Intentions and the Logic of Interpretation

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What exactly are we doing when we say that an author's intentions should or should not have a role in the interpretation of a text? Are we making a claim about a crucial piece of evidence which should be taken into account, if at all possible? Or are we making a claim about grammar or logical character of the whole enterprise of interpretation? In this paper I shall mount a modest case for the latter way of construing this issue. I shall argue, that is, that the debate about intentions has been misplaced.1 It has less to do with external avowals which an author may or may not make about the meaning of his work and much more to do with the fundamental goal of the interpretative process as a whole. We will begin by sketching more fully the first option and examining the case against appeal to intentions on that level.

When an author's intentions in writing a particular text operate as a piece of external evidence, the logic of the situation is relatively straightforward. In puzzling over the meaning of a text, we normally assemble all sorts of evidence. We take into account the genre, the grammar, the style, the literary context, the usus loquendi of the words used, the circumstances in which the text was written, how it may have been or was received in its day, how it may have been composed and put together over time, and the like. Alongside these we now place the author's own account of what he was doing in writing the text under review. According to our hypothetical theory, the author's avowals will be treated as decisive in the construal of the text. These avowals may themselves be expressed in a variety of ways. They may be written in diaries or workbooks; or they may have been enshrined in a commentary on the relevant work; or they may have been made in some kind of public or private utterance which has been written

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down and has survived. Of course, the author's intentions may have been enshrined in the text itself. One thinks immediately of what Luke has to say in his famous prologue or what John says in his tantalizing comments towards the end of his gospel. But this is so rarely true that we can overlook it for the moment. In any case, the appeal would be much the same: the author's avowals about his intentions would be treated as having a privileged position in the debate about the most appropriate rendering of the text. At the very least it would require very strong evidence to overturn what the author said he meant on any particular occasion.

The appeal to intentions as evidence for a particular interpretation of a text has not, to my knowledge, been used to displace the appeal to other kinds of evidence. Other considerations are to be included in the process of interpretation; the issue is one of status, not exclusivism. Indeed, as applied to Holy Scripture the appeal to the intentions of the original author was embedded in a profound and hard-won attempt to tackle questions about the meaning of a text in a rigorous and intellectually persuasive manner. On the one hand, it was part of a move to cut texts loose from dogmatic, theological traditions which refused to let them speak for themselves. In earlier times the enemy tended to be the classical creeds of the Church, while in more recent times the great enemy has been real and imagined forms of Fundamentalism. On the other hand, it was an attempt to rid scholarship of faulty methods of interpretation--like allegory, or hasty, pietistic application--which imposed meanings on the text which were clearly not there in the first place.

Several interesting assumptions about texts and about human action are built into this deliberately sketchy account of interpretation. It is assumed, for example, that texts and authors are not just contingently, but logically, connected. A text is demarcated from mere markings on paper by its conceptual relation to human action. Texts are in fact human, intentional actions. They are the expression of human purposes and intentions; they are not mere events which occur as the result of natural, law-like happenings in the world; they embody and make manifest human consciousness. It is also assumed that, although texts are actions of human subjects acting to express certain intentions and purposes, they are also objects in the world and as such they possess an independence which stands over against the would-be interpreter. However difficult it may be to decipher or read them, texts must be approached with great patience and skill so that their authors may be heard and understood. They should not be railroaded into saying something which their authors did not intend them to say. Furthermore, it is assumed that the
author’s intentions have a privileged position in the process of interpretation because the author has privileged access to his or her intentions. Generally speaking, the human subject knows his or her intentions better than an external observer does, or so it is widely held. It is this principle which surely operates as the warrant for the special place of authorial intention in the debate about interpretation. Finally, it is assumed in this account that we can draw a distinction between the meaning of a text and the significance of a text. The former remains stable; it is that which the author intended to convey in the text. To be sure, our account of what the author meant may have to change, for new evidence about authorial intention may come to light and hence lead to revisions in our interpretation. But that is one thing. It is another thing entirely to identify the significance of what a text says. Here we may speak of its truth or falsity, its depth or shallowness, its relevance or irrelevance, its beauty or plainness, and so on. These may change drastically, depending on the criteria of evaluation we deploy, on the circumstances in which we find ourselves and on the personal commitments of those making the evaluation. However we plot the distinction in detail, some distinction between meaning and significance will be pressed upon us by those who want to stress the crucial role of intentions in the act of interpretation.

