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## **Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of the Old Testament in the New: a Rejoinder to Steve Moyise**

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This article is a response to Steve Moyise's critique of my perspectives on the use of the Old Testament in John's Apocalypse (in the May, 1999 issue of *Irish Biblical Studies*). First, I argue for the legitimacy of an ongoing distinction between original authorial intent and subsequent interpretative expansions and applications of that original intent by later reader/authors. These should not be collapsed into one another. Secondly, I contend that, while it is true that New Testament reader/authors had presuppositions through which they interpreted Old Testament texts, these presuppositions did not distort the original authorial intent of the Old Testament writers, partly because the presuppositions of the early Christian community were rooted in the Old Testament itself. I conclude in the third and final section that the presuppositions of modern readers does not have to prevent understanding what New Testament writers said; though we cannot achieve exhaustive knowledge of their intention we can achieve some adequate knowledge.

### *Introduction*

In the first chapter of my recent book, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, I reviewed several works on the subject written since the mid-eighties, including Steve Moyise's *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*. I thought it important to discuss this book because it was the first systematically to apply recent hermeneutical perspectives to debates surrounding John's use of the Old Testament. Above all, he tried to understand the problems from the related perspectives of "intertextuality" and "reader-oriented criticism." I think the book has some good contributions, though I took issue with him on some points. He has

responded to some of my criticisms in a recent article in this journal (“The Old Testament in the New: a Reply to Greg Beale” *IBS* 21 [May, 1999], 54-58). The purpose of this article is to respond to some of his critiques with the hope of bringing further clarification to these thorny issues.

First, I want to reiterate the conclusion of my earlier review of Moyise:

Critical evaluation of... Moyise has been difficult ... since the hermeneutical issues are complicated, and there are subtleties which may be hard to express, all of which makes it difficult to know whether or not I have completely understood [his positions] ... In the light of this, my criticisms ... should be viewed as considerably softened.<sup>1</sup>

This is no less true with the present attempt to evaluate Moyise’s response. There are three main issues to which I will respond. All of these are, at heart, epistemological issues, and they demand book length treatments. Though I am not a philosopher, I will nevertheless, try to summarize my views on these issues and refer the reader especially to book length treatments for elaboration.

### ***1. The Problem of Equating the Phrase “New Interpretations” with the Phrase “New Meanings”.***

First, Moyise disagrees with my approach to understanding how Old Testament texts could have “new meanings” in the New Testament.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Beale, *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation* (JSNTSupp 166: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), p. 93.

<sup>2</sup> The conclusions to which Moyise is responding are about my views of John’s use of the Old Testament in my *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*. His response goes beyond this to the New Testament use of the Old in general. Whether or not the same conclusions can be applied to the rest of the New Testament was outside the scope of my book to which Moyise is replying. I have briefly addressed this wider issue elsewhere and outlined the

I gave the analogy of picking an apple off a tree and making it part of a decorative table arrangement of fruit. The new context does not obliterate the apple's original identity but it must now be viewed not merely in relation to its original context but in connection to its new context. Old Testament references gain "new significance" but not "new meaning" when placed in a new context. The original "meaning" does not change but the "significance" of that meaning changes.

Moyise, however, concludes that "this sounds like a hermeneutical cover-up," since I do "speak of New Testament authors offering 'new understandings' of Old Testament texts 'which may have been surprising to an Old Testament audience,' and since I even refer to these 'authors offering 'new interpretations'"<sup>3</sup>. He asks, therefore, why such "new understandings and interpretations" must be called "new significance" and not "new meanings," unless what I mean by the former is ultimately synonymous with the latter. I am happy to try to unravel the distinction between "meaning" and "significance." Though I do not have liberty in this article to expound a full-blown hermeneutical theory (as was the case also in my book), I can attempt to amplify the discussion from my book and to sketch the outlines of a more thorough analysis. It is best, however, to consult E. D. Hirsch, and his most recent developer, K. J. Vanhoozer, for the fuller distinction, since Hirsch's work on hermeneutics was the one on which I was relying in my book.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, I am a bit

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approach I would take (especially see my "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method," *Themelios* 14 [1989], pp. 89-96). My "rejoinder" here is primarily concerned with John's use, since that is what Moyise's response formally addresses and that is the area in which I have done full scale work, though I believe the study has wider implications for the New Testament.

<sup>3</sup> S. Moyise, "The Old Testament in the New a Reply to Greg Beale" *IBS* 21 (1999), p. 55.

<sup>4</sup> E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1967). See for further refinement from an explicitly theistic perspective K. J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), to which I am also indebted for making known other sources with which I interact throughout this essay.

perplexed about why Moyise would refer to the distinction between “meaning” and “significance” as a seeming “hermeneutical cover-up” because the distinction is virtually a commonplace in the recent history of hermeneutical discussion, though the distinction may sometimes be termed variously (e.g., original intention and contemporary relevance, meaning and application, the author’s horizon and the reader’s horizon, etc.). The following discussion in this section is a summary of Hirsch and Vanhoozer and my own elaboration of their positions, especially with respect to the problem of the “Old in the New.” Indeed, one subsidiary purpose of this essay is briefly to help introduce Vanhoozer’s work, since it was only recently published, and to apply his development of Hirsch to the debated issue of the use of the Old Testament in the New.<sup>5</sup>

Interpretation seeks to obtain an understanding of an earlier author’s original meaning. No interpretation ever reproduces an author’s original meaning in a perfectly exhaustive manner, but it can achieve a truly approximate, partial and adequate understanding, so that there are some essential points of overlap between the original meaning and the apprehension of that meaning. Therefore “interpretation” or “understanding” is the attempt to reproduce an approximate understanding of the meaning of earlier texts and to explain them. “It is a logical mistake to confuse the impossibility of certainty in understanding with the impossibility of understanding.”<sup>6</sup> If one acknowledges on the epistemological level that an original authorial meaning is recoverable from Old Testament texts, not in absolute completeness but partially, then it is helpful to distinguish between the enduring original meaning recognized by later reader-writers and how that meaning is responded to by later writers, i.e., the “significance” of that earlier meaning. Hirsch says that “meaning” refers to the “entire verbal meaning of a text” and “significance” to “textual meaning in a context beyond itself” (in relation to a later time, a later mind, a wider subject matter, etc.). One must understand a meaning of a prior text before attempting to explain it to someone else. Then “the public side of interpretation”

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<sup>5</sup> Though Vanhoozer himself does address this issue briefly at various points.

