Religious Studies **37**, 293–306 © 2001 Cambridge University Press
DOI: 10.1017/S0034412501005674 Printed in the United Kingdom

Response to Helm, Quinn, and Westphal

NICHOLAS WOLTERSTORFF

Yale University Divinity School, 409 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511

Before beginning my response, let me express the honour I feel in having these three friends and distinguished philosophical colleagues comment so thoughtfully on my ideas in *Divine Discourse*. I warmly thank them for their 'labours'.

I propose mirroring the general structure of the book itself in my response. First, I'll consider what Helm says about my delineation of the topic, second, what Quinn says about my discussion of God speaking; third, what Westphal says about my discussion of interpreting for God's speech; and last, what Quinn says about my discussion of the epistemology of believing that God speaks.

Helm: speaking and revealing

I observe at the beginning of the book that, whereas there have been few theological and philosophical discussions directly on the topic of God speaking, there have been extensive discussions on the related topics of God revealing, of God inspiring, and of God effectuating faith in persons. I speculate that the major reason for this discrepancy is that it's been assumed that God's speaking is a special case of God's revealing, so that in writing of divine revelation in general one is thereby writing about that species thereof which is divine speech; or it's been assumed that God's speaking by way of human authors is the same as God's inspiring those persons to speak or write, so that in writing of divine inspiration one is perforce writing about that mode of divine speech; or that God's speaking to human beings is the same as God's effectuating faith in those human beings, so that in writing of the latter one is, perforce, writing of the former. I hold that all of these identifications are mistaken. My argument for the non-identities of inspiration and effectuation with divine discourse occurs along the way; to the thesis that speaking is not a special case of revealing, and thus, that divine discourse is not a special case of divine revelation, I devote my entire second chapter.

Paul Helm focuses his attention on this second chapter, arguing that the contrast between 'divine revelation and God speaking, is much less sharp than

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

[Wolterstorff's discussion] implies, and indeed, that the idea of God speaking … is logically parasitic on the idea of God revealing'. Helm does not explain why he thinks it important to 'narrow the gap', as he puts it, between God's revealing and God's speaking. My own reason for emphasizing the 'gap' is, as Westphal discerns, religious as well as theoretical. Because of the assimilation of speaking to revealing, our theologians have not adequately explored the implications for our understanding of God of the fact that God speaks. More importantly, my insistence on the distinction is motivated by the conviction that, to use Westphal's words, we must

> **… [decentre] the theoretical, the indicative, the constative: assertion is no longer the privileged speech act … . 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?** (274)

Exactly!

Imagine that, instead of engaging what Helm said, I asked what his article revealed about its author; he and others would rightly regard that as demeaning, if not insulting. It's in therapeutic types of situations that we divert our attention from what a person says to what their saying reveals about themselves. Strange indeed that our theologians should have assumed that that's how we should deal with God's speaking: rush right past what is asserted, commanded, promised, to ask what the asserting, the commanding, and the promising reveal about God!

At what points does Helm wish to 'narrow the gap'? And what's his case for doing so? Let's be clear about the nature of the 'gap' I argued for. My thesis was that illocutionary actions are not a species of revelation. Accordingly, to arrive at an understanding of divine discourse we cannot first develop a general account of divine revelation and then differentiate that species thereof which is divine discourse; we'll have to have an independent account of divine discourse. I concede that *by* speaking one invariably reveals something about oneself; indeed, I insist on the point. And if one's ontology of cases (abstract particulars) allows for a single entity to be a case of two distinct predicables, I'm open to the suggestion that some cases of speaking are identical with cases of revealing; I don't argue the point one way or the other, though, since for my purposes it makes no difference.

It's exactly on this last point, however, that Helm focuses his attention in the first half of his discussion. He concedes that 'speaking (as such) is not revealing, there is no identity between them'. Indeed, he apparently concedes that there's no illocutionary act whatsoever that, as such, is a species of revealing; he says that 'commanding, asserting and requesting are not acts of revealing'. What he argues for is only that a 'case of asserting may *be* a case of revealing' – a thesis on which, as I have already said, I had no reason to take a position.