It is not entirely clear whether the attack on the role of intentions is meant to cut into all of the aforementioned assumptions. It may be simply an attack on the status of appeal to intentions when they are seen as part of wider battery of evidence which might be mustered by an interpreter. Or it may be something much more ontological and philosophical. It is absolutely crucial that we be clear about this, for there is far more to intentions than meets the eye initially.2 This is one of the enduring merits of attending to the claims of Derrida among the deconstructionists and Rorty among the new pragmatists.3 The latter are seeking to undermine in a very profound way the epistemological foundationalism which has been central to Western philosophy since Descartes. Their work in literary criticism generally, and their attack on intentionalism in particular, are part and parcel of a wider vision that covers issues which go far beyond those encompassed in traditional hermeneutics. An innovation of the magnitude they are seeking cannot hang on some kind of intentional fallacy, however generously construed; nor for that matter can it hinge on appeal to some expert in the field of literary criticism. Such an attack will depend on substantive philosophical moves in epistemology, and Rorty at least is only too aware of the demands that this lays upon both him and Derrida.
Indeed, what both Rorty and Derrida want to do is to overturn philosophy and epistemology, yet to do so they must deploy recognizably philosophical arguments, a feat which no one has as yet successfully performed. So we do well to isolate the debate about intentions initially as a debate about the status of certain kinds of evidence in the interpretation of a text.

It is not difficult to find fault with the appeal to intentions in the interpretation of a text, and ever since Wimsatt and Beardsley published their famous article on the “intentional fallacy,” many have followed their lead in banishing intentions from the process of interpretation proper. Their strictures about intention were initially limited to the interpretation of poetry, but as the debate proceeded they were extended to literature generally. Of late, opposition to intentions has been spreading to biblical studies, most especially among those who are interested in the literary study of the Bible. It is surely not an exaggeration to say that a deep division has developed between those who operate fundamentally as historians and those who operate fundamentally as literary critics. Up ahead it is likely that the division will become sharper and deeper.

The attack on intentions is mounted from a variety of angles. The most popular move at first is to point to the simple fact that in most cases, say, of the biblical literature, the author’s intentions are not accessible. Like most simple points, this is expected to settle the issue immediately and its proponents hope to return in triumph to a closer reading of the text, trusting that they will be left alone to get on with their work. If this is all there is to the debate about intentions, then indeed the debate is over and we had best bury it for good. One could, of course, take the simple logical expedient of accepting the consequences of this state of affairs and arguing that this does not overthrow the place of intentions; it just shows that we are not in a position to interpret the relevant biblical material. Biblical scholars need not quit their jobs, but they must now earn a living performing other functions in the commonwealth of learning. That no one has seriously suggested this option should make us pause and ponder what is really at stake in the debate as a whole. Those opposed to intentions, however, are not going to be satisfied with this abrupt attempt to keep the commitment to intentions unharmed and intact. So the attack proceeds apace.

Suppose we have access to the intentions of the author. For one thing, our author may have failed to execute her intentions in the work in question. Yet this does not render her text meaningless or necessarily obscure. Meaning therefore must be logically distinct form intentions. For another, the author may
have abandoned her original intentions in the course of her work or she may have included material which was not at all central in her deliberations. If the intentions have in any way changed, they can be of no help in determining the meaning of the work in hand. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the author best knows her intentions. We can all be deceived or ill-informed about our intentions. In some cases it even appears that the author had no idea what she was up to until the work was finished and she turned and read the work for herself, just like any other intelligent reader. Privileged access, even if it does exist, does not in the least guarantee infallibility; yet only infallibility could underwrite the claim that avowals about intentions have a special status. Add to this the fact that a text often has a surplus of meaning over and above what the author intended. Our author may not know the full meaning of what she is saying, or she may be incompetent or not inclined to declare what she meant. Surely something along these lines lies behind the commonplace among Protestants that God has still more light to break from His Word. The original author may have only been incipiently aware of what she was saying; to limit oneself to intentional meaning is therefore restrictive and spiritually debilitating. Texts are far richer than the standard intentionalist can allow.