<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 17.

includes answering both the questions of “What does this text mean?” and “What use or value does it have: how is its meaning applied to me, to us, to our particular situation?”<sup>7</sup> Consequently, for Hirsch, there is a sense in which an aspect of later “interpretation,” but not original authorial meaning, overlaps with “significance.” As we shall see, the “later” interpretation is an expanding of the original meaning.

If the basic distinction is not maintained, however, between an author’s original meaning (i.e., what it meant then) and what it means for today, then meaning and the contemporary relevance of meaning (i.e., application) are collapsed, and the ultimate meaning of a text becomes merely the reflection of the interpreter’s own purely socially constructed thoughts; “Understanding is not the same as authoring.”<sup>8</sup> This would mean that “interpreters [would] risk confusing the aim of the text with their own aims,”<sup>9</sup> and that what any interpreter says is the meaning of an ancient text is as valid as what any other interpreter says. One may disagree with the terms Hirsch uses to distinguish authorial meaning from significance (i.e., application of that meaning), but whatever terms are used, the distinction needs to be maintained, if one does not hold to the presuppositions of radical “reader-response” criticism and deconstructionism (i.e., that no meaning is recoverable from an original author’s intentional acts of writing and, in the case of deconstructionism, that the enterprise of interpretation is primarily the exposing of authors’ or interpreters’ triumphalistic presuppositions). “Hermeneutical realism ultimately rests on this distinction between meaning and significance, on the distinction between an object of knowledge and the context in which it is known.”<sup>10</sup>

Hirsch has further defined his meaning/significance dichotomy by the concept of “transhistorical intentions.” While maintaining this

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<sup>7</sup> Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1978), p. 19; cf. also pp 2-3, 156.

<sup>8</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 263.

<sup>9</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 421.

<sup>10</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 260

distinction, he believes that an intended original meaning can go beyond the original content or original context. Authors using some genres will extend meaning to analogous and even unforeseeable situations so that their meaning is intended to have presently unknowable, future implications.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, one can “speak of open-ended authorial intentions” and “extended meaning” in which an original meaning can tolerate some revision in cognitive content and yet not be essentially altered.<sup>12</sup> It is in this sense that some applications of original meaning pertain more to the “meaning” side than the “significance” side. Interpretation should go beyond the author’s letter, but it must never exceed the author’s spirit.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the task of “interpretation” includes: (1) ascertaining the original meaning; (2) ascertaining the ongoing extended meaning, which may be present in some genres but not others (i.e., which is discerned by noticing when authors intend to extend implications of their meaning into the indefinite future by espousing principles intended for an indefinite number of applications); (3) recontextualizing meaning by ascertaining creative applications of the meaning to new contexts, which in some genres may not involve extending the original meaning.

These three aspects of interpretation do not collapse original meaning into the readers’ response to that meaning. The two are still kept separate, though there is some overlap between “original meaning” and “significance” in the second step. It is helpful to expand a little on Hirsch’s middle step, what Vanhoozer calls “extended meaning.” Hirsch refers to this as an expansion of the original author’s “willed type.” I summarized and illustrated this in my book as part of the response to Moyise, but it bears repeating here (in connection with “significance”) with another illustration from Hirsch. Civil codes are good examples of genres in which authors realize that no law can cover all the future instances which

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<sup>11</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 125, who also elaborates on and gives further refinements of the “meaning/significance” question in “Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted,” *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984), pp. 202-224.

<sup>12</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 26 1-262, following Hirsch.

<sup>13</sup> Hirsch, ‘Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory,’ *New Literary History*, 25 (1994), pp. 558.

will fall under legitimate application of the law originally legislated. The principle of the originally formulated law must be applied to later instances to see whether or not it is relevant. If the new instance falls within the “willed type” of the original legal author, then the original law applies. For example, a traffic code may assert that a violation occurs when any wheeled vehicle on a public thoroughfare fails to stop at a red light. Suppose that years later a vehicle was created which had no wheels but moved instead on currents of compressed air. Does the law still apply to such a vehicle, since the formulation of the law explicitly referred to wheeled vehicles? The original intent of the law would apply to this new instance, since what was in view from the beginning was a “willed type” of “any vehicle.” The law might be amended to include “all vehicles serving the function of wheeled vehicles within the purpose and intent of the law.’ The idea of a law contains the idea of *mutatis mutandis*, and this generic convention was part of the meaning that I willed.”<sup>14</sup> It should be easy to see that such a genre convention could be included in biblical literature which has legal, ethical, and theological content.

To come back full circle to Moyise’s critique and question: why I am reluctant to say that “new understandings and interpretations” are not “new meanings” but “new significances.” I am reluctant because I do not want to confuse original authorial meaning with the extension of that meaning or the application of that meaning. Indeed, one cannot judge whether a meaning is being extended or amplified unless there is some clear understanding of a determinate original meaning. And, of course, one cannot apply an original meaning to a new situation without knowing some significant aspect of that original meaning. In this light, I am happy to equate “new interpretations or understandings” with “interpretative significance” or “meaningful significance” or even “*extended meaning*.” I am loath to confuse *original* meaning with anything that is subsequently *derivative* of it. Consequently, I can understand that New Testament authors creatively develop “new interpretations” of Old Testament texts but not “new meanings,” since that *could* be

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<sup>14</sup> Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p. 125.



understood to indicate that what they develop is not organically related in some way to the earlier source text. I would not be “picky” about semantics if there was not the potential danger of sliding into saying that “new meanings” indicate something cut off from the conceptual roots of the base text. I am content to see “new meanings” as creative developments or outgrowths, but not “absolutely new” meanings. A feature of any good interpretation is some *essential* element of recognizability with the original meaning of the text being interpreted.