Let's have before us the example Helm gives of coincidence in cases. I began the concluding part of my discussion concerning the relation of speaking to re-

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

vealing by observing that illocutionary acts are not a species of *transitive* propositional revelation; such revelation requires communication of knowledge or true belief from one person to another for its occurrence, whereas there's no such requirement for illocutionary actions. When transitive revelation is accomplished by means of an illocutionary act, it's an example of what J. L. Austin called a *per*-locutionary act.

One way in which the difference turns up, I said, is that whereas illocutionary actions pass what I called the 'hereby' test, acts of communication do not. What I had in mind is this: if one makes an assertion by uttering in its literal sense the sentence, 'I hereby assert that I will repair the car', then the content of one's assertion is true. By contrast, one can make an assertion by uttering in its literal sense the sentence, 'I hereby reveal (communicate) to you that I will repair the car', without the content of one's assertion being true. I then remark that quite different considerations than these will be required to determine whether illocutionary actions are a species of *non*-transitive revelation.

It's at this point that Helm jumps in to try to 'narrow the gap'. This is what he says:

> **… it looks as if non-transitive revealing might well pass the 'hereby' test. For it seems that if I use the sentence 'I shall order a pizza' to reveal that I will order a pizza, I can also non-transitively reveal that I will order a pizza by uttering the sentence … 'I hereby (non-transitively) reveal that I shall order a pizza'.** (251)

As Helm acknowledges, this is a rather exotic example for making the general point that entities that are cases of revealing may also be cases of illocutionary actions. But let that pass. So far as I can see, the claim made is false. The content of one's assertion is *not* perforce true when one makes an assertion by uttering in its literal sense the sentence, 'I hereby non-transitively reveal that I shall order a pizza'. The reason is the old familiar one: only what is the case can be revealed. Without the content of one's assertion being true one can assertorically utter, meaning it literally, 'I hereby non-transitively reveal that I shall order a pizza' – for the reason that it may not be the case that one shall order a pizza.

Though the example is thus infelicitous for his purposes, I'm happy to concede the point Helm wants to make. If one's general ontology allows cases of two distinct predicables to be identical, then sometimes a case of asserting that *p* will be a case of non-transitively revealing that *p*.

In the second part of his critique Helm focuses on what he calls 'INIS revelation' – meaning by this, agent self-revelation that is intended, non-manifestational (i.e., propositional), and intransitive. About this he first asks whether such revelation could ever occur without the revealed proposition being asserted – the point being that if it cannot, then the 'gap' between revelation and discourse has been 'narrowed'. I think it could. Consider Swinburne's model for divine revelation: God brings about texts such that, if we perform the right operations of interpretation on those texts, then information will be conveyed

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from God's mind to ours. Revelation of that sort would be intended, non-manifestational (propositional), and intransitive – while nonetheless not occurring by way of assertion.

Helm then argues that the intelligibility of cases of divine speech which are not revelation depends on a background of INIS revelation; such divine speech is, as he puts it, 'logically parasitic' on revelation. In defence of this claim Helm first appeals to the point I make in *Divine Discourse*, that authorial-discourse interpretation can only occur in the context of relevant beliefs about the person whose discourse one is interpreting, and then adds that in the case of Christians interpreting for divine discourse, these background beliefs about God will have come from INIS revelation. He does not explain why he thinks this last claim is true.

Let me note, in the first place, that I find it surprising that Helm would make this last claim, for as we have seen, he is inclined to think that the medium of all INIS revelation is assertion. He is thus in the position of holding that the background beliefs we need to interpret divine discourse are themselves derived exclusively from divine discourse. But apart from that, I see no reason to think that the beliefs about God that we bring to our interpreting for divine discourse are all derived from intentional non-manifestational (propositional), intransitive revelation on God's part. In fact, they seem to me to be derived from multiple sources: from Jesus Christ, from Church tradition, from the workings within us of the Holy Spirit, from inference, and so forth.

