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On reading God the author

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Abstract: **The first part of the essay explore's three features of Wolterstorff's account of God as a performer of speech acts: (1) the claim that God literally speaks, suggesting that this claim needs something like a Thomistic theory of analogy as an alternative to univocity and mere metaphor; (2) the claim that speaking is not reducible to revealing; and (3) the political implications of these claims, especially in relation to Habermasian theory. The second part focuses on the theory of double discourse, which seeks to make sense of the notion that God speaks to us through the human voices of prophets, apostles, and especially of Scripture, and seeks to show that a fuller account of the speech act by which God deputizes or appropriates human speech is needed. The final section suggests that Ricoeur and Derrida are not the threat to his theory that Wolterstorff takes them to be and that their emphasis on the text, rather than the author, makes sense in contexts where we have only the text to consult.**

'Augustine believed that God was a speaking God – that God says things to human beings. That belonged to his background beliefs.'[1] The same can be said for Nicholas Wolterstorff. The two questions to which he devotes primary attention in *Divine Discourse* are these: (1) how could it make sense to say that the Bible is the word of God, that in and through the Bible God speaks to us? and (2) what would be the appropriate hermeneutic for the Bible if we believe it to be divine discourse? He has wonderfully thought-provoking suggestions to make on each front. But his subtitle, 'Philosophical reflections on the claim that God speaks', makes it plain that he sees these specific questions in the larger context of how we think of God. He recognizes that the issue of divine speech is intimately linked to the question of a personal God, and while he doesn't quite put it this way, he suggests that divine discourse is the litmus test for distinguishing theism from pantheism, the propensity of many different kinds of philosophical theology to side with materialism in declaring the Ultimate to be impersonal (even if it is somehow the ground of the personal).

For the most part the belief that God speaks remains in the background as the

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presupposition on which the more specific questions are posed. But Wolterstorff makes three contributions, however brief, to the general notion that God speaks. First, he insists that we speak literally and not metaphorically when we say that God speaks. This is crucial, for pantheistic theologies can use personification as a trope without undermining their ultimate commitment to the ultimate impersonality of the Real.

Wolterstorff cites Maimonides and Schneider to the effect that since God lacks hands and tongue and hence cannot literally inscribe or utter sentences, we can only speak of divine discourse metaphorically (10–11). Against them he appeals to the distinction in speech-act theory between locutionary acts (uttering, inscribing) and illocutionary acts (asserting, commanding, promising, and so forth). The latter, it is claimed, can be performed in a variety of ways without the former, and once this is recognized 'the argument of Maimonides and Schneider against God [literally] speaking appears patently fallacious'. We can attribute illocutionary acts to God 'leaving it open how God performs those actions' (13).

But will this work? In the first place, when Wolterstorff suggests ways of performing illocutionary acts without uttering or inscribing, he gives such examples as 'producing a blaze, or smoke, or a sequence of light-flashes' (13), the sign language of the deaf, and such conventional gestures as 'winks, nudges, shrugs, nods, and so forth' (38). But since for human speakers these involve the use of the body as much as uttering or inscribing do, the fact that, for instance, we can agree by nodding without uttering or inscribing anything doesn't seem to help much with the question of divine discourse. Speech acts remain tied to embodiment. As long as we leave it 'open how God performs those actions' speech-act theory doesn't do much damage to Maimonides and Schneider.

More seriously, it may help them by pointing away from the claim that God literally performs illocutionary acts? When the poet says that 'beauty calls',[2] or that 'death calls',[3] an illocutionary act of calling (inviting, commanding) is attributed to beauty or to death in the absence of both the locutionary acts that normally accompany such an act in human discourse and such bodily substitutes as nodding, winking, sign language, and so forth. But this is plainly metaphor! So far is speech-act theory from providing a substantive refutation of Maimonides and Schneider that the regular habit poets have of attributing illocutionary acts metaphorically to 'subjects' incapable of uttering or inscribing (or performing other bodily 'locutionary' acts) would seem rather to count as prima facie evidence in favour of the claim that we can only speak of divine discourse metaphorically. When we make such attributions we do what poets do – we speak in metaphor.

On God as a performer of speech acts

Both the poet and the theologian want to attribute illocutionary acts to 'subjects' lacking the equipment for the normally associated locutionary acts.

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Both want the discourse to which they refer to be at once like and unlike human discourse. But the theistic theologian wants to be distinguish (this) God talk from poetry by understanding it to be literal. It seems to me that we need more than speech-act theory if we wish to claim that God literally speaks (in which case, of course, God might well speak both literally and metaphorically). Taking a cue from Aquinas, we might say that we need two distinctions, one between literal and metaphorical and the other between analogical and univocal.

After defending Holy Scripture's metaphorical discourse about God,[4] Aquinas distinguishes two modes of positive predication, metaphorical and 'proper' or literal. Those predicates that essentially involve some imperfection, such as corporeality, can only be applied to God metaphorically, as when we call God a lion. But those predicates which do not essentially involve imperfection, such as goodness, can be applied properly or literally (*ST*, 1.13.2–3). They 'are in God in a more eminent way than in creatures … . As regards what is signified by these names, they belong *properly* to God and *more properly* than they belong to creatures, and are applied *primarily* to Him' (*ST*, 1.13.3, my emphasis).

Aquinas hastens to insist that as in metaphor, there is a difference between the way we use these terms of God and of creatures. 'But as regards their mode of signification, they do not properly and strictly apply to God; for their mode of signification befits creatures' (*ST*, 1.13.3). In terms of the *res significata*, what the terms signify, these predicates apply primarily and properly to God and only derivatively to creatures. In terms of the *modus significandi*, the way in which we grasp the meanings through our experience of creatures, they apply primarily to creatures and derivatively to God. In neither direction, ontologically from God to creatures and epistemically from creatures to God, is meaning univocal. But in these cases the likeness-with-unlikeness of meaning is not metaphor but analogy (*ST*, 1.13.5–6, 10).

NB – Aquinas denies both that literal discourse is necessarily univocal and, correspondingly, that non-univocal discourse, if not utterly equivocal, is necessarily metaphorical. There is a *tertium quid* between univocity and metaphor, namely analogy.

Applied to divine discourse, the theist should say that 'God speaks' is a literal but analogical claim. It is analogical because divine discourse is both like and unlike human discourse; but this is not metaphor, because the performance of illocutionary acts belongs properly and primarily to God and only derivatively and by participation to human creatures. Just as what we do when we love is a pale reflection of what God does and, indeed, is, so what we do when we speak (assert, promise, command) is a pale reflection of what God does in divine discourse. To make sense of the claim that God literally speaks, it seems to me that one needs an ontology of participation and analogy, or something very much like it. The burden is too great for a pragmatics of speech acts to carry. I suspect, (1) that some such ontology is among Wolterstorff's background beliefs, and (2) that he will need

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to invoke it explicitly if he wishes to make sense of the claim that God literally speaks.

