Theology* (Boston MA, Cowley Publications, 1993)
- R Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000)
- R Williams, *Arius* (London, SCM Press, 2001, Second edition).
- R Williams, "How does God reveal himself? A Christian Perspective", *Lecture given by the Archbishop of Canterbury at the World Islamic Call Society Campus, Tripoli, Libya, 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009*,  
<<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/833/how-does-god-reveal-himself-a-christian-perspective>> (4<sup>th</sup> March 2013).
- R Williams, 'Word and Spirit', in E F Rogers Jr (ed.), *The Holy Spirit: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Chichester, John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 53-67
- R Williams, 'Dialogue is a means of 'God-given discovery'; *address at the Christian Muslim Forum Conference of Scholars, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2010*,  
<<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/926/archbishop-dialogue-is-a-means-of-god-given-discovery#sthash.w3e6YWeu.dpuf>> (4<sup>th</sup> March 2013).

- D Wilson and D Sperber, 'Mood and the Analysis of Non-declarative Sentences' in J Dancy, J M E Moravcsik & C C W Taylor (eds.) *Human Agency: Language, Duty and Value. Philosophical Essays in Honor of J O Urmson* (Stanford CA, Stanford University Press, 1988) 77-101
- M Wise, 'Review of R S Briggs, *Words in Action: Speech Act Theory and Biblical Interpretation* (London, T & T Clark, 2001)', *Ars Disputandi*, <<http://www.arsdisputandi.org/index.html?http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000144/index.html>> (2<sup>nd</sup> February 2012)
- L Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1967)
- L Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1989).
- L Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1997)
- N Wolterstorff, *Divine discourse: Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- N Wolterstorff, 'The Promise of Speech-act Theory for Biblical Interpretation', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 73-90
- S K Wood, 'The Liturgy. Participatory Knowledge of God in the Liturgy', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 95-118
- A Woods, 'How do we know that we have the author's intended meaning?' <<http://spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/10/10.htm>>
- W A Woods, 'On Plans and Plan Recognition: Comments on Pollack and on Kautz', in P R Cohen, J Morgan and M E Pollack (eds.), *Intentions in Communication* (Cambridge MA, MIT Press, 1992)
- World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No 111*, (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 1982)
- World Council of Churches, "A Treasure in Earthen Vessels: An Instrument for an Ecumenical Reflection on Hermeneutics", WCC <<http://www.oikoumene.org/gr/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/iv-interpretation-the-meaning-of-our-words-and-symbols/a-treasure-in-earthen-vessels-an-instrument-for-an-ecumenical-reflection-on-hermeneutics.html>> (4<sup>th</sup> March 2013)
- E Wright, 'Derrida, Searle, Context, Games, Riddles', *New Literary History* 13:3 (Spring 1982) 463-477.
- S I Wright, 'Words of Power: Biblical Language and Literary Criticism with Reference to Stephen Prickett's *Words and the Word* and Mark 1:21-28', in C Bartholomew, C Greene and K Möller (eds.), *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation. Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 2* (Carlisle, Paternoster Press, 2001) 224-240
- T Yamada, 'An Ascription-Based Theory of Illocutionary Acts', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 151-174.

- M Yamanashi, 'Speech-Act Constructions, Illocutionary Forces, and Conventionality', in D Vanderveken and S Kubo (eds.), *Essays in Speech Act Theory: Pragmatics and Beyond New Series 77* (Amsterdam, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002) 225-238.
- D S Yeago, 'The Bible. The Spirit, the Church, and the Scriptures: Biblical Inspiration and Interpretation Revisited', in J J Buckley and D S Yeago (eds.), *Knowing the Triune God: The Work of the Spirit in the Practices of the Church*, (Grand Rapids MI, William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001) 49-93
- S C Yeazell, 'Convention, Fiction and Law', *New Literary History* 13:1 (Autumn 1981) 89-102.
- F Young, *The Art of Performance; Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London, Darton Longman & Todd, 1990)