In summary, I don't see that Helm has 'narrowed the gap' between divine revelation and divine discourse; and in any case, he concedes the existence of the only 'gap' that my argument requires, namely, the gap consisting in divine discourse not being a species of revelation. If it were shown to me that that 'gap' is nonexistent – that divine discourse *is* a species of divine revelation – then my argument in the book would have to be significantly altered.

Quinn: discourse and obligation

Philip Quinn's response is typically crisp and elegant. It comes in two parts. I'll discuss the second part in the last section of my discussion, and discuss the first part here. To respond to what Quinn says in this part of his response I'll have to be more forthcoming on certain crucial issues than I was in the book.

On my analysis, discourse is a through-and-through normative activity – and let me add that when I speak of the 'normative,' I mean to allude to rights and obligations. Quinn very nicely summarizes the various ways in which I see discourse as a normative activity; that saves me from having to do so. The question I discuss in my sixth chapter is whether God could have the rights and duties required for being a discourser.

Most theists have no difficulty ascribing rights to God; it's the ascription of duties that raises questions in their minds. We can let pass, for our purposes here,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the fact that all discourse, on my view, presupposes the holding of obligations for the discourser and focus on promises and covenants. It's obvious that when one promises or covenants something one takes on to oneself certain obligations. So could God promise? Could God covenant? Biblical discourse about God is full of attributions of promises and covenants to God. Can these be taken as literally true?

My own intuition is that they are to be taken as literally true. In the course of redemptive history God promises and covenants, and in so doing assumes obligations. I am inclined to think that obligation enters even deeper into God's life than this, however. Just as a human being's coming into my presence imposes moral claims on me, so a human being's appearing in God's presence imposes claims on God. Of course God did not have to create human beings; but in the very act of creating us, his icons, God acquired obligations toward us. God cannot dispose of us in any old way and remain morally excellent.

A good many Christians and Jews have an intuitive revulsion to this suggestion; the very notion of being 'bound' by obligations seems to them incompatible with deity. But let's reflect a bit on the nature of obligations. An act is obligatory for me if my doing it is not only a good thing but is *required* of me. Required of me *on pain of what*? So far as I can see, the answer is: on pain of impairment of my moral excellence.

To the question, 'Required of me *on pain of what*?' the divine-command theorist answers, 'on pain of disobeying the command of God'. And that appears to be, for him, the end of the matter: what's obligatory just is what's required by the commands of God. The commands of God are constitutive of moral obligations. As I see it, however, even of what's required by the commands of God one can ask: 'required of me on pain of what'? There's a significant strand in the Christian tradition that would say: 'on pain of being punished by God'. That answer seems to me not correct, for the reason that it turns moral requirements into prudential requirements. The correct answer, as I've already said, seems to me to be: 'on pain of impairment of one's moral character'. It's true of entitled commands in general that they make something required which before was not required. The view of the divine-command theorist is that God's commands are the source of moral requiredness, in the sense that there would be no moral requiredness were there no such commands. It seems to me, rather, that God's commands make particular things required in a way parallel to the way in which human commands make particular things required.

In short, I'm inclined toward the view that an action is morally required of one – is obligatory – just in case its non-performance would constitute an impairment of one's moral excellence. Moral excellence is what's deepest. And the sense here of 'required' is: *logically* required.

It will also be the case that certain things are (logically) required by God's moral character – or as I put it in the book, by God's loving character. So if the analysis of obligation that I've been suggesting is correct, then what's (logically) required

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for moral excellence on God's part will be what's obligatory for God. God has obligations. Thus what looked to Quinn like 'philosophical legerdemain' on my part – I began by asking whether moral requirement pertains to God and ended by observing that logical requirement pertains – wasn't really a case of sleight of hand but a case of not all hand movements being revealed to view. (I concede that the difference from the viewer's seat might be slight!)

I explored Alston's objection to the attribution of obligations to God because it was the most thoroughgoing that I could find. The objection depends on quite a different way of thinking of obligation from the way I suggested above. For Alston, the concept of obligation has its home use in practical rules for the governance and regulation of action; and he holds that only where there's the possibility of action out of accord with those rules can there be such a thing as action governed or regulated by those rules. Moral obligation applies only to those agents for whom there is 'the possibility of deviation'. But in God there is no such possibility. Hence, God has no obligations.