A second contribution Wolterstorff makes to the general theory of divine discourse is summed up in his claim that speaking is not revealing. Of course, he does not deny that when we speak we do reveal a great deal, often more than we realize or intend. It is just that conveying information is not the sole or even primary purpose of language. In the language of speech-act theory, asserting is only one of the many things we do with words. As is fitting in a discourse about divine discourse, Wolterstorff most frequently speaks about speaking in terms of asserting, promising, and commanding. Theologically speaking, this is a protest against reducing divine discourse to revelation, conceived as ignorance dispelling whether by asserting or by manifesting. We have a kind of Venn diagram. The concept of revealing is broader than that of discourse, because speech acts are not the only way we show or manifest; at the same time the concept of discourse is broader than that of revealing, since, for example, to promise is to do more than to assert, and to command is to do more than to show or manifest.

This involves a decentring of the theoretical, the indicative, the constative: assertion is no longer the privileged speech act. Language is much more diverse than merely telling others what we believe to be the case. Luther understood this when he somewhere said that we should ask of every passage of Scripture we read not merely the question, What does it tell me to believe? but also the questions: 'For what does it tell me to give thanks?', 'For what does it tell me to repent?', and 'What does it tell me to do?'.[5]

So far we have only a weak decentring. There is more to language than assertion, communicating beliefs, liquidating ignorance, and keeping epistemologists employed. But a number of philosophers have argued for a stronger decentring. When Heidegger presents knowing as a 'founded mode' of being-in-the-world and assertion as a 'derivative mode of interpretation',[6] when Foucault argues that knowledge is inextricably linked to power,[7] or when Wittgenstein tells us that language games are forms of life,[8] they are arguing not only against the privilege of factual knowledge and its communication but especially against its autonomy. They see our purely indicative interests and achievements as so deeply embedded in personal and social practices that they are always relative to and to a significant degree of function of those practices.[9] If we use the term 'practical' in a broad, Deweyan rather than a narrow, Kantian sense, we can speak of the primacy of practical reason.

Perhaps it isn't crucial to Wolterstorff's argument, but it would be interesting to know whether his decentring of asserting is the weak version implicit in speech-act theory or some stronger version with affinities for Heidegger, or Foucault, or Wittgenstein, or Dewey.

A third theme related to God as a literal speaker is political. In only the second paragraph of his Preface, Wolterstorff asks: 'might it be that God is a member of

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the community of speakers?' (ix). In ways not noted in the text, Wolterstorff has a very Habermasian view of a speech community. First, it is a matter of norms. Rejecting both behaviourist and expressivist accounts of what discourse is, he notes both (1) that discourse is the performance of illocutionary acts, and (2) that this involves the speaker in having a normative standing, normatively ascribed (83). To speak is to be accountable, to have rights and responsibilities. I have the right to say some things, such as 'I love you' to my wife, but not others, such as 'You are pardoned' to a prisoner (since I am neither State Governor nor President). And I have responsibilities such that when I fail to live up to these my speech acts are '*normatively* ill-formed'.

There are three ways in which this can happen. My discourse may be an insincere expression of my mental state, an inaccurate claim about the facts of the world, or an act inappropriate in relation to various social norms. This third norm means that, for example, the child cannot rightly say to the parent, 'Go straight to your room', not can I, who am not the umpire, call the runner out at home. Verbal acts of sexual harrassment would also be normatively ill-formed in this third way.

These three ways in which speech acts can violate the norms to which they are subject are a second Habermasian feature of Wolterstorff's account. They correspond precisely to the three validity claims of: (a) truthfulness or sincerity, (b) truth, and (c) rightness or appropriateness in relation to: (i) the inner world of the speaker, (ii) the outer world of facts, and (iii) the public world of social rules.[10]

The normative standing of the speaker, the rights and duties to which her speech acts are subject, are normatively ascribed. They are not (normally) the product of personal preference or self designation,[11] but of the rules which constitute a particular social group. Wolterstorff recognizes the large element of convention or social stipulation involved in these rules and writes, 'If there is any place where the notion – so popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – of an *implicit compact*, is appropriate, it is here!' (89).[12] For Wolterstorff, as for Habermas, the speech community is already a body politic.

Now it gets interesting. Wolterstorff has suggested that a truly personal God, one who literally speaks, will be a member of the community of speakers. This would seem to imply that God has rights and duties. But this is in tension with the claim of divine command theory that God has no obligations, from which William Alston draws the conclusion that since making promises involves becoming obligated, God can be said to make promises only metaphorically. But whether one denies that God has duties on the basis of divine command theory or some other ground (as in Alston's case), Wolterstorff is worried about the implication that 'God's participation in the community of discoursers is, in general, deeply idiosyncratic' (101). To avoid this, he suggests that God can have duties if 'an action might be required of God without any norm being imposed on God from outside … the fact that certain actions are character-required of God, with respect to

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God's loving character, is not the consequence of something's being imposed on God from outside' (110).

No doubt an argument along these lines will remove from God the idiosyncrasy of being the speaker we would all too often like to be ourselves, one with rights but no duties; but it leaves God radically idiosyncratic with respect to how God comes to be obligated. Unlike our duties, God's duties do not come from without; nor are they, like ours, significantly the products of social conventions. But this is as it should be. A God who couldn't speak would not be a personal God; but a God who belonged to the community of speakers in a manner not radically idiosyncratic, would not be God at all.

Theocratic political theory and practice have the merit of taking God to be a radically idiosyncratic member of the speech community. But they have the disadvantage of needing to designate some human entity as the authoritative vehicle of divine speech, with the result of domination, exploitation, intolerance, persecution, inquisition, holy war, and terrorism. Habermas solves the problem by the 'linguistification of the sacred'.[13] God is entirely removed from the scene and the (procedurally) rational consensus of the human speech community becomes the sacred, the highest source of both theoretical and practical norms. In a post-metaphysical age when substantive rationality, for example, natural law, is widely suspected of being ideology more than insight, Habermas represents what seems increasingly to be the future of liberalism.

This can hardly be an alternative to theocracy attractive to Wolterstorff, who elsewhere speaks of the need for a post-liberal politics. One the one hand, one cannot expect a book on divine discourse to be a treatise on political theory. But on the other hand, the political dimensions of the theory are so explicit and so significant that they cry out for at least a sketch of an answer to the question: what sort of post-theocratic, post-liberal politics is appropriate to a theism for which a personal God is a radically idiosyncratic member of the community of speakers?