Of course, interpreters can wrongly interpret and have no idea of an original meaning (which is the conclusion many make about New Testament authors), but this is a different matter than saying that it is impossible for interpreters to gain some approximate understanding of the original meaning of a text.<sup>15</sup> My “apple” illustration was an attempt to underscore the indelible line between some unchanging aspect of the original identity of a meaningful act of communication and the effect of that act (i.e., recontextualization through extended implications of “willed types” or applications or both). Moyise’s illustrations of the relation of an apple to fruit salad (or one could even compare apple sauce) might still be compatible with my idea and my own analogy of an apple in a decorative basket of fruit: there is still some identifiable aspect of the original apple, whether through sight or taste, though I think this illustration obscures the original identity of the apple too much. Moyise says that a better illustration should not be something corporeal (like apples), since texts do not have firm boundaries which protect them

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<sup>15</sup> See D. Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Text und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 30; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992), who identifies all the purported examples of pre-70 A.D. proto-rabbinic exegesis of the Old Testament. His study shows that, while these Jewish exegetes may not have achieved success in each case, they did try to interpret the Old Testament in the light of its context, and never substituted a secondary or allegorical understanding for the primary one. Even if some of his conclusions are judged to be overstated, the main point of his research still stands. See G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1984), for the similar observation in some Jewish apocalyptic literature.

from being altered by changing contexts. Moyise offers less corporeal analogies of ripples in a pond which combine with other ripples and form new patterns or sound waves which interfere with one another. These analogies, however, seem to me to lose the distinction between some identity between the original ripple and the combination of other ripples or between the original sound wave and the other sound waves which interfere with it.

A better analogy than either mine or Moyise's needs to express the nature of original meaning as part of a "three-dimensional communicative action"<sup>16</sup>: (1) the literary act of putting words together to make a proposition (locution); (2) the particular way in which this literary act is executed (illocution, i.e., what is done with the propositional content, e.g., greeting, promising, commanding, wishing, being ironical, polemical, etc.); (3) what is effected by or results from the communicative act (perlocution, e.g., obedience, persuasion, surprise, etc.).<sup>17</sup> "If a text is a meaningful action... We can... have as much confidence in determining what an author is doing in a discourse as we can when we seek to determine what a person is doing in other kinds of action."<sup>18</sup> The meaning of a communicative act is dependent not on its effect (e.g., how it is responded to by readers, i.e., perlocution or "significance") "but on the direction and the purposive structure of the author's action" (illocution).<sup>19</sup> In fact, another way of formulating the meaning/significance distinction is to say it is "a distinction between a completed action and its ongoing intentional or unintentional consequences.

The three aspects of a communicative act are comparable to any physical act which becomes part of history. A professional golfer (1) uses a club to swing and hit the ball, (2) though the kind of swing he uses may put spin on the ball to slice, hook, or he swings to hit straight or he can swing to make it go high or low, all with the

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<sup>16</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 218.

<sup>17</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 209.

<sup>18</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 216-217.

<sup>19</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 255.

purpose of accomplishing a par on the hole and a low score for the round; (3) the actual effect is how the ball flies and how that particular shot contributed to the overall shots of the round and to the final score. A radio commentator explains the shot to the audience. The commentator observes the swing (stage #1) and its effect (stage #3), and he also tries to explain the kind of swing and the intent behind it (stage #2). Though he cannot completely understand the precise kind of swing actually used and the exact purpose in the golfer's mind in swinging the way he did, the commentator can still comprehend these two things adequately to make an educated guess (i.e., interpretation) for the listening audience (illocutionary physical and literary actions may be complex, so that there may be multiple ways of describing the action, not all of which will exactly portray the intent of the action<sup>20</sup>). A golf historian who writes years later about this particular round will rely on the commentator's account, on newspaper and magazine accounts, and perhaps add his own understanding to the commentary (perhaps, he has access to something the radio commentator did not, e.g., the commentator may have "inside" information from the golfer's caddie or his family who revealed that the golfer may have been ill for three weeks prior to the tournament, which explains why some of his shots were hit poorly and why he did not win the tournament, etc.).

Likewise a written communicative act is just as historical as any other act in history and its meaning is just as accessible. Of course, as in hermeneutics, so in the philosophy of history there is debate about whether historians can objectively report history. Both the naive positivistic objectivist and the postmodern solipsistic, subjectivist sceptic are too extreme. The truth lies somewhere in between: historians do not record events fully as they actually happened nor are they unable to record anything that happened. They are able to recognize, though not exhaustively, something of what happened. Tom Wright calls this "critical realism," which

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<sup>20</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 327-333.

applies both to the historian's as well as the interpreter's craft.<sup>21</sup> In fact, ultimately, these are not two different disciplines (for elaboration, see section 3 below on *Modern Interpreters' Presuppositions and the Question of Real Knowledge*).

Though Moyise does not want to class himself with more radical "reader-oriented"<sup>22</sup> critics, his responses still place him closely with that position. He says approvingly in his monograph "emphasis on the author's intention has been largely abandoned in New Testament study and replaced by a focus either on the text itself or on the role of the reader"<sup>23</sup> (though he cites no careful study "polling" what general percentage of scholarship really reflects this view, a view which is certainly in the minority in the actual exegetical practice of such leading journals as *NTS*, *NovT*, and *Biblica*). In addition, he says, "we have no access to the author's 'intention,'" and "meaning is not a 'given' but has to be 'created' by the reader,"<sup>24</sup> so that authorial intention is a social "construct."<sup>25</sup> He adopts the words of Fiorenza to explain his position: "Competing interpretations of Revelation are not simply either right or wrong, but they constitute different ways of reading and constructing socio - historical and theo-ethical meaning."<sup>26</sup>

In the light of these clear statements employing the "buzz words" of more radical "reader-response" language, how can Moyise say that his "point is *not* that readers make texts mean whatever they like"<sup>27</sup>? Though he does not want to say it that baldly, I cannot see how he can logically resist the conclusion, especially since he does say above that "meaning is not a 'given' but has to be 'created' by the reader." Perhaps, he would want to say that "interpretative communities" with their own socially constructed view of reality

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<sup>21</sup> *New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), pp.31-144.

<sup>22</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," p. 57.

<sup>23</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 142.

<sup>24</sup> Moyise *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 142.