There's room for a variety of skirmishes between us. I'm not persuaded, for example, that acting on a rule requires the possibility of deviation; 'Frankfurt cases' strike me as showing the contrary. But the main issue between us is whether the concept of obligation belongs, in its essence, to the field of practical rules. I don't see that it does; I hold that the functioning of the concept of obligation in practical rules is derivative. Being obligated to do so-and-so consists in the act of doing so-and-so being required of one on pain of impairment of one's moral character; that relationship between action and moral character holds, whether or not one is capable of not doing so-and-so, and whether or not practical reasoning is called for. What is the case is that there won't be any point in issuing ought-imperatives to people unless one believes there resides in them the possibility of deviation.

Westphal: divine discourse and analogy

Before moving on to issues of interpretation, let me take note of an important point that Westphal makes at the beginning of his substantial and probing critique. Appealing to some points Aquinas makes, he suggests, after agreeing with me that attributions of discourse to God are literally true, that we should add that they are nonetheless only *analogically*, not univocally, true: literal but analogical. I think Westphal is calling our attention to an important point here; I do have to qualify or amplify the claim that it's literally true of God that God discourses. However, I don't think the qualification or amplification called for is that the predication is literal *but analogical* – not if we're thinking of analogy as Aquinas thinks of it.

A few points of Aquinas interpretation are required. I know in advance that my interpretation will be controversial. So be it. Partly it'll be controversial because I'll

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have to be brief and won't be able to lay out my evidence. More fundamentally, it'll be controversial because every interpretation of Aquinas on these matters proves controversial; laying out one's evidence doesn't make everyone rally round.

Westphal admirably takes note of the passage that most commentators ignore, in which Aquinas observes that some predicates 'can be applied properly or literally' to God – those, namely, 'which do not essentially involve imperfection'. Nonetheless, says Aquinas, when the same predicate is literally applied to both God and creatures, it will never be univocally predicated as between God and creatures but always analogically. Literal but analogical.

What did Aquinas have in mind in speaking here of *analogical* predications? Westphal tries to explicate Aquinas's thought by introducing Aquinas's distinction between *which* property or *quale* a predicate term signifies (*res significata*), and *how* it signifies that property or *quale* (*modus significandi*). But as Westphal himself notes, Aquinas introduces this distinction so as to be able to say that, when the same predicate in its literal use applies to both God and creatures, the property signified is possessed by God pre-eminently and primordially, even though we get our cognitive grip on it by learning how to apply it to creatures. In short, the *res significata*/*modus significandi* distinction was not introduced by Aquinas to illuminate – and does not in fact illuminate – what he means by the univocal/analogical distinction.

My own view is that when one takes note of why, and in what context, Aquinas introduces the univocal/analogical distinction, it's pretty clear what he has in mind. It's his doctrine of divine simplicity that drives the distinction. The predication of the predicate 'good' to a human being can be analysed thus: the predicate stands for goodnesses (*qualia*); and in saying of the person that she *is* good one claims that one of those goodnesses is present in the person. But that, says Aquinas, cannot be what goes on when one says of God that God is good, since God, being simple, doesn't have *qualia* present within him. The force of the 'is' is different – though obviously not entirely different or it wouldn't be predication. In short, analogicity pertains to *the predicating* – not to the predicate predicated but to the act of predicating, not to the predicate 'good' but to the copula 'is'.

If one embraces the doctrine of divine simplicity, then I think one has to say something pretty much like this: even those predicates that apply literally to both God and creatures are nonetheless predicated analogically as between them. But that does not articulate the intuition that led Westphal to suggest that we have to qualify or amplify the claim that it is literally true of God that God discourses; it wasn't God's simplicity that he had in view. Literal but analogical isn't the qualification or amplification we're looking for.