On the Bible as the word of God: the theory of double discourse and the hermeneutics of authorial discourse interpretation

So far we have only been speaking about the idea that God literally performs such illocutionary acts as asserting, commanding, and promising. In turning to the more specific notion that God does so in and through the Bible, Wolterstorff appeals to the notion of double discourse, the idea that one person can perform an illocutionary act through the locutionary act of another. Thus, for example, in the *Confessions*, in words uttered by a child and in words inscribed by Paul, Augustine hears God speaking to him, performing the illocutionary act of commanding.

There are two modes of such double discourse within the merely human sphere, deputized and appropriated discourse. In the former case, the ultimate

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speaker authorizes another to speak on her behalf before the fact, as when the Prime Minister sends an ambassador or when anyone gives the power of attorney to another. In the latter case the authorization comes after the fact, as when a boss signs a letter inscribed by a secretary, or when Members of Parliament say, 'Here! Here!' – meaning, 'I agree. She speaks for me too'. The recipients of the messages rightly ascribe the speech acts which constitute them to those who deputize or appropriate them, for example, the Prime Minister and the boss. Wolterstorff points out that the degree of supervision is not the crucial factor. The letter, for example, could have been dictated, right down to the punctuation. Or it may have been composed by a secretary, who knew what needed to be said, while the boss was out of town. The important fact is that the boss signs the letter, becoming through this appropriation the performer of the illocutionary acts it contains, commitments, instructions, questions, and so forth. The reply will not be addressed, Dear Mr Secretary.

Wolterstorff thinks that some of the prophetic and apostolic speech contained in the Bible (but not the Bible as a whole) can be understood as deputized double discourse in which God speaks through human agents. However, it is only as appropriated double discourse that the Bible as a whole can be thought to be the word of God, a site where God speaks to us. This raises the question as to what counts as the after-the-fact appropriation of the entire book. If, as preachers are so fond of saying, the Bible is God's love letter to humankind, written by dozens of secretaries, what is to count as God's signing of the letter?

We are told that 'the event which *counts as* God's appropriating [the Christian Bible] as the medium of God's own discourse is presumably that rather drawn out event consisting of the Church's settling on this totality as its canon' (54). Wolterstorff has acknowledged that as stated this will not do. The act of a human entity, the Church, can hardly count as the divine act of appropriation. One might, of course, construe the 'rather drawn out event' in question as a divinely deputized or appropriated speech act, but this would only begin a regress in which the question would again arise as to where the deputizing or appropriation is to be found.

Appeal to the process of canonization can work only if it is construed in terms of divine and not merely human agency. Moreover, as Wolterstorff recognizes, the divine action in question needs to be one or more speech acts, for deputizing and authorizing are illocutionary acts. God must not only be causally involved but 'must causally bring about events *generative* of divine discourse' (117), that is, events that count as illocutionary acts. Wolterstorff immediately turns to a question which relates discussion about divine discourse to the debate about miracles. He asks, 'might all the events generative of divine discourse … be part of a plan God formed and initiated at original creation, requiring, in addition, only sustenance and general concurrence for their coming about?' (119). He replies with a strong case for the conclusion that 'divine discourse of anything like the range and

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diversity claimed in the scriptures and traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, almost certainly requires direct intervention by God in the affairs of human history; and contemporary science provides us no good reason for thinking that such intervention does not occur' (129).

Fair enough. But can anything more basic be said about the causality that produces events of discourse? One can think of any number of causal accounts of the process of canonization – Marxist, Hobbesian, feminist, for example – in which the causal agency is not divine. So far from contributing to a theory of divine discourse, such accounts would lend at least prima facie support to the claim that we speak metaphorically when we attribute speech to God. A God who literally speaks must sometimes speak directly, without the benefit of deputized ambassadors or appropriated secretaries, precisely in order to deputize the ambassadors and to appropriate the writings of the secretaries. No doubt causality is involved; no doubt it is not the causality of an embodied locutionary acts such as uttering, inscribing, nodding, winking, and so forth; and no doubt it involves supernatural intervention in human history. But can we say anything about the analogues of locutionary acts by which God directly performs illocutionary acts or are we left with 'leaving it open how God performs those actions'? (13). Don't we need a little more metaphysics – not for worship or for prayer, to be sure, but for a philosophical theology?

Some theologies will attribute the relevant divine causality to the Holy Spirit.[14] While that is not an answer to the question just posed, it poses another question. Should we think of the divine appropriation of the Bible in wholesale or retail terms? If we locate appropriation in canonization, we get it wholesale. But does it not frequently come retail? I do not believe that God is speaking to me through this biblical text, because I believe it to be part of a whole book (of books) that has been appropriated in its entirely. Rather, my belief that God is speaking to me through the reading or proclamation of this text is a basic belief, enabled by the inner witness of the Holy Spirit and not dependent evidentially on any beliefs about canonization. When Augustine describes his own experience and that of St Anthony of hearing God speak through the words of Scripture, it sounds more like their belief that God was speaking was basic than that it was derived from a belief about canonization. Moreover, I am confident that Wolterstorff is comfortable with the notion that many of our beliefs about God are properly basic.

No doubt what I am calling wholesale and retail appropriation are not mutually exclusive.[15] But it is perhaps a matter of some theological importance where the emphasis falls;[16] and it is perhaps surprising that for a thinker as deeply reformed as Wolterstorff the emphasis falls on canonization rather than the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

After discussing how the Bible could be God's word, a vehicle and locus of divine discourse, Wolterstorff turns to the question of an hermeneutic appropriate to such a book. He believes it to be the traditional practice of the Christian church

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and calls it authorial-discourse interpretation. Since the Bible always has two authors, one (or more) human[17] and one divine, there will be a dual task. The first hermeneutic asks what the human author said by writing the text, that is, what illocutionary acts did (s)he perform. The second hermeneutic asks the same question about the divine author. What speech acts did God perform in appropriating this text.