Furthermore, persons who talk about the intentions of an author tend to be general and schematic, so it is not clear how precisely they will illuminate this or that part of the text. An author's intention to write a satire or a tragedy does not tell the reader how to handle the details of the script. Indeed there are cases where knowledge of the author's intentions tells us next to nothing about the text. Thus, to know that someone wrote a play to make a lot of money or to placate an enemy will not get us very far in the process of interpretation. Nor can the appeal to intentions set any ultimate guard against subjectivity, as Hirsch and his admirers so fondly hope, for intentions are by definition inward mental acts which are not available for inspection by the general public. It is surely better by far to work with the text in hand and let its precise and particular features settle whatever disputes arise. Textual certainties may not amount to much when weighed in the scales of knowledge, but they are all we have and they are always to be preferred to biographical speculations which take us away from the text and into the swamps of endless background studies and genetic guesswork.

Finally, there are extra considerations which come into play when we deal with a canonical text of Scripture. Text embodied in a sacred canon takes on new meaning when read as part of the canonical whole. As the biblical writers had no idea that their
work would have canonical status, there is no way in which they 
could have intended the meaning that their work now has, given 
its place in Holy Scripture. Attempts to get around this by 
claiming that the intentions of the final editors or canonizers, or 
even God, are to be the bearers of the relevant intentions is just 
one last-ditch effort to save the appeal to intentions. There is 
absolutely no warrant in the texts themselves for such a move; 
only a dogged commitment to theory precipitates such desperate 
expedients.

The consequences of this attack on intentions are extremely 
significant for hermeneutics. By far the most interesting for our 
purposes is that it calls into question the whole quest to ferret out 
the inner life behind the outer text associated with 
Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Collingwood. Thus, if this attempt to 
reject intentions succeeds, it will make no sense to speak of the 
interpreter reversing the causal process which brought the text 
into existence or of seeking to relive the thoughts which lie 
behind the text. Exercises of this character will be seen as adding 
nothing to the task of interpretation properly conceived; on the 
contrary, they may well be construed as a devious distraction. To 
be sure, such operations may be of some psychological value in 
drawing attention to evidence within the text which might 
otherwise go unnoticed, but they are of no deep epistemic value 
and they are assuredly not the heart of the interpretive enterprise.

Those opposed to intentionalism of one sort or another are not 
agreed on exactly what the heart of the enterprise should be. 
Some, especially those impressed by Marx, have turned to the 
social context of a text, as the key to interpretation. How far this 
alternative can avoid an unacceptable form of determinism and 
reductionism cannot be pursued here, but there is no denying that 
placing texts in their wider social setting can be exceptionally 
illuminating and the wise interpreter will develop a keen eye for 
the possibilities which this option may make available. Others, 
especially those interested in the formal features and structures of 
language, have turned to a close reading of the text as an 
autonomous object as the hope for the future. The text itself is 
read and reread until it yields up its riches. Again, there is no 
denying the fascinating and penetrating observations which have 
emerged from such endeavour. Others have sought for their 
literary salvation in the mining of continental, hermeneutical 
philosophy and the theories of meaning developed in this fertile 
domain. As some ponder the options, they sometimes gain the 
impression that the task of interpretation has become a thoroughly 
relativistic operation where subjectivism reigns and where there 
are no controls to adjudicate between one interpretation and
another. I suspect that this reaction reflects panic rather than good judgment, but, where sentiments like this prevail, it is small wonder that the commitment to intentions as a crucial issue in hermeneutics dies very hard indeed.

If intentions are to be seen as crucial, however, it should not be because appeal to intentions is the only way to head off relativism or subjectivism. Taking this line, aside from tending to beg vital questions against rival visions of interpretation, is likely to breed fantasy and confusion in our hermeneutics. If intentions are important, it is not just because we want them to be important or because we fail to be attracted by anti-intentionalist or non-intentionalist accounts of interpretation. They should be taken seriously because reference to them is logically indispensable in any plausible account of interpretation. In recent analytical philosophy precisely such an account has emerged over the last generation. The account in question began life as an attempt to solve certain problems in the philosophy of language and was then applied to the debate about interpretation.