<sup>25</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," p. 58.

<sup>26</sup> Moyise, *The Old Testament in the Book of Revelation*, p. 143.

<sup>27</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," p. 57.

determine how individual readers in the community interpret, so that in a strict sense readers cannot make texts mean whatever they want, but this only moves to the corporate level: communities can make texts mean whatever they want, i.e., communal consensus is the only criterion for a valid interpretation, and “interpretative communities” who disagree with one another must be content to agree to disagree. That this is Moyise’s view is pointed to by his statement that “it is one of the enduring insights of liberation and feminist writings that ‘what one knows and sees depends upon where one stands or sits’ ...”<sup>28</sup> As far as I can tell, meaning for him is not based on the notion that there is a “given meaning” (a literary communicative act) which resides in a text which can be accessed, not exhaustively, but in some determinant, partial, and adequate manner.

Moyise tries to explain that meaning is essentially the creation of the reader by arguing that “readers have to make choices” in order to formulate “coherent interpretations.” He uses the quotation of Ps. 118:22-23 in Mark 12 as a brief example. The reader is not addressed by only one authorial voice but a number of voices. Should readers focus their interpretative concerns (1) on the original author of the Psalm or (2) on its meaning in relation to the Psalter or (3) on how the Psalm was interpreted in early Judaism or (4) on what Jesus had in mind or (5) on what the evangelist had in mind? Which we should focus on is “simply not ‘given’ to us by the text.”<sup>29</sup> The decisions readers make about what “voice” to focus on will shape their interpretation and make it different from other interpretations which have a different focus. Moyise believes that the reason there are differences of interpretation in such cases is that there is no methodological consensus about how to approach an analysis of the plural voices (which “voices” should be focused on, how to relate them, etc.). Several textual voices drift into a reader’s mind, and each reader will organize these voices in a different way, so that they become like echoes reverberating with one another in different ways and sounding different (i.e., meaning different things

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<sup>28</sup> Moyise, “Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale,” p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Moyise, “Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale,” p. 57.

to different people). Just as different people will connect dots on a paper in different ways to form different shapes, so likewise interpreters connect different voices in different ways to formulate different interpretations.

Vanhoozer's summary of the significance of this kind of intertextuality gets to the heart of Moyise's program:

Intertextuality is the free association of diverse voices, the centrifugal force that explodes the centripetal constraint of [determinant meaning] ...Meaning is not something located in texts so much as something that happens between them. It is precisely because this "between" cannot be stabilized that intertextuality undermines determinancy of meaning.

"The codependence of texts precludes both the mastery of one text by another and the subservience of one text to another [citing M. Taylor]."<sup>30</sup>

I believe, however, there is a method of validating which of the voices should be focused on and which of a text's (or texts') interpretations is more probable than the others. To focus on only one of the contexts related to the Psalm's use in Mark 12 would be an example of "thin description." One would want to focus on all of them, especially keeping in mind Hirsch's above concept of "willed type" in which subsequent "new interpretations" and applications of the meaning of a primary text can be seen as legitimately falling within the "willed type" of the original meaning, and hence a legitimate extension of it. This could be referred to as "thick description," which includes an account of an author's threefold communicative act (on which see above).<sup>31</sup> The "commonsense"

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<sup>30</sup> Vanhoozer *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p. 135; for his expanded discussion, see pp. 131-135.

<sup>31</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, e.g., pp. 282-285, 291-292, 331-332.

approach then would be to study closely all five of the contextual uses of Psalm 118 mentioned by Moyise, since Jesus and the evangelist may have had aspects of all in mind, so that each subsequent use of the Psalm develops the richness of the original meaning. Alternatively, they may only have one or two such contexts in mind, and the evangelist may have had more or less in mind than Jesus.<sup>32</sup> If one presupposes the existence of God and includes God as author of particular biblical texts and of the whole canon, then specific expansions of earlier texts in later ones is part of one complex authorial act of communication (which best represents a summary of a viable view of *sensus plenior*).<sup>33</sup>

Is it mere subjective choice which guides readers to know which of the contexts are in mind or uppermost in mind or whether all could be included, as Moyise seems to think? I do not think so. Those contextual uses which have ideas which correspond in some approximate way with the original meaning are live candidates, together with the original, for texts which the last author/reader may have focused upon (in this case the evangelist). The more “organic” correspondences one can muster between the Old Testament text and each of its subsequent uses and the main text being interpreted (in this case Mark 12) will build up a “probability case” that one or more of these contexts is actually in mind in the text under consideration.<sup>34</sup> To put it another way, “The success of any interpretation depends on its explanatory power, on its ability to make more coherent ... and natural sense of textual data than other

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<sup>32</sup> In this respect, Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp.313-314, following M. Bakhtin, says texts of some genres have a real latent potential meaning which is intentionally open-ended, though it might be better to call such open-endedness a determinate but complex communicative act. In Christian tradition this has sometimes been referred to as *sensus plenior*, which has been defined in various ways.

<sup>33</sup> On which see, again, Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 312-452 (*passim*).

<sup>34</sup> For examples of my own attempted applications of Hirsch’s criteria for validation, see Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*); idem., *The Book of Revelation* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); idem., *John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*.

interpretations do.”<sup>35</sup> Hirsch has three chapters in his *Validity in Interpretation* (chaps. 3-5) which discuss the method of how inductively to validate interpretations, not in a purely subjective manner nor solely objectively, but according to a “critical realist” perspective. Competing interpretations have degrees of possibility and probability, depending on the number of fundamental correspondences which can be drawn between an interpretation and its source text. Of course, the “last author/reader’s own contextual use must be considered in the ongoing trajectory of meaning. In my commentary on Revelation, I often found that a number of subsequent exegetical reflections on an Old Testament text (by later Old Testament authors, Jewish writers, and other New Testament writers) together with that text had influence on John and that he himself in good prophetic fashion further expanded on the Old Testament text’s meaning. This is not to say that interpretation is not “creative.” It is, but it is not a creation *ex nihilo* nor does the creative role of interpreters make an author’s meaning inaccessible. Good interpretation has an organically identifiable link with the base text being interpreted.