Although he often speaks about what God said or was saying, in the examples of double discourse involving Augustine he talks about what God was saying 'then and there', that is, when Augustine heard the child's *tolle lege*; and he has Augustine believing, as he reads from Romans, that 'by way of his now reading those words from Paul's letter, God was *here and now* saying to him' (5, 7). He wishes to explore and, I believe, defend, the possibility 'that God *now speaks to us* by way of our now being *presented* in some fashion with that [biblical] text … . It may be a medium of *contemporary* divine discourse, a medium of God's *here and now* addressing you and me' (56; cf. 131). So perhaps we shouldn't put too much stock in the past tenses Wolterstorff usually uses, for he clearly does not mean to imply that what God once said is just a fact about the past which we discover; it also becomes an event of the present in which we are addressed. The second hermeneutic asks what God was saying (to others) then and is saying (to us) now in the text under consideration.[18]

Authorial-discourse interpretation is to be sharply distinguished from so-called 'romantic' hermeneutics and its concern for the intention of the author. The latter presupposes an expressivist theory of language, according to which its function is to give outward expression to the inner mental life of the speaker or writer, and conjoins to this a hermeneutic whose task is to retrace this movement in the opposite direction (from outside to inside) with the goal of discovering the inner psychic life of the author. The *mens auctoris* or the intention of the author fixes or, perhaps, simply is the meaning of the text.[19]

Wolterstorff rejects the 'romantic' account of language and interpretation. For

> **… to speak is not, as such, to express one's inner self but to take up a normative stance in the public domain.[20] The myth dies hard that to read a text for authorial discourse is to enter the dark world of the author's psyche. It's nothing of the sort. It is to read to discover what assertings, what promisings, what requestings, what commandings, are rightly to be ascribed to the author on the ground of her having set down the words that she did in the situation in which she set them down. Whatever be the dark demons and bright angels of the author's inner self that led her to take up this stance in public, it is that stance itself that we hope by reading to recover, not the dark demons and bright angels.** (93)

Among other things, this means that we want to know what the author said, not what she intended to say, for the two do not always coincide. Radames does not intend to betray Egypt by giving military secrets to the king of the Ethiopians, but when he tells Aïda where the Egyptian army plans to ambush the Ethiopians, while

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her father is listening in hiding, his speech act consists in giving state secrets to the enemy. This is one of the ways in which the meaning of the discourse (what illocutionary act it counts as) exceeds the intention of the author.

On how not to pick a fight with Ricoeur and Derrida

I do not want to suggest that Wolterstorff is paranoid, but he seems uncommonly eager to have enemies. He sees authorial-discourse interpretation as 'deeply contested' in the modern world (131). So he devotes three chapters to picking a fight, unnecessarily, as it seems to me, with the interpretations of interpretation given by Ricoeur, Derrida, and performance theory. No doubt it is primarily Ricoeur and Gadamer who come to mind when we read, 'Contemporary hermeneutics doesn't invite placing this topic [divine discourse] on its agenda; it resists it. A pervasive theme in contemporary hermeneutics is that there is something deeply misguided about reading texts to find out what someone might have been saying thereby' (15). Wolterstorff speaks of Ricoeur's 'case against authorial-discourse interpretation' (141), and of his 'attack' on it (133, 153). When Ricoeur speaks of the distanciated situation in which 'the author is not available for questioning',[21] Wolterstorff takes this to mean that 'the author is entirely absent from the interpretative process' (148), and that 'discourse proper has disappeared' (149).

But he has just quoted Ricoeur as saying, 'Not that we can conceive of a text without an author; the tie between the speaker and the discourse is not abolished, but distended and complicated' (145).[22] And he refers us to the passage where Ricoeur says, 'But this de-psychologizing of interpretation does not imply that the notion of authorial meaning has lost significance'. He opposes both the intentional fallacy 'which holds the author's intention as the criterion for any valid interpretation', but also 'the fallacy of hypostatizing the text as an authorless entity', a fallacy which 'forgets that a text remains a discourse told by somebody, said by someone to someone else about something. It is impossible to cancel out this main characteristic of discourse without reducing texts to natural objects'.[23] Or, in other words, 'Languages do not speak, people do'.[24] Wolterstorff's reading seems to fly in the face of Ricoeur's explicit statements, leaving us puzzled with his question: 'How could Ricoeur give central importance to authorial discourse in his philosophy of language, and then, in his theory of text interpretation, acknowledge only textual sense interpretation?' (149). Ricoeur's philosophy of language as discourse is that it occurs when someone says something about something to someone. In spite of the passages just cited, Wolterstorff's question and the context in which it occurs suggest that in Ricoeur's hermeneutics the someone who speaks is eliminated so that with the author 'entirely absent … discourse proper has disappeared' (148–149).

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A better question would be, why does Ricoeur, without eliminating the author, indeed while emphasizing the author's essential role, shift emphasis from the author to the text? Before trying to answer this question we would do well to notice two things. First, Wolterstorff also wishes to depsychologize hermeneutics and in rejecting romantic-expressivist hermeneutics he shifts attention away from the author *qua* hidden psychic life. On this point there is no dispute. The author's inner life is not the goal of interpretation, nor do her intentions simply determine the meaning of her discourse. Second, in his critique of 'excavative' biblical scholarship, Wolterstorff calls attention to the convergence between his hermeneutics and two other modes of biblical interpretation, namely 'biblical theology' and narrative theology. What the three have in common is 'their focus on the text itself – the text we have' (16–17).

But clearly Ricoeur's shift of emphasis is not reducible to these two points. I want to suggest several reasons for such a shift, none of which constitutes a 'case against' or an 'attack' on authorial-discourse interpretation. First, Ricoeur distinguishes the dialogic from the distanciated context of discourse. In the first case the speaker is present so that if questions of meaning arise one can simply ask, 'What do you mean by such and such?' Distanciation occurs when 'the author is not available for questioning', when the text 'is no longer the voice of someone present'.[25] Wolterstorff is right to note that this distinction doesn't correspond to the distinction between speaking and writing. Two students passing notes in class are in a dialogic situation, while I am in a distanciated situation while listening to the State of the Union address on television. I cannot ask the President, 'What do you mean by that?' But when Ricoeur says, 'Hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends',[26] he makes it clear that he is theorizing about contexts in which 'the author is not available for questioning', which is typically if not always the situation when we read a text. A compelling reason for shifting attention from the author to the text is that the text is present and the author is not. If we want to know what the author said or is saying, (NB – if we are engaged in authorial-discourse interpretation), we shall have to ask the text and not the author. Precisely in order to find out what the author said we shall have to ask what the text says.[27]

But secondly, we are often more interested in what is being said than in who said it. In the someone-says-*something-about-something*-to-someone formula, emphasis now rightly falls the italicized portion. The 'what' of the discourse is more significant than the 'who'. After all, the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not important because Kant wrote it but vice versa. In these circumstances what we look for in a text is 'the projection of a world, the proposal of a mode of being-in-the-world which the text discloses'.[28] Wolterstorff acknowledges that we read texts in this way. 'When someone who knows well as sonnet of John Donne reads it again, she ordinarily does so in order once again to delight in the words and the world of the poem' (132; cf. 185). A second reason for shifting attention from the 'who' to the 'what', from the author to the text, is that the latter in each case is

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often more significant to us than the former.[29] Ricoeur thinks that this is the typical case, whether we are reading a newspaper, a novel, or a treatise on divine discourse.