How about the pre-eminent/limited distinction? God is pre-eminently good, powerful, and knowledgeable, whereas we are limitedly good, powerful, and knowledgeable? May it be that, whereas God and human beings are both literally

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

discoursers, God, unlike us, is pre-eminently so? Westphal says that 'what we do when we speak (assert, promise, command) is a pale reflection of what God does in divine discourse'. I'm dubious. Unlike excellence, power, and knowledge, discourse as such doesn't come in degrees; consequently the concept of *pre-eminence* is not relevant. Of course, noticing that some people talk more than others, one could say that God is the pre-eminent discourser in that there's nothing God could say that God does not say. But why would one want to say that? It is true that our speaking is *reflective* of God's discourse, and thus derivative; that's an important thing to say, in addition to saying that it's literally true of both God and us that we discourse. But that's a point about ontology rather than about meaning.

The qualification or amplification that I would want to make about meaning, here and elsewhere when speaking about God, is the following. For many of our predicates we are confronted with borderline cases; the concept of *work of art* is a notorious example. The question arises, 'Is this a work of art?' Rather often we find ourselves in the situation of not wanting to deny it, of wanting to say that it is, while nonetheless feeling that one is stretching things a bit in calling it a work of art, for the reason that it lacks some features possessed by everything one had previously called a work of art and that had functioned for one as criterion, or rule of thumb. Notice that it's the literal use of the term that's at issue.

The applicability to God of many of our predicates is like that. God is a borderline case for their literal use; the predicate doesn't fit God very well. It does fit; but it's not a good fit. Just as our concept of *work of music* did not get framed with John Cage's productions in view, and doesn't fit them very well, so too our predicates in general did not get framed with that extremely exceptional being who is God in view, and don't fit very well.

So does God discourse – literally so? Well, yes. But divine discourse is most unusual as discourse goes, over on the edge of what we are accustomed to call 'discourse'. Our concept of discourse, and all its ancillary concepts, did not get framed with God in view and doesn't fit all that well.

Westphal: texts and authors

I turn now to the issues of interpretation that Westphal raises. Westphal says that he has no substantial disagreements with either my general defence of authorial-discourse interpretation or what I say about the specifics of interpreting for divine discourse. Rather, he chastises me for my polemics. Whereas I think that to be a defender of authorial-discourse interpretation is to occupy a rather lonely position in the contemporary world, he thinks there are such defenders all over the place, including, in particular, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Derrida, and that my engaging in polemics with the latter two, on the assumption that they do not clearly distinguish between textual-sense and authorial-discourse interpretation,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and then choose the latter, amounts to unnecessarily picking a fight. He wonders whether there is in me some quasi-paranoid dynamic that makes me 'uncommonly eager to have enemies'. Why else would I be so determined to set up would-be friends as opponents!

Well, let's see. In the first place, I worry that Westphal lacks a firm grip on the difference between textual-sense and authorial-discourse interpretation. Textual-sense interpretation assumes that there is such a thing as *the* sense of a text, and then sets as its goal to discover that sense. The first great defenders and practitioners of such interpretation in the twentieth century were the so-called New Critics. Their idea was this: a sentence has a meaning – or perhaps several meanings – in a language. But when a sentence is combined with other sentences in a text, not only will the ambiguity of those sentences that are ambiguous typically be eliminated, but some sentences will acquire new meanings – metaphorical, ironic, and so forth. Call the meaning that a sentence has in a text, its *sense* in that text; and call the totality of such sentential senses, the *sense of the text*. The sense of a sentence in a text is a 'function' of the meaning of that sentence in the language plus the way it fits with other sentences in the text. Textual-sense interpretation aims at discovering the sense of the text, thus understood. Authorial-discourse interpretation, by contrast, aims at discovering the illocutionary acts performed by the authorizing of the text – whether that authorizing be done by author or editor.