To elaborate more would be to begin to repeat needlessly further details of the book which Hirsch has written. I speculate whether Moyise is unclear about the “nuts and bolts” of validation in exegetical method because he has not done much of it in the public arena. This is not to cast an unfair aspersion on him nor to discredit him but to say that his publications to date reveal mainly an area of expertise in “hermeneutical theory” and not in the actual practice of the theory. His monograph on Revelation, while stimulating, interestingly has not much original exegesis in Revelation or elsewhere. He merely relies on some main lines of interpretation already laid out by other earlier commentators, and then tries to draw some conclusions related to hermeneutical theory.

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<sup>35</sup> R. H. Gundry, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p.4.



## **2. The New Testament Writers' Presuppositions and Their "Respect for Old Testament Context."**

In my book I contended that John sometimes gives "new" interpretations of Old Testament texts which appear different from their original intended meaning. I argued that such apparently different uses were due to John's new presuppositional perspectives which caused him to see Old Testament texts in such seemingly different ways. I then concluded that if his presuppositions were legitimate, then his interpretation of Old Testament texts could be seen as showing respect for the Old Testament contexts from which they come.

Moyise makes a good criticism of my argument: "if 'respect for context' means 'understandable given the author's presuppositions', then it surely becomes a truism. Even the most bizarre allegorical use of Scripture could be said to 'respect the context' if we accept the legitimacy of the author's presuppositions."<sup>36</sup> The reason for his disagreement is, not only that my argument is a "truism," but that "respect for context" does not fit well with the New Testament authors' habit of giving "new interpretations" because of their "new presuppositional lenses." Without further elaboration, Moyise's last point offers no further evidence for disagreement but a mere authoritative declaration that my conclusion is wrong because it just seems that way to him.

But that my argument is a truism needs response. One could make the similar objection that my claim about John is unfalsifiable (which one person has actually said to me in a conversation). My responses are sixfold, four methodological, one epistemological, and the last logical.

(1) First, many of John's uses of the Old Testament do not need to be explained only by referring to his unique Christian presuppositions (e.g., John's thematic and analogical uses<sup>37</sup>), so that

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<sup>36</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," pp. 56-57.

<sup>37</sup> Beale, *John's Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, pp. 93-100.

this is not as great of a problem as Moyise implies. For example, a direct messianic prophecy could be seen as fulfilled in Jesus Christ (e.g., Ps. 89:27-37 in Rev. 1:5; Dan. 7:13 in Rev. 1:13). One could argue that John was wrong about applying such passages to Jesus and identifying Jesus as the long - awaited Messiah. But if so, nevertheless, his actual understanding of the prophecy in its original context could still well be good. The only problem then would be “application” of the prophecy, not understanding of the prophecy. The same is the case with Qumran. Some of the community’s understanding of Old Testament prophecies concerning Israel are plausible but most would disagree with the application of the prophecy to their own community and identifying themselves as true, eschatological Israel (e.g., cf. the restoration prophecy of Isa. 40:3 in 1QS IX, 19-21).

(2) Second, my reference to “respect for context” needs clarification. Moyise prefers “awareness of context” because “respect for context”... suggests some sort of conformity.” Does he believe then that there is no (or could not be) conformity of thought between the meaning of an Old Testament text and a New Testament author’s understanding of that text? I do not believe that a New Testament author exhaustively understands the meaning of a prior text but that it is possible to have some understanding. Indeed, “conformity” does not have to entail the notion of an exact replica but carries connotations of “likeness” (cf. the OED). I argue, in fact, that John has varying degrees of awareness of ... context” and that some uses may be categorized as “semi-contextual,” since they have a lower “degree of correspondence with the Old Testament literary context” than do other uses;<sup>38</sup> and certainly it is possible in principle that some uses pay no attention at all to Old Testament context (e.g., rhetorical uses for polemical purposes). My own research on the Apocalypse over the past twenty years, however, has concluded that John uses the Old Testament with significant recognition of Old Testament context.

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<sup>38</sup> Beale, *Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, p. 74.

(3) It is true that presuppositions have to be brought into play to explain some uses, i.e., “typological uses” and uses involving some different applications in fulfilment: when a prophecy is said to be fulfilled in a person instead of the nation Israel, or in the Church, but even these are understandable in that they arise from the Old Testament presupposition of corporate solidarity and the notion of the one and the many, an idea developed even in Judaism.<sup>39</sup> Even the specific idea that Jesus the Messiah corporately represents his people as true Israel is an outgrowth of the notion that Israel’s kings represented their people (e.g., Israel was punished for David’s representative sin of numbering the people [1 Chron. 21:1-17]). Moyise thinks that appealing to New Testament authors’ presuppositions to understand and even ‘justify” various uses of the Old Testament means that any presuppositions willy nilly, allegorical or otherwise, could be adduced to justify any bizarre interpretation. Many of the presuppositions which I mention, however, are not bizarre or new in the sense that they are rooted in the Old Testament itself. In addition to the assumption of corporate solidarity, note also the following presuppositions: (a) the New Testament authors assumed they were living in the age of the eschaton (partly on the basis that the Old Testament prophesied that the messianic age was to be an “eschatological” period); (b) history is unified by a divine plan, so that earlier biblical history was designed to point typologically to later parts of biblical history.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 187-192.

<sup>40</sup> For discussion of the presence of typology as an interpretative method and hermeneutical presupposition in the Old Testament, see F. Foulkes, *The Acts of God: A Study of the Basis of Typology in the Old Testament* (Tyndale Monographs; London: Tyndale, 1958); G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology 2* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 365-374 (cf. p. 36: “Typological thinking [is] ... one of the essential presuppositions of the origin of prophetic prediction”); Goppelt, *Typos* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 38-41; M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), esp. pp. 350-379; D. C. Allison, *The New Moses*, pp. 11-95, who includes typological uses in Judaism, as does Kim, *The Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, p. 187; G. P. Hugenberger, “The Servant of the Lord in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah,” in *The Lord’s Anointed*, edd. P. E. Satterthwaite, R. S. Hess, and G. J. Wenham (Carlisle: Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); D. Garrett, “The Ways of God: Reenactment and Reversal in Hosea,” a paper presented as the