But this is hardly to deny that there are times when the 'what' derives its importance not from itself but from the 'who'. Commands and promises, for example, have widely varying meaning depending on who gives them. If I am reading a love letter, or a call to jury duty, or the Bible, on the assumption that it is the word of God and that it contains commands and promises addressed to me by God, the 'who' will be of utmost importance. Wolterstorff is giving a hermeneutics for just such a situation. Ricoeur is not. He is giving a more general hermeneutic for what he takes to be a more typical reading situation. But this focusing on the text rather than on the author can hardly be an attack on or a resistance to authorial-discourse interpretation in circumstances where the normative status of the author is of special significance to the reader and creates a relation far more specific than a to-whom-it-may-concern relation between an author in general and a reader in general.

I am suggesting that what Wolterstorff calls textual sense interpretation makes sense in contexts where the text but not the author is available to the interpreter and in situations where what is said does not derive its importance from who said it. Ricoeur's third reason for shifting emphasis from the author to the text is that he does not think the author is fully in control of the meaning of the text.[30] Twice Wolterstorff quotes Ricoeur's claim that the 'text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by its author … and every exegesis unfolds its procedures within the circumference of a meaning that has broken its moorings to the psychology of its author'.[31] This is only to restate the rejection of romantic hermeneutics.

One reason for this is that the meaning of a text arises not only at the intersection of author and text but also in the encounter between text and reader. The death of the author (to use language which overstates Ricoeur's case) is the birth of the reader. The meaning of the text is 'not essentially the presumed intention of the author, the lived experience of the writer, but rather what the text means for whoever complies with its injunction'.[32] But this means that the same text will have different meanings for different readers, and, insofar as the human author cannot anticipate all her readers, the text's meaning will exceed the finite horizon of her experience and intentions. She presides only partially over the meaning of her text.

But Wolterstorff makes this point himself. He gives a wonderful example of a single speech act having quite different meanings to different hearers. At dinner Mom says, 'Only two more days till Christmas'. To the kids this is a message of comfort and hope. But to Dad it can be roughly translated as 'Get off your duff and get the shopping done' (55). He later appeals to this principle in the attempt to explain why the task of biblical interpretation is

> **… forever *incomplete* … . I cannot in general just assume that what God said to me in my situation, or to my group in our situation, by way of this text is exactly**

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> **the same as what God said to other earlier readers and interpreters in their situations. But if there is indeed a rich diversity in the particularity of what God said to different people by way of authoring this text, then those different people have to try to discern that.** (185)

No doubt the mother intends both of the meanings she sends with a single locution, and no doubt God, as the ultimate author of Scripture, is the author who is able to anticipate all readers and situations and thus to intend all the messages sent. In the first case the meaning does not escape the finite horizon of its author because (in all likelihood) its only recipients fall within that horizon. In the second case the meaning does not transgress the finite horizon of its author because the author works in an infinite horizon. But Wolterstorff gives the Christmas example in his discussion of the first hermeneutic, and, for the human authors of the Bible, Ricoeur's principle clearly holds, if Wolterstorff is right in claiming that a single locution can be different illocutionary acts for different readers.

There is a second way in which the author is not fully in control of her meaning. It is what Ricoeur calls, in the subtitle to *Interpretation Theory*, 'the surplus of meaning' to be found especially in the language of metaphor and symbol. Here, we might say that the meaning exceeds the finite horizons of both the (human) author and any given reader. Some subsequent reader will legitimately find meaning in a metaphor or symbol that did not, and perhaps could not, occur to the author and her original readers. Once again, Wolterstorff agrees. Interpretation is 'forever *incomplete*' for a second reason, the 'subtlety of the text' (185). It has a richness that is not exhausted in a single reading, even by the same reader. No doubt metaphor and symbol are part, but not all, of this inexhaustible subtlety and richness.

Ricoeur has three good reasons, then, for shifting attention from author to text, for posing the hermeneutical question as, 'What does the text say?', rather than as 'What does the author say?'. In what he takes to be the typical situation of reading a text where we *set about interpreting*, as Wolterstorff like to put it (130): (1) the text is present to the interpreter but the author is not; (2) what the text says is more important than and not dependent upon who said it; and (3) the author is only partially in control of the meaning, since readers will legitimately find more and ipso facto different meaning than is to be found within the finite horizon of the author. This is, of course, a story about texts whose authors are human. Ricoeur is not offering an account of how to read a text whose author is believed to be God. But the fact that he is asking a different question from Wolterstorff and giving an appropriately, but by no means wholly different, answer, hardly counts as an attack on authorial-discourse interpretation, an obstacle that has to be cleared away if Christians are to retrieve the traditional way of reading the Bible. To the best of my knowledge he never denies that the Bible is God's word or that believers should read it to find out what God is saying to them. And he insists, in passages called to our attention in *Divine Discourse*, that he is not abolishing the role of the

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author but only complicating it. The strength of Wolterstorff's biblical hermeneutics does not depend on having Ricoeur as an enemy.

At one point he seems to realize this. Ricoeur's theory 'was not based, strictly speaking, on a rejection of authorial-discourse interpretation, but rather on the claim that to discover the sense of the text *just is* to discover the content and stance of the authorial-discourse' (153). But he immediately proceeds to speak of Ricoeur's 'attack', if only to say it is not 'not truly radical' in comparison with the 'truly radical attack' of Derrida, for whom 'the very notion of authorial discourse is untenable'.

Wolterstorff focuses on two important claims of Derrida. First, the meanings that get expressed in language are not prior to, and independent of, signification or language. One way to put this is that interpretation is not deciphering. If it were, meaning would be fully formed and fixed prior to its being encoded in some natural language for the purpose of transmission from one mind to another. Interpretation would then be the decoding or deciphering so as to replicate the original meaning, which would be wholly unaffected by the encoding and deciphering process. Thus the pig-Latin in which I transmit a message to Mom that I don't want the kids to understand is wholly external to the meaning I hope to transmit from my mind to hers.

Another way of putting this theory of meaning and language, which Derrida decisively rejects, is in terms of a postal system. I finish my essay. I send it by Priority Mail to Nick Wolterstorff and by Fed-Ex to *Religious Studies*. If the mail gets through, they will have exactly the same text I have. Its content or meaning is entirely unaffected by the vehicle by which it was transmitted from me to them. To claim, with Derrida, that meaning is internally related to language is to deny that language is like the US Postal Service (the English language, perhaps) or Fed-Ex (the German language, perhaps), an antiseptic conveyor of pre-linguistic meanings which does not contaminate them in any way.[33]

Wolterstorff finds this thesis to be part of Derrida's 'case against authorial-discourse interpretation' (162). But how? Let us just suppose, as many besides Derrida do, that language is not a postal system and interpretation is not deciphering prefabricated meanings. If I receive a love letter from my wife or from God, I can still read it to find out what she or God is saying to me. The only difference will be the fact, of which I might or might not be aware, that she could not have sent me exactly the same message had she written in Danish, and that God could not have sent me exactly the same message had the Bible not been written in Hebrew and Greek, or if I was reading a Chinese rather than an English translation. Translators know this, even if philosophers often forget it.