Even though the primary work on this issue is highly technical, the relevant data for the task of interpretation can be stated quite succinctly. The key point to grasp is that the meaning of an utterance is not just a matter of the discourse deployed or the sentences uttered; it is fundamentally a matter of the speech act performed by the speaker on specific occasions in particular contexts. Moreover, the speech act performed is in turn determined by the intentions of the relevant speaker. Hence the interpretation of an utterance, and by extension the interpretation of a text, is logically related to the action performed by the person or persons who made the utterance or produced the text, and the action can only be identified by referring to the intention which governs it.

The standard way to deal with the issue at stake here is to attend to what J. L. Austin referred to as the illocutionary force of an utterance.6 Thus when someone in normal circumstances seriously utters the sentence, "Shut the door," there are three distinct elements to be noted. There is the locution itself or the locutionary act; the speaker has said this particular sentence. There is, secondly, the act performed in what has been said; in this case an order has been given. Finally, there is a perlocutionary element in that this particular act may have had certain effects on its hearer; say, it may have made the hearer feel sad. According to Austin and those who have borrowed or built on his work, understanding the illocutionary force of an utterance is essential to understanding the meaning of an utterance, hence it is quite inadequate simply to attend to the public meaning of the
sentence uttered. Thus, to take a hackneyed example, if someone were to say, "There is thin ice over there," it is essential not only to know what the various parts of this sentence mean in English but also to know how the speaker is using the sentence. Normally we take it as an affirmation, but in various circumstances this sentence could be an order, a warning, an insult or a request. To know this we need to know the intentions of the speaker in using this particular utterance. Discarding any reference to intentions and attending closely merely to the locutionary act in question will eliminate, therefore, an essential ingredient in the meaning and hence in the understanding of the utterance. What applies to this short, pithy utterance also applies to whole stretches of utterance such as we find in written texts.

Needless to say, various aspects of this proposal have come under attack in the philosophy of language. Enough of it remains intact, however, to cut deeply into the debate about intentions. What is especially important is the general orientation which it gives to the interpretive process. Even if the case has not been fully made for intentions as the necessary and sufficient conditions for the identification of illocutionary force, it sets texts very firmly in the domain of human actions. So Dilthey and his admirers were correct to develop a general hermeneutic which would focus on the understanding of human actions generally as the key to understanding texts. A text is not some abstract entity floating in free space endowed with meaning by some mystical agent called language or discourse. Nor are texts natural objects produced by passive, unintentional agents. Whatever else they are, texts are fundamentally the fruit of human action and are generally created to express human intentions and purposes. Speakers produce meaning, not texts per se; in this process they make use of discourse, and to reverse this order and focus primarily on language and secondarily on what is actually achieved by use of language is to get the cart before the horse. As Strawson puts it succinctly, "as theorists, we know nothing of human language unless we understand human speech."

Hence, when interpreters debate the role of intentions in their work it is hopelessly inadequate to resolve this issue simply by insisting that we may not have access to the avowals of the author as to what he or she meant. To work on this level is to work bereft of crucial conceptual tools and thus prevent the relevant issues being canvassed appropriately from the outset of the discussion. Besides, making an avowal about our intention is only one way of getting access to our intention, and we may be more or less fallible in our claims in this domain. The text itself will be a vital part of the evidence as to what intentions are expressed
in the work, and it is the task of the interpreter to develop skill in picking up what they are and hence determining what the force of the utterance under review may be. Nor will it do to confuse intentions with logically distinct matters such as motives, desires, feelings and other mental acts and events. To do so is to make elementary blunders in the philosophy of mind and breed unnecessary confusion in the field of hermeneutics.