That allegory is not a method found in the New Testament is, I think, a reflection that its hermeneutical methods are not haphazard.<sup>41</sup> One might want to see the similar presuppositions of the Old Testament also to be flawed like those purportedly of the New, but at least a common interpretative and presuppositional approach can be seen between the two testaments. This observation makes it more difficult to say that the New Testament's interpretative presuppositions distort the meaning of Old Testament texts. In this respect, the authors of both testaments are part of a broadly related interpretative community which shared the same general "world view" and continued to develop earlier meanings with comparable hermeneutical perspectives as time went on.<sup>42</sup>

(4) In the light of the earlier discussion of an author's "willed type," can we say with confidence that John's interpretations do *not* fall in line with legitimate extensions and applications of the meaning of Old Testament texts? If someone as steeped in the Old Testament as Matthew could utilize the New Testament community's presuppositions, surely it is possible that someone like Isaiah, if he were living in the first century, might well think the extended application of his prophecies to Jesus would fall within the

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author's inaugural lecture as professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the Fall of 1998; Garrett develops the typological use of Genesis by Hosea (in process of submission for publication).

<sup>41</sup> As generally acknowledged by both Old and New Testament scholars (respectively see von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* 2, p. 366, and Goppelt, *Typos*, pp. 3 2-58, though some disagree). In further support, however, see further C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London: Nisbet, 1952), *passim*, F. F. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), *passim*, and G. K. Beale (ed.), *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), *passim* (including relevant bibliographical references therein). See, Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE*, who sees one dominant strand of early Jewish exegesis also as not employing allegory but "contextual" exegesis of the Old Testament.

<sup>42</sup> See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, as well as *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), for an explanation of this shared worldview common to the Old Testament, early Judaism, Jesus, and the early Christian community.

parameters of his understanding of what he wrote. And, in addition, such a possibility is fuelled by the fact that the New Testament community's presuppositions are rooted in the Old Testament. It is striking, for example, that the well-known suffering servant prophecy of Isaiah 53 is itself a typological expectation of an anticipated second Moses who was to do everything and more than the first Moses.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Matthew's understanding of Jesus as a typological fulfilment of the first Moses is in keeping with anticipations already embedded within the prophetic expectations of the Old Testament itself and in Judaism.<sup>44</sup> Even the notion that Jesus corporately represents true Israel is likely due in part, not only to the notion that Israel's past kings represented and summed up the nation in themselves in various ways, but that the same was true of Moses and was likewise expected to be true of the Servant whom Moses typologically anticipated.<sup>45</sup>

(5) Should we dare ask the epistemological question, "are John's presuppositions true, and if so, should the answer not have a bearing on his interpretative approach either negatively or positively?" This is not a question often asked in scholarly monographs and journal articles because the scholarly discipline has been so dominantly descriptive. Tom Wright has broached such questions, though he would not state it in quite the way I have.<sup>46</sup> There is a "commonsense tradition" by which presuppositions can be challenged, critiqued, and evaluated (cf. the validating criteria of correspondence, coherence, the law of non-contradiction, etc., on which see section 3 further below). I have argued that the early Christian community's assumptions are grounded in the Old Testament, so that questions of validity must also be extended to the interpretative assumptions of the Old Testament itself. Furthermore, it is likely that Jesus himself was the originator of the main interpretative approaches and presuppositions employed by his

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<sup>43</sup> So Hugenberger, "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah," pp. 105-139.

<sup>44</sup> So D. C. Allison, *The New Moses. A Matthean Typology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); cf. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, pp. 187-192.

<sup>45</sup> So Hugenberger, "The Servant of the Lord in Isaiah," pp. 111, 121, 131.

<sup>46</sup> *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 139-144.

followers, especially the christocentric focus on the Old Testament;<sup>47</sup> while being creative, he was making developments squarely on the basis of the Old Testament and early Judaism. Can we be bold enough in a scholarly forum to ask the question whether or not Jesus' interpretative perspective was wrong? One's view of who Jesus was should determine decisively the answer to this question. Of course, it is a hermeneutical fad today to say that all human thought is a mere expression of each reader's "socially constructed world," so that ultimately all thought is relative and no one's thought is any more correct or incorrect than anyone else's. Such a politically correct perspective would make it moot to ask the question about the rightness or wrongness of hermeneutical methods and presuppositions and the resulting conclusions derived from them.

(6) This last point also entails a logical objection to Moyise. If meaning were a function only of how John as a reader responded to Old Testament texts through his own culturally relative and "socially constructed" presuppositions, and the same is true of all interpreters (whether ancient or modern, as Moyise appears to maintain), then these texts could never be misunderstood, and there would never be such a thing as false interpretation.<sup>48</sup> In fact, the question of whether or not John "respected" or was even significantly "aware" of Old Testament texts is not relevant. He is only able to see mirror reflections of his own mind when looking at and interpreting Old Testament texts.

This last point also touches upon Moyise's final critique of my position.

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<sup>47</sup> See C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*, who made this point persuasively (in this respect, see my own summary of Dodd's view in Beale, "Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts An Examination of the Presuppositions of Jesus' and the Apostles' Exegetical Method," *Themelios* 14 [1989], pp. 89-96).

<sup>48</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, p.218.

### **3. Modern Interpreters' Presuppositions and the Question of Real Knowledge**

Moyise takes me to task because I affirm that though all modern interpreters have presuppositions which influence how texts are interpreted, such presuppositions do not completely blind readers from comprehending an author's meaning which is incompatible with their own hermeneutical lenses and from discerning the different assumptions of others. He disagrees because "since scholars do arrive at positions that differ with Beale, it would appear that what he really means is that *his* presuppositions have not prevented *him* from correctly discerning authorial intention."<sup>49</sup> Following Bruggemann, Moyise agrees with the "insights of liberation and feminist writings that 'what one knows and sees depends upon where one stands or sits ... the knower helps constitute what is known.'"<sup>50</sup> This is explained by saying that authorial intention "is a 'construct' rather than a 'given'"<sup>51</sup>.