So it is puzzling when Wolterstorff himself supposes 'that meaning is a creature of language', and then writes, 'If meaning is not anterior to signification but a creature of signification, of *our* signification, then there is no divine Book on which we are to model our books, no divine thoughts after which to think our thoughts'

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(161). Of course, if there is no meaning but ours there is no God and no divine Book. But this follows from Derrida's atheism, not from his theory of human meaning's embeddedness in human language. Let us suppose that there is a God who desires to speak to us. God could sweep us out of the cave of human language and culture and address us in the pure sunlight of eternity. This is what the mystics claim, though they usually describe such divine discourse as silence. But that is not what the Bible is about. Like the Incarnation, biblical discourse is kenotic. It involves God's coming into the cave and speaking to us in the finitude of human language. And if, as Derrida and others argue, human language plays a constitutive role in the meanings it bears, this may spoil a certain (postal system) picture of divine discourse, no doubt more Platonic and Cartesian than biblical, to which some philosophers and theologians are deeply wedded, but it is hard to see how it eliminates the possibility of a divine Book, one in which God speaks to us.

But Derrida makes a second claim. All language has the character of writing as described in a theory that goes back at least to Aristotle. Spoken signs refer to signifieds, meanings or facts (or events, if you prefer)[34] at which thought comes to rest. They do not point beyond themselves and thus, in Derrida's term, are transcendental signifieds. But written signs refer to spoken signs which, in turn, refer beyond themselves to meanings or facts. To say that all language has the character of writing is not to make the silly claim that it always involve inscription, but to claim that all signifieds are themselves signs, pointing beyond themselves to that which is essential to what they are. Neither meanings nor facts are atomic, which Derrida says by denying that any are transcendental signifieds. They always point beyond themselves because they are internally related to other meanings and facts.

This is Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence. It is not the denial that I am ever present to a meaning or fact but that neither is ever simply or wholly present, since they always refer beyond themselves to other meanings or facts which are: (1) absent, and (2) essential to what they are. As long as I am not God, that is as along as I do not have the totality of meanings or facts before me, what is present will be a trace of what is absent. It will have a certain indeterminacy or undecidability about it.[35] I cannot fully understand the flower in the crannied wall unless I see it in the light of the whole show.

Wolterstorff complains that Derrida's notion of presence is 'murky territory' (157). But it is as clearly delineated as most philosophical concepts, and he quotes a brief and succinct account: 'every signified is also in the position of a signifier'.[36] This is the critique of the metaphysics of presence. If it is true, then presence is always partial and the dream of 'full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play'[37] remains a pipe dream.

Wolterstorff finds in Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence a 'radical attack' on his hermeneutics. But how? It is a theory of the radical finitude of human thought, but theists have at least as good reason to make that point as atheists.

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Suppose Derrida is right, or at least barking up the right tree, not in his atheism, which is separable, but in his claim that in human experience meanings and things always point beyond themselves to a total web of interconnections which we never fully possess. Would this make it impossible for us to read love letters in order to find out what our Beloved is saying to us? Things would be, at least at the theoretical level of which we might or might not be aware, messier than many philosophers would like. There would be a certain indeterminacy of meaning that could, on occasion, be more than trivial. But what kind of love would refuse a love letter unless guaranteed that it was delivered in clear and distinct ideas, written and read (deciphered) in the sunshine outside the cave?

Wolterstorff himself disavows full determinacy, the view that there is 'a definite answer to the question as to whether something does or doesn't belong to that content. We the interpreters may not know that answer; but it's there for the finding out'. Against this view, he insists that

> **… what it is a speaker wants to say, and what it is that a speaker does say, will sometimes be relatively indeterminate. Or may have a richness of content which she herself only dimly apprehends. This dimness of apprehension may itself come in degrees … . Especially is this true when we speak metaphorically.** (200–201)

So it's hard to see how Derridean indeterminacy is a 'radical attack' on authorial-discourse hermeneutics. Nor is there any paradox in the fact that Derrida 'wants us to interpret his texts for what he was saying and to get that right' (153).[38] We should not read his denial that we cannot have everything as the claim that we have nothing. I find nothing in his critique of the metaphysics of presence incompatible with his claim that interpretation

> **… cannot consist of reproducing, by the effaced and respectful doubling of commentary, the conscious, voluntary, intentional relation that the writer institutes in his exchanges with the history to which he belongs thanks to the element of language. This moment of doubling commentary should no doubt have its place in a critical reading. To recognize and respect all its classical exigencies is not easy and requires all the instruments of traditional criticism. Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. But this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*, a reading.**[39]

Like Wolterstorff, Derrida recognizes a certain indeterminacy in language, but refuses to exclude all determinacy in the process.

But, Wolterstorff insists, in denying the transcendental signified Derrida denies that there are facts. He thinks it is as clear as anything in Derrida that he does not accept the distinction between meanings and the facts that make meanings true or false. There is 'nothing transcendent to signification' (157–158).

But, as we have seen, the denial of a transcendental signified is not the denial of a difference between meanings and facts; it is rather a denial that either meanings or facts are atomic in character, that they are themselves devoid of difference, devoid of reference to what is both other than themselves and essential to what

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they are.[40] Moreover, Derrida expressly denies that language does not refer to a world beyond it. In answer to the question, 'Can language … refer to anything other than itself?' he replies:

> **It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the 'other' of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is, in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' and the 'other of language' … . Certainly, deconstruction tries to show that the question of reference is more complex and problematic than traditional theories supposed.**[41]

We are looking at two Derridean claims, that the meanings expressed in language are not wholly external to that language and that language, and for that matter, the things in the world, have the character of writing, where every signified is itself also a sign pointing beyond itself. Within this frame of reference there are two kinds of facts that do not and cannot exist: atomic facts and given facts, facts to which we have a cognitive access unmediated by language.[42] But why insist that these are the only possible facts, that whoever develops a sustained questioning of the philosophical traditions which posit them is thereby denying factuality as such? And why tie the notion that we can and should read the Bible to see what God is saying to us to such a dubious philosophical posture?