My objection to textual-sense interpretation is that there is no such thing as *the* sense of a text. The text alone will not determine whether we are confronted with irony, with metaphor, or whatever. If all we have to go on is Disraeli's sentence, 'I climbed the greasy pole', then we have no way of knowing whether to interpret that as a metaphorical allusion to the prime ministership or as a reference to an accomplishment at a county fair. Adding more sentences will not change things. The additional sentences may all be compatible with both construals (and why assume that there's always compatibility?). Or if they don't, we're confronted with two open possibilities: we can interpret this sentence metaphorically and then interpret all the others so as to be consistent with this one interpreted metaphorically, or we can interpret this one literally and then interpret all the others so as to be consistent with this one interpreted literally. My contention is that to decide the issue we have to exit the text and ask what *Disraeli* would have wanted to say with these words in the situation in which he uttered them.

Now to Westphal. Westphal says that when a text is present and the author is not, then 'in order to find out what the author said we shall have to ask what the text says'. Let me once more emphasize the conceptual distinction between *the illocutionary act that an author* (*editor*) *performs by inscribing a text*, and *the sense of the text*. Now if, in spite of that difference in concept, the sense of a text were *identical* with the propositional content of the illocutionary act performed by inscribing the text, then what Westphal says would nonetheless be true. But I hold,

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to say it once again, that there is no such thing as the sense of a text; in addition, I offer reasons for thinking that even if there were, the identity claimed above would not hold. Westphal does not address himself to these theses of mine.

Immediately after the sentence quoted just above Westphal says that 'we are often more interested in what is being said than in who said it'. He offers a reason for thinking this to be true; and then, a few sentences later, offers a 'second reason for shifting attention from the ''who'' to the ''what'', from the author to the text'. I find these remarks confused in two respects. First, he tacitly identifies attention to the text – by which I assume he means attention to the *sense* of the text – with attention to what was said with the text; I have already given my reasons for rejecting this identification. And secondly, he takes me to be arguing for attention to the 'who', that is, to the author. But the aim of authorial-discourse interpretation is not to find out who said something, nor, having identified that person, does it aim at interpreting that *person*; its aim is to discover the illocutionary act performed by the inscription of the words of the text – both the content of that act (what was said) and the illocutionary stance.

In other passages in his critique Westphal speaks of 'shifting emphasis' from author to text, and argues that this shift of emphasis makes good sense when the text is present but the author absent; he adds that the difference between Ricoeur and me comes to no more than our having different interpretive situations in view and each emphasizing what's called for in those different situations. But to say it yet one more time: the issue is not author or text. The issue is *discourse* or text. More precisely, the issue is whether to interpret for authorial discourse or for textual sense. If I thought there were these two things, and if in addition I thought that textual sense is not identical with the content of authorial discourse, then I too would say: interpret for whichever serves the purposes at hand. That's what I do say when it comes to interpreting for what someone did say or for what they intended to say. There are situations in which it's the latter that we care about. But the choice between textual-sense interpretation and authorial-discourse interpretation cannot be reduced to choosing which to emphasize, for the reason that there is no such thing as the sense of the text to emphasize. You can't emphasize what's not there to emphasize.

That was about the distinction itself, between textual-sense and authorial-discourse interpretation. Now to my interpretation of Ricoeur. As Westphal notes, there's much I agree with in Ricoeur. Nonetheless, I stand charged with misinterpretation on the fundamental issue. I plead not guilty.

Westphal quotes the passages in which Ricoeur says that a text is not an 'authorless entity', that texts are not 'natural objects', that 'we cannot conceive of a text without an author', that 'a text remains a discourse told by somebody', and so forth. I know all those passages; most of them I myself quoted; none of them militates against my interpretation. Ricoeur begins with authorial discourse; that's what he's getting at in these passages. And that's what I like about him. It makes

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

him significantly different from the New Critics, and from Gadamer; the New Critics did sometimes talk about literary works as if they were found objects.

The clue to Ricoeur's thought is located right there on one of the pages from which Westphal quotes, *Interpretation Theory* (30). There, as on many other pages, Ricoeur speaks of the 'dialectic of event and meaning' which an act of discourse confronts us with. Reference and illocutionary act belong on the event-side of this dialectic; they are perishing. The content of the illocutionary act belongs on the meaning-side of this dialectic; meaning abides. Meaning (i.e., illocutionary content) is, on Ricoeur's ontological construal, a Fregean *Gedanke*.