It appears that Moyise and I have neither an exegetical nor even ultimately a hermeneutical disagreement but an epistemological dispute. He lines up with the more radical side of postmodern "reader-response critics" (though his comments are not inconsistent with the even more radical deconstructionist movement). He adamantly protests my placing him with "those reader-response critics who... believe that a text can mean whatever they like," since he is "unaware of any reader-response critics who go that far..."<sup>52</sup> I

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<sup>49</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," p. 58.

<sup>50</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," p. 58.

<sup>51</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," p. 58.

<sup>52</sup> Moyise, "Old Testament in the New: Reply to Beale," p. 57. Though Moyise may be unaware, there are numerous examples of reader-oriented interpretations of biblical texts whereby authorial intent is not considered as the primary aim or recoverable: cf. O.T. examples in Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 175-182, and in examples in Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 59-61, where also a "deconstructionist" sample is found and where Wright's assessment of the epistemology of "reader-response" criticism is like mine (in so doing Wright is following others like B. F. Meyer). Likewise, see S. F. Porter, 'Literary Approaches to the New Testament: from Formalism to Deconstruction and Back,' in

did not actually say in my monograph that Moyise nor reader-oriented interpreters affirm “that a text can mean whatever they like,” but I do think it accurately represents my view of more radically minded subjectivist interpreters.

In essence, the approach with which he aligns himself generally contends that readers or “interpretative communities” are the ultimate determiners of a text’s meaning and not the original author’s intention in a text. In particular, incompatible interpretations of the same texts mean that one interpretation is just as valid, in terms of its “correctness,” as another. If this is not Moyise’s position, then I will be happy to be corrected, but this appears to be his view, as far as I can tell from his monograph, and his response to me continues to confirm this. As I mentioned in my monograph, it is hard to get a handle on Moyise’s perspective, but his clearer statements still line him up more with the notion that readers, not authors, are the essential creators of meaning than the milder form of “reader - response” criticism which sees a significant interplay of author’s meaning and reader’s creative interpretative response.<sup>53</sup>

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*Approaches to New Testament Study*, edd. S. F. Porter and D. Tombs (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 90-128, who summarizes and evaluates the milder and more radical forms of “reader-oriented” criticism, and the closely related “deconstructionism,” giving examples of how each have been applied to biblical studies. Similarly see D. McGartney and C. Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand* (Wheaton, Illinois: Bridgepoint [Victor Books], 1994), pp. 280-284; cf. also pp. 51-52. Strikingly, R. Morgan and J. Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 7, make the programmatic statement that “Texts, like dead men and women, have no rights, no aims, no interests. They can be used in whatever way readers or interpreters choose;” on the same page the authors say, “But the present point is that in all cases it is the interests or aims of the interpreters that are decisive, not the claims of the text as such. Any suggestion that a text has rights is a deception concealing someone else’s interests.”

<sup>53</sup> In this respect, see my analysis of Moyise’s discussions of John’s use of the Old Testament which seem to fit into a milder “reader-response” outlook, and then compare my analysis of his discussions of the stance of modern readers towards John’s writing, which are rooted in the more radical form of “reader-response” approaches (*John’s Use of the Old Testament in Revelation*, pp. 43-51).



In contrast to Moysie's subjectivist interpretative perspective, I want to elaborate briefly on Tom Wright's attempt to maintain a balance between the "objective" and the "subjective" in the doing of history and of interpretation.<sup>54</sup> The positivistic (observers are neutral and purely objective) and the phenomenistic (observers only see reflections of their own minds) are two extremes to be avoided. The truth lies somewhere in between, a view Wright styles as "critical realism." Ultimately, he sees that all observers have presuppositions ("worldviews") which are "private" to each individual but which also can be discussed "publicly." The public element includes the ability of people to perceive other presuppositions which differ from and even oppose their own. Further, the inductive data of reality are also a sharable public commodity. People with differing presuppositional perspectives can discuss with one another how that data fits into their perspectives. That perspective which is the "simplest" and which makes for the best logical fit of the most data is the most probable perspective. That mindset which is unable to make sense of as much data as another is less plausible. Hence, the tests of "logical coherence" and "correspondence" are crucial tests which can be conducted in a public manner.

Wright gives the example of a paleontologist who has the task of fitting a dinosaur skeleton together from some scattered bones.<sup>55</sup> If he creates a simple structure of a known dinosaur which still omits some significantly large bones that do not fit in, then others may accuse of him of satisfying the criterion of "simplicity" at the expense of the "data." The paleontologist responds by saying that the extra bones belong to another animal who was eaten by or ate the one now being constructed. If a second paleontologist produces another skeleton from the same bones and is able to use all the bones, but there are seven toes on one foot and eighteen on the other, then the opposite problem is posed: "simplicity" has been abandoned for the sake of including all the "data," and the first paleontologist will not be persuaded by an unconventional

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<sup>54</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 31-120.

<sup>55</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 104-105.

evolutionary explanation. Which of the competing theories will be accepted? The first is more plausible, since it is easier to think that some scattered bones from another animal intruded into the pile of the other than it is to believe that the strange mutated creature in the second scenario ever existed.

Presuppositional perspectives are comparable to the dinosaur hypotheses, which illustrate that usually no two hypotheses are without problems, but the one with the least problems is the more likely. Ultimately, in judging history and historical interpretations, Wright is probably correct in placing more weight on the criteria of “inclusion of data” than on the “simplicity of perspective.”<sup>56</sup> The same epistemological criteria applied by Wright to verifying historical acts are just as applicable to the verification of authorial literary acts of history (in fact, Wright includes hermeneutics within the purview of his discussion). Wright is apparently unaware that he has espoused an epistemology of presuppositional verification quite close to the Dutch Reformed theological tradition developed earlier this century (e.g., of Abraham Kuyper,<sup>57</sup> and Cornelius Van Til,<sup>58</sup> as well as Gordon H. Clark,<sup>59</sup> the latter being Reformed but not standing as squarely in the Dutch tradition). Similarly, his theory of perspectival validation is virtually identical to the classical “commonsense” tradition of hermeneutical validation developed in detail further by E. D. Hirsch, to whom he also makes no reference.

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<sup>56</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, pp. 104-105.

<sup>57</sup> *Principles of Sacred Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954).