Wolterstorff has a powerful account of divine discourse, of how the Bible can be a site of divine discourse, and how we should read the Bible in that case. It can stand on its own. It does not need to pick a fight with Ricoeur and Derrida, who are either asking different questions or making philosophical claims compatible with authorial-discourse interpretation, though not necessarily compatible with all the philosophical assumptions Wolterstorff makes on the side and wants to tie (but why?) to his hermeneutical theory.

Finally, Wolterstorff seeks to distinguish his hermeneutics from performance interpretation. He suggests that Derrida's hermeneutics is 'only a special case of a much more general mode of interpretation which I will call *performance* interpretation' (169). And he calls our attention to Ricoeur's suggestion that the 'text is like a musical score and the reader like the orchestra conductor who obeys the instructions of the notation'. Ricoeur's elaboration is brief. 'If the objective meaning is something other than the subjective intention of the author, it may be construed in various ways. Misunderstanding is possible and even unavoidable. The problem of the correct understanding can no longer be solved by a simple return to the alleged situation of the author'.[43]

There would seem to be no problems for Wolterstorff here. There is a clear repudiation of romantic hermeneutics and, as a consequence, the recognition of multiple meanings. But this multiplicity is not interpreted to mean that anything goes, as the concepts of misunderstanding and correct understanding make clear.

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But Wolterstorff wants to keep his distance in two surprising ways. First, he presents performance interpretation as 'a genuine alternative to discourse interpretation, in that every text on which discourse interpretation can be practiced is also one on which performance interpretation can be practiced', and goes on to ask what a religious community loses if it settles for performance interpretation and 'doesn't interpret for what the author was saying' (169). Second, in spite of Ricoeur's clear commitments to the contrary, he seeks to drive a wedge between the two in terms of truth or correctness. In the performance case one defends one's interpretation

> **... by reference to its value for this or that sort of person. I must emphasize that when it is discourse interpretation in which one is engaged, then one has to defend one's interpretations in a very different way. The issue then is whether one's conclusions are correct, whether they are true – whether the discourser did in fact, by authoring or presenting this text, say what one claims that he said.** (181)

To see why these moves are surprising, let us look at what is involved in interpretative performance, whether our 'text' is the script of a play, or the score of a string quartet. There is a mixture of determinacy and indeterminacy. In its determinacy the text permits and requires judgments or correctness. If I am playing Hamlet and say, 'To fish or not to fish', I have simply got it wrong, and if I play a G-sharp where the score has an F, I have once again made a mistake. Performance interpretation does not simply replace questions of accuracy with questions of some other value for the performer or audience.

But there is also indeterminacy, and the text underdetermines its interpretation, making room for Branagh's Hamlet as well as Olivier's, for the Kronos Quartet version of Shostakovich's Eighth String Quartet as well as for the Borodin Quartet version. In each case, the two will be different, but not because one is right and the other wrong. Both may be judged by the most discriminating experts to be superb. When you have got everything right that can be got right, you still don't have an interpretation, and there are decisions that must be made in terms of values other than correctness. But in going beyond that value one does not abandon it. What the performance analogy suggests is that reading is itself a kind of performance (not necessarily staged for a public) in which both faithfulness in relation to a text's determinacy and creativity in relation to its indeterminacy are desiderata.

So it is terribly misleading to contrast performance and authorial interpretation in terms of whether correctness is a criterion of good interpretation. The performers ask, 'What is Shakespeare or Shostakovich saying here?', knowing that the text will answer some, but not all, of their questions. Here again, we encounter the birth of the reader from the ashes of the (alleged) author who would reduce the reader to a duplicating machine.

Instead of presenting performance interpretation and authorial interpretation as alternatives and asking what a religious community loses if it opts for the first

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instead of the second, we would do better to ask, 'What does a religious community, who reads its Scripture to find out what God is saying to them in and through it, learn about its hermeneutical task by giving serious consideration to the performance analogy?'. The answer is quite clear. It will learn that, owing to the indeterminacy of the text, there will be more than one interpretation that is worthy of commendation; and it will learn that, owing to the determinacy of the text, this does not mean that anything goes – that there is no such thing as getting it right as distinct from getting it wrong. No doubt there will be debates about how far determinacy will take us. But this could be the basis of an ecumenism that is not an indifferentism.

Notes

1. Nicholas Wolterstorff *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Subsequent references will be given parenthetically in the text. I have discussed some of the issues raised here in a review essay, 'Theology as talking about a God who talks', *Modern Theology*, **83** (1997), 525–536, but that was not a context in which Wolterstorff had the opportunity to respond.
2. Nathaniel Lee (1653–1692) *The Rival Queens: or the Death of Alexander the Great* (London: J. Bell, 1793).
3. James Shirley (1596–1666)'Cupid and Death', Morna Stuart (ed.) (London: Caxton Press, 1929).
4. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* 1.9. Subsequent references in the text will use the abbreviation *ST*.
5. That assertions ask, recommend, suggest, or perhaps command one to believe indicates their performative nature, and the reason Austin abandoned the strict dichotomy of constative and performative. I use 'constative' earlier in this paragraph in his original sense designed to emphasize the 'tractarian', fact-stating function of language. By my count we have the same three-to-one ratio in 2 Timothy, 3.16, where we are told that Scripture is useful 'for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness'.
6. Martin Heidegger *Being and Time* John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (transl.) (New York NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 13, 33.
7. For example, in M. Foucault *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings* 1972–1977, Colin Gordon (ed.) (New York NY: Pantheon Books, 1980), especially chs 5–8. This is not the absurd thesis, too often attributed to Foucault, that when someone tells me, for example, that it is raining, she is trying to pull a power play on me rather than to inform or warn me.
8. This is, of course, a central thesis of Ludwig Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations*, G. E. M. Anscombe (transl.) (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958).
9. Nothing about this 'relativism' implies that anything goes, that all practices (along with their embedded knowledges) are equally good. It only means that there is no neutral territory, no 'view from nowhere' where we can stand when we try to evaluate various perspectives. Just as there are no non-circular validations of perception or memory, so there are no non-circular justifications of our values and the 'truths' embedded in them. This is the hermeneutical circle from which the Enlightenment project in both its Cartesian, foundationalist and Hegelian, totalizing versions sought in vain to escape.
10. Jürgen Habermas develops these in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols, Thomas McCarthy (transl.) (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1984, 1987), vol. 1, 305–337. He classifies speech acts accordingly as expressive, constative, and regulative.
11. At the scene of a traffic accident a lay person could become a self-appointed traffic cop (until the police arrive), whose directives others ought to follow.
12. Since he also says that conventions and institutional facts are not fully sufficient (78–80), Wolterstorff may hold to something like Habermas's view that the norms of discourse at some level have a (quasi)transcendental status.
13. Habermas *Communicative Action*, vol. 2, 46–108.