Then, having identified the dialectic of perishing event and abiding meaning, Ricoeur makes the crucial move that I mentioned above, of *identifying* the meaning (content) of the illocutionary act with the *sense* of the sentence. Just to cite one of many indications: on that same page of *Interpretation Theory* he says, 'The authorial meaning becomes properly a dimension of the text'. I continue to think, *contra* Westphal, that I was right in saying that it's Ricoeur's view that when interpreting at a distance 'the author is entirely absent from the interpretative process' and that 'discourse proper has disappeared'.

Ricoeur's defence of textual-sense interpretation is right there before us: the sense of the text is identical with the propositional content of the illocutionary act which produced the text, so that to interpret for the textual sense *just is* to interpret for that propositional content. So, yes, in a Pickwickian way, Ricoeur is not only a defender of textual-sense interpretation (when interpreting at a distance), but also of authorial-discourse interpretation – or better, of interpretation aimed at discerning the propositional content of authorial discourse. I concede to Westphal that it was misleading of me to speak of Ricoeur's 'case against authorial-discourse interpretation' and of his 'attack' on it. But there's no issue here of contrasting emphases, since Ricoeur holds that illocutionary content and textual sense are *identical*. In so far as Ricoeur speaks of emphasis, and that's not much, emphasis pertains to those perishing events of reference and illocutionary act: in the dialogic situation we emphasize these a lot, when interpreting at a distance we de-emphasize them to the point of ordinary reference being, as Ricoeur says, 'eclipsed'.

But of course this elegant case for textual-sense interpretation, as being at the same time content-of-authorial-discourse interpretation, falls apart if there is no such thing as the sense of the text, or if there is but it's not identical with the content of the authorial discourse. And that's what I contend. I have no trouble with the Fregean ontology of propositional content that Gadamer and Ricoeur inherit and embrace; my contention is that whereas texts *qua* texts don't select or pick out Fregean *Gedanken*, acts of discourse do.

In short, I didn't pick my fight with Ricoeur. Both the New Critical tradition and the hermeneutic tradition are defenders and would-be practitioners of textual-sense interpretation. I find it – well, incredible – that anyone should think that either of them had clearly distinguished between such interpretation and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

authorial-discourse interpretation, and then plumped for the latter. Since he does clearly recognize authorial discourse, I regarded Ricoeur as the most subtle defender of textual-sense interpretation; that's why I chose to engage him rather than Gadamer or any of the New Critics. I also chose to engage him because he speaks of biblical interpretation. In what he says on that, he is totally consistent with his general hermeneutic. Contrary to Westphal's suggestion, nowhere does he advocate reading to discern what God was saying; he mocks the suggestion that God might literally speak. What he advocates instead is reading for the religious 'world' projected by the text.

That leaves Derrida. I concede to Westphal that if I were writing the chapter on Derrida today, I would write it differently – mainly because I think I understand him better. I would not back off from interpreting Derrida as having ontological, and not merely hermeneutic and epistemological, interests; thus, I would continue to disagree with Westphal's interpretation of Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence as no more than 'a theory of the radical finitude of human thought'. Likewise, I would remain deeply sceptical of Westphal's suggestion that one can just slide Derrida's atheism out of his thought and slide theism in. What I would do is bring Derrida's ontology – his espousal of *différance*, his attack on presence, his anti-realism – into the argument at a somewhat different point. And I would insist, much more emphatically than I did, on Derrida's coming clean on what it is that an interpreter is after. What is it, to quote a passage Westphal cites, that prevents interpretation from 'developing in any direction at all'? What exactly is that 'indispensable guardrail'? What is it that we're trying to get at when we interpret – and that we can get wrong? And don't just say: *meaning*.