Yet we must be careful in all our claims about both human actions and intentions. The terrain here is extraordinarily slippery and it is easy to fall prey to simplistic theories of action. Contrary to the standard orthodoxy on the subject, I seriously doubt if a general theory of human action is in fact intellectually attainable. This is not to decry the attempt to tie actions to intentions conceptually, but I am not fully convinced that all that human agents do as responsible agents is done intentionally. It is certainly useful to begin with a firm connection between actions and intentions, but this is the first word; it is unlikely to be the last. Thus I may set out to do $x$ and end up doing $y$ without at all realizing what I was doing or intending to do what I did. For example, contemporary television evangelists insist that they are simply using modern media to spread the old-time gospel, while in actual fact many of them are offering a new gospel message and their actions are more akin to that of an entertainer than that of an evangelist. That they would vehemently reject such a description of their action is beside the point. They are simply unaware of the social character of their behavior and how it may be legitimately understood. If this example seems too controversial, consider the situation where I set out to shoot Murphy in the Enniskillen stockyard filled with cattle. I fire and miss, but my action of shooting scares the cattle and they stampede, trampling Murphy to death. Here I have the intention to kill Murphy and I kill him, congratulating myself all the way to prison for what I have done; but I do not kill him intentionally. I suspect that examples like these may crop up quite frequently in our work on human texts, and anti-intentionalists are correct to focus on how tricky intentions really are. However, they tend to misread the significance of their astute observations by failing to see this as a signal to look afresh at the whole notion of action rather than as an invitation to focus on texts in themselves. We need to pursue the complexity of human speech–acts rather than just look again at the language and text. This is what I meant at the outset of this paper when I suggested that the debate about intentions was misplaced; it is less a matter of the relevance of certain kinds of evidence than it is about the total orientation of our work in hermeneutics. It is crucial in this orientation to place
texts where they belong; in the stream of human life, thought and action.

We might summarize the fundamental thesis we are driving towards in this way: Hermeneutics is not so much the study of what an author intended as the study of what the author achieved. If meaning has an equivalence, it is to be located less in intention and more in achievement. What is achieved may be more or less than what the author intended; happily we can be generous and charitable in our initial judgments and trust that intention and achievement may coincide more often that not. In any case, the old proverb holds; actions speak louder than words; so it is the actions which should get our full attention. Moreover, in understanding actions we do well to adopt the lofty vision outlined by Dilthey: “The ultimate goal of the hermeneutic process is to understand an author better than he understood himself.” This is clearly the case with many human actions, and thus we do well to set ourselves this task in hermeneutics. In the light of this, the task of the interpreter is to summon all the relevant evidence and all the skill that can be mustered to elucidate the nature of the achievement in question. For the author, the road to meaning is paved by good achievements, and the versatile and wily interpreter will map out such achievements as lucidly as possible. In constructing such maps, it will be useful to bear the following general rubrics in mind (all of which stem from construing a text as an achievement or an action and all of which have been vigorously advocated at one time or another in the history of hermeneutics).

First, it is useful to keep a distinction between the elucidation of a text and the evaluation of a text. As with the evaluation of actions generally, it is morally required that we know what a person has done in some detail before we evaluate the worth of what has been done. This holds for the study of action in the writing of texts. In the evaluation of a text, it is important at times to bear in mind the intended aim of the author. For example, if a writer intended to write a satire or an apocalypse, it is clearly erroneous to evaluate such work as if it were a piece of sober historical narrative. Intention in itself does not determine, in some simplistic fashion, precisely what value we should attach to a particular work, but it should be taken into account in the evaluative process overall. We may even need to take into account the motives of an author as we evaluate a text. Thus, if we know that a writer’s motive was to smear the good name of an opponent, then this will have an obvious bearing on our value of the worth of the text. The process of evaluation as a whole will involve a variety of criteria, depending on our commitments and
the express point of our evaluations. The good interpreter will
develop a high degree of self knowledge in this area without
sacrificing nimbleness of touch and economy of operation.

Second, in elucidating a text, it will be crucial to attend to the
linguistic repertoire of an author. The study of grammar, syntax,
vocabulary, genre, style, local idioms, usage, and the like, are
indispensable. In this there is no substitute for the demanding
task of mastering the original languages. The loss of these in the
modern seminary is surely to be deeply regretted. Also crucial is
a knowledge of how to read a book as a whole, dismantle it and
then put it back together again. Here concessions to the natural
language of the reader can legitimately be made, and it is crucial
to bear in mind the communicative conventions Traina has
captured in his analysis of the relationships to be found with a
text.\(^{11}\) We need also to bear in mind the innovations and
transformations which an author may have introduced. In all, we
need to know the capacities and range of options available to an
author in producing a text. If we neglect this, we are liable to
underestimate or overestimate what has been, or fail to perceive
what action has actually been performed.