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14. For example, following Calvin, Alvin Plantinga in *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), especially ch. 8.
15. Nor is the distinction absolute; for Christians will no doubt want to say that it was by the guidance of the Holy Spirit that various groups and individuals came over several centuries to recognize various writings as Scripture. But there is a difference between the belief that this epistle, say, belongs to the canon of Scripture and the belief that God is speaking to me here and now through this particular passage; and it is examples of the second sort that Wolterstorff gives when speaking of double discourse.
16. Especially in light of the rather messy nature of the canonization process, in particular, the absence of anything with the status of an Ecumenical Council at its culmination, and the corresponding lack of an agreement among Christians about what is included in the canon.
17. Where there is editorial work of various kinds, a biblical book may well have more than one author, and it may be important to try to distinguish them. But the essentials of Wolterstorff's hermeneutic can be expressed most simply by speaking of a single human author, understanding that the first hermeneutic may well need to be extended to more than one.
18. This puts Wolterstorff in agreement, I believe, with Gadamer's claim that application is integral and not subsequent to interpretation. See Hans-Georg Gadamer *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. edn, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (transl.) (New York NY: Crossroad, 1991), 307–341.
19. Gadamer attributes some such hermeneutic to Schleiermacher, mistakenly, I believe. It fits Dilthey better. Schleiermacher is concerned with knowing as much as possible about the author and speaks of 'divination' as a method of knowing the author's mind. But he regularly makes it clear that the ultimate goal of interpretation is, as Gadamer also insists, what the author has to say about the *Sache*, the subject under discussion. See F. Schleiermacher *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, Andrew Bowie (ed.) (New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 90, 98, 103–104, 137, 139, 157, 228, 230, 257–258. Thus, when Gadamer famously says that in interpretation 'we understand the author better than he does himself' (33), this means that the 'task is also to be expressed as follows, to understand *the utterance* at first just as well and then better than its author' (23, my emphasis). In most cases, of course, the utterance is not about the author's inner life but about some other *Sache*.
20. Wittgenstein's critique of private language stands in the background of this dimension of speech-act theory, which does not necessarily opt for a behaviourist alternative.
21. Paul Ricoeur *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 30.
22. The citation is from Paul Ricoeur *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thompson (transl.) (New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 201.
23. *Idem Interpretation Theory*, 30. When Ricoeur speaks of de-psychologizing interpretation he refers us to Frege and Husserl, for whom 'a 'meaning' … is not an idea that somebody has in his mind. It is not a psychic content, but an ideal object that can be identified and reidentified by different individuals at different times as being one and the same.' Quoted in Wolterstorff (138) from Ricoeur *Interpretation Theory*, 90.
24. *Ibid*., 13. This would seem to be a clear break with the Beardsley's form of anti-intentionalism, according to which 'texts acquire determinate meaning through the interactions of their words without the intervention of an authorial will.' Cited by Wolterstorff on 306, n.7.
25. Ricoeur *Interpretation Theory*, 30, 75.
26. *Ibid*., 32, cited in Wolterstorff, 134.
27. A strict structuralist or New Critic might wish by such a statement to exclude any third possibility, such as historical knowledge about the author and her times. But I see no reason to attribute such a view to Ricoeur. Wolterstorff himself acknowledges that Ricoeur breaks with the notion of 'a text as a self-contained entity' (152). See note 24 above.
28. Ricoeur *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 192, cited on 146.
29. It is to assure that we read certain texts in this way that Kierkegaard resorts to pseudonomy, and insists upon maintaining it even after acknowledging that he is the creator of the various pseudonymous authors.
30. This theme is shared by Ricoeur and Gadamer in their attempt to move beyond a romantic hermeneutics of *mens auctoris*. But it is also *the* point of the 'death of the author' motif in Derrida, Foucault, and Roland Barthes. The 'author' whose death this postmodern trio announces is a godlike

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figure who stands in the same relation to her text as God the Creator stands to the world. The text has all and only what the author consciously puts into it. The postmodern claim, shared by Wolterstorff, is that no human author has this power. See my essay, 'Kierkegaard and the anxiety of authorship,' *International Philosophical Quarterly*, **34** (1994), 5–22.

31. Ricoeur *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 200, cited in Wolterstorff, 133, and 145. Cf. a similar citation from *idem Interpretation Theory*, 99, on 60.
32. Ricoeur *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 161, cited on 146. NB – In textual sense interpretation as in authorial-discourse interpretation, the reader finds herself addressed. Discourse has not disappeared.
33. It was this view of language I was challenging in a recent essay in which I questioned 'the proposition presupposition' of many philosophers. See 'Taking Plantinga seriously: advice to Christian philosophers,' *Faith and Philosophy*, **16** (1999), 173–181.
34. Against the background of structuralism, the signified is a meaning. But Derrida makes it quite clear, I believe, in the very texts Wolterstorff cites, that we can also think of the signified as thing or fact or event. See Jacques Derrida *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (transl.) (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 11, where the signified is sometimes a sense and sometimes a thing. When he says, '*The thing itself is a sign*' (49), he clearly claims that things, like meanings, point beyond themselves and thus are not transcendental signifieds, points at which thought can stop. Cf. Jacques Derrida *Positions*, Alan Bass (transl.) (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 44 and 65, where 'things' or 'objective reality' are the signified but not the transcendental signified.
35. Undecidability in Derrida does not mean paralysis but the need to decide. As with Kierkegaard, we need to decide and act before an essentially interminable process of approximation is completed.
36. Quoted in Wolterstorff, 157 from Derrida *Positions*, 20.
37. Quoted in Wolterstorff, 155 of Jacques Derrida *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass (transl.) (Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 292. It is important to note that play, for Derrida, is not what we do but what happens to us. It is the play of the signifier or the play of the world, this constant referral beyond what is present that something in us so desperately wants to stop, or at least control. See my essay, 'Deconstruction and Christian cultural theory: an essay on appropriation', in Lambert Zuidervaart and Henry Luttikhuizen (eds) *Pledges of Jubilee* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 107–125.
38. See especially his debate with Searle in John Searle *Limited Inc*, Samuel Weber (transl.) (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988).
39. Derrida *Of Grammatology*, 158, in the paragraph just before the (in)famous claim, 'There is nothing outside of the text'.
40. Theists, it seems to me, are committed to precisely this relation between all creatures and God.
41. In Richard Kearney *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 123.
42. The claim that there are no atomic facts is a kind of Hegelian claim; and the claim that there are no given facts is a kind of Kantian claim.
43. Quoted in Wolterstorff, 133 and 175 from Ricoeur *Interpretation Theory*, 75–76.

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