<sup>58</sup> For a summary of C. Van Til’s works and thought, see T. Notaro, *Van Til and the Use of Evidence* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), especially with respect to the relation of presuppositions and inductive data. In the Kuyperian and Van Tilian tradition, see recently J. M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1987).

<sup>59</sup> E.g., *Language and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980); for a summary of his epistemology, see R. H. Nash, “Gordon Clark’s Theory of Knowledge,” in R. H. Nash (ed.), *The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark: A Festschrift* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 125-175 (esp. pp. 155-160).

The public discussability of peoples' presuppositions is also apparent from realizing that the way a perspective impinges on and distorts an observation or interpretation is primarily in the selectivity of what is looked at. An apt analogy might be a telescope. Parents may take their three year old child to a ridge which overlooks only half of a town, and they place a telescope there, and have their child look through it. The lens has a red tint and it has a distorting feature which makes people look as wide as they are tall. The young, inexperienced child concludes that the town is only half as big as it really is, that the people are red, and that they are as wide as they are tall. This would certainly be a distorted view, but the fact remains that the child still is looking at real objects outside of himself in the real world and that the child has some actual knowledge of that real world.

Working off a similar example, Wright concludes that historians also may have presuppositional lenses which distort in various ways (whether they be white European, feminist, capitalist, Marxist, Latin American liberationist, etc.), and "we may well need other lenses and viewpoints to correct such errors; but we are looking at [real] events none the less."<sup>60</sup> Some knowledge can be ascertained, even if it is not exhaustively or perfectly understood. It should be added that some presuppositions are good because they guide us into a right understanding of reality (e.g., presuppositions of the law of non-contradiction, of the existence of the self, and of justice; if the first two are consistently not assumed, then a person cannot operate in society and are categorized as "insane"; if "justice" is not consistently assumed, then society itself cannot function but is thrown into civil chaos). I imagine Moyses, if he granted the appropriateness of the telescope illustration, might want to say that the lens is so clouded that the child could not make out that a town with people was even there (this would be in keeping with his illustration of an initial ripple losing its clear identity when combining with other ripples or an initial sound wave losing its distinguishable identity when combining with other sound waves). Intriguingly, one of the prominent criteria of validating

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<sup>60</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 90.

interpretations among the more radical “reader-response” critics is whether it enables readers to see texts in ways that are new to them.<sup>61</sup>

To deny any real knowledge in historical or hermeneutical investigation is to be sceptical about reality itself, comparable to the solipsistic philosophers who question whether or not they are presently dreaming or living in a real world. “The philosophical tricks by which authorial intention has been dismissed from the reckoning are in the last analysis no more impressive than the well-known trick which keeps the hare in permanent pursuit,” contending that the hare keeps halving the distance between it and the tortoise into always smaller portions.<sup>62</sup> Vanhoozer mentions Umberto Eco’s similar critique of the postmodern notion of textuality: that sentences and texts are all connected to other sentences and texts in a never ending chain of interconnectedness, so that there is never a determinate but only an open-ended meaning in any particular text. Even such “scientific realities” as atomic energy, radioactivity, and electricity are considered mere metaphors and cannot be known. Eco has the main character in one of his novels question the common understanding of the shop signs and clouds, and other everyday sights and begs them to reveal their hidden meanings. Even a “subtext” must be sought for a sign which says “no littering”.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, Wright argues for another “public” aspect of hermeneutics: “a hermeneutic of love.” Accordingly, “the lover affirms the reality of and the otherness of the beloved. Love does not seek to collapse the beloved in terms of itself...”<sup>64</sup> (“Love seeks not its own,” 1 Cor. 13:5). Practically and epistemologically, this means that readers will attempt not to be selfish and twist the authorial intentions of others to their own selfish ends, but deny themselves and seek with all their might the real meaning outside of themselves, which an author

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<sup>61</sup> Porter, ‘Literary Approaches to the N.T.’, p. 115.

<sup>62</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 58.

<sup>63</sup> Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>64</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, p. 64.

has communicated. This must happen in marriage, else there will be a communication breakdown and the relationship will become chaotic. Wright is contending that such love must be extended to our neighbour in “public,” to everyone who crosses our path, including authors whom we read. I hope that I have “loved” Moyise in this manner because he is a real person and author, and I have no right to twist his authorial intentions carelessly in ways that might make it easier to criticize him or fictionalize his views. I may have failed in this, but I have tried truly to understand his view. Likewise, we should “love” ancient authors by denying any modern lenses which distort and by striving to understand what they originally meant and how that meaning might be extended to the present. I agree with Wright and his working assumption that such an ethic is based on a Christian, theistic biblical worldview.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, I believe this worldview makes most sense of particular values such as love than do non-theistic worldviews.

## *Conclusion*

This essay is a defense in summary form for the hermeneutical and epistemological hope that is in me. It contains the barest outlines of an approach which could only be written fully within the larger

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<sup>65</sup> For an indepth explanation of such a worldview as the basis for the kind of epistemology argued for in this essay, see Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? passim*. In my monograph (*John's Use of the Old Testament*, p.55, n. 136), I alluded briefly to a crucial connection between such a worldview and epistemology: the mind can “demarcate” the meaning of a communicative act so that the meaning remains constant over time (following Hirsch and Husserl); the enduring foundation for such “an absolute transcendent determinant meaning to all texts” is the presupposition of an omniscient, sovereign, and transcendent God, who knows the exhaustive yet determinant and true meaning of all texts because he stands above the world he has constructed and above all the social constructs which his creatures have constructed, yet he has created them to be able to share partly in his attributes and to have some determinant meaning of the communicative acts of others (following generally McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, p. 284; likewise G. H. Clark [cf. Nash, “Gordon Clark’s Theory of Knowledge,” pp. 143-162).

parameters of a book. My own thought in these areas is best represented by Hirsch, Vanhoozer, and Wright, from whom I have learned a great deal. I do not expect others to agree with me or those with whom I am in agreement; nevertheless, I believe the hermeneutical and epistemological positions laid out are plausible and other contrary positions bear the greater burden of proof, though some will think just the opposite.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> I am grateful to Professor Moisés Silva for his willingness to read this essay and for his helpful comments.