Let me put my point by posing a question. A good deal of Derrida's attack on the hermeneutic tradition is aimed at its Fregean ontology of illocutionary content, or textual sense; on that point I side with the hermeneuts against Derrida. Beyond that, Derrida attacks the hermeneutic tradition for some of the same reasons that I do – in particular, for its assumption of the unity of the text. So here's the question: is there any passage in which Derrida clearly distinguishes authorial discourse from textual sense, and clearly presents authorial-discourse interpretation as a distinct and viable alternative to discredited textual-sense interpretation? Westphal's reference to all those passages in which Derrida talks about the 'total web of interconnections which we never fully possess' doesn't settle the issue; both parties will, or ought to, affirm that. I do. The question is whether there's any passage in which Derrida says that what arrests the play of meaning is the illocutionary act performed. Is there any passage in which he says that it's the illocutionary act that constitutes the guardrail for interpretation?

If there is such a passage, it would conflict with the main point of my interpretation; and if there were several such passages, they would constitute a decisive refutation of my interpretation. I know of none such – nor, significantly, does Westphal cite any. I'm of the view that the absence of such passages – assuming

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

they are absent – is not accidental; Derrida has reasons for not stepping forth as an articulate defender of authorial-discourse interpretation. It's not accidental that the talk in Derrida is all about *texts*, and that the talk among his followers is all about *texts*. In short, I await being shown that on the main point in contention I mistook Derrida for an opponent when he's really an ally!

Epistomology

I turn, lastly, to Quinn's comments about the epistemological claims I make. I myself regard my discussion of epistemology in the penultimate chapter of the book as its most underdeveloped part. The project of the book was to explore the use of speech-act theory to articulate the claim that God speaks, and to consider what interpretation of a text for divine discourse would look like. Epistemology was not my topic. I would have preferred saying nothing about it. But I didn't think that in our epistemology-crazed intellectual climate I could get by with that; hence the penultimate chapter. Perhaps the brevity of my discussion raises more questions than I answered. If so, I hope to correct that flaw by publishing, in the not-distant future, a book-length discussion of entitlement to believe – including then, entitlement to religious belief.

I should not have suggested, in a sentence in the introduction to the epistemological coda, that I was going to discuss whether God does speak. For I do not discuss that; Quinn is right to catch me on my loose talk. What I do discuss, as I indicate right away after posing that malformed question, is whether an intelligent adult of the modern Western world could be entitled to believe that God has spoken to him or her.

The centrepiece of my discussion was my description of the experience of an acquaintance of mine that immediately evoked in her the belief that God had spoken to her. The question I asked was whether she was entitled to that belief – whether she was entitled to it on the spot, but more interestingly, whether she was entitled to it after some time had passed. I concluded that she was, since she had done everything that, so far as I could see, she ought to have done to 'check it out'. Quinn observes that my description of what transpired in her visits to the psychologist was too underdeveloped for even the sympathetic among us to be able to tell whether or not her employment of this practice was sufficiently thorough for her to be entitled; he's right about that. Without now going into the details of how the visit to the psychologist apparently went, let me just say that I quizzed her on that point and was convinced that the psychologist had conducted as thorough an investigation as one could have asked for. Let it be added that Virginia herself was worried that she was 'going off her rocker' and wanted a thorough investigation, not the brush-off that, as Quinn notes, is compatible with my brief description.

What I did not discuss was whether I, and others like me, are entitled to believe

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that Virginia was entitled to believe that God had spoken to her – though in fact I think that I am thus entitled; nor, as Quinn observes, did I discuss whether Virginia was *obligated* to believe that God had spoken to her. On this last, I have the sense that the concept of obligation lacks application here – by which I mean, not that Virginia's believing was permissible but not obligatory, but that it's not the sort of thing that could be obligatory. If so, that shows that the application of deontological concepts to beliefs is not fully parallel to the application of such concepts to actions. Lastly, Quinn is quite right in pointing out that even if Virginia were obligated to believe that God had spoken to her, it would not follow that the belief was true; it's for that reason that my discussion of entitlement does not answer the question, '*Does* God speak?'.

Conclusion

Let me, in closing, thank Paul Helm, Philip Quinn, and Merold Westphal, for their probing and generous-spirited comments. They have forced me at some points to clarify what I said, at some, to retract, at some, to admit infelicity of expression – and at many, to think hard so as to be able to answer their searching objections.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412501005674 Published online by Cambridge University Press