Third, we need to develop a keen eye for the historical context
and particular circumstances in which a text has been written. At
this point, the current wrangle between historians and literary
critics is of deep significance. It is certainly true that historians
have not always served us as well as they might. As far as the
interpretation of Scripture is concerned, they have at times
dismantled the texts into atomistic bits and pieces, they have lost
the text in a mass of genetic and background information, they
have indulged in fanciful speculation which is intellectually
unifying, they have set unduly restrictive limits on the options
open to the contemporary theologian, and they have arrogantly set
aside exegetical insights from the astonishingly rich heritage of
interpretation which is available to us. Whatever catalogue of sins
we cobble together, we cannot ignore history if we construe the
interpretation of a text as the interpretation of a human
achievement. Achievements take place in a context and in a set of
circumstances. To understand them is to see them as making sense
within the conventions, assumptions, values, beliefs and attitudes
of their situation. Hence our knowledge of an author's repertoire
of linguistic action depends on historical information about the
period and the circumstances of the actual writing. Those who
focus on a close reading of the text as an autonomous object
either ignore this at their peril or smuggle precisely such
information into the interpretive process without acknowledgment.

There is another reason why history is important. Some texts
cannot be understood at all adequately if we do not know something about the ideas and the events concerning which they speak. If we read a text ahistorically in such circumstances we are liable to go astray. Equally, if a writer is making a rejoinder to another text, it is important that we have access to such information. Thus, if an interpreter insists that Job is a response to Deuteronomy, or that James is a response to Paul, we need the aid of the historian in evaluating such claims. How we resolve these issues will have a clear bearing on the illocutionary force of much of what is said. We cannot say in advance when or how historical information will be relevant. Some texts are more heteronomous than others, but even in seemingly autonomous books like Proverbs it is exceptionally illuminating to have some idea of the proverbial repertoire available at the time of writing, the traditions out of which the book emerges, and the way in which the current text of Proverbs may represent or depart from these conventions. Of course our judgments in history are invariably contested, and it is easy to be carried away by those alternatives which chime with our prepossessions. The sensitive interpreter will soon learn to make a virtue of such necessities while taking with radical seriousness the canons of historical judgment.

It is in this context that we should deal with the place of a text within the canon of Scripture as a whole. Two points deserve mention. First, it is both important and useful to see what happens to our understanding of a text when it has been placed in a sacred canon by a community of faith. It is best to designate our intellectual undertakings at this level not as the elucidation of the text but as the careful integration of the content of a variety of texts in a wider theological vision. When we appropriate the significance of a text of Scripture and relate it intimately to our expanding metaphysical commitments, how we do so will depend in part on how we relate that text to our understanding of other relevant, scriptural texts. Significance, in turn, will depend on elucidation in the sense that we cannot satisfactorily gauge the value of a text without first knowing what the text means. Hence we need to tread warily when claims are made about the canonical meaning of a text. Perhaps we should speak of canonical significance rather than canonical meaning.

Second, when we deal with the text as part of the canon of Scripture much more attention needs to be given to the broader historical considerations which are at stake. The process of canonization was part of a wider enterprise which the early church initiated in order to deal with its life and teachings in the crises which it faced over several centuries. Thus to cope with its
problems, the church not only put together a canon of Scripture, it also developed various creeds and put episcopacy in place. On an intellectual level, there is a deep sense in which creed and Scripture go together canonically, while episcopacy can be read as an attempt to secure these canons as integral to the social authority of the church and as constitutive of its identity. Much harm has been done in Protestantism when this is neglected. Scripture has been called upon to perform functions which were designed to be met by the creeds, and the creeds have been ignored or neglected in the canonical construal of Scripture. A canonical reading of Scripture which fails to take into account the early creeds of the church is therefore historically inept, and this is one more reason for treating the canonical interpretation of Scripture at the level of significance and appropriation rather than at the level of elucidation and exegesis.

In conclusion, one further point springs naturally to mind in our brief comments on the rubrics of interpretation. When we deal with a text, we cannot ignore the subject or particular content in which the writer is engaged. To take a simple example, adequate elucidation of a classical philosophical text depends in part on one’s capacity to understand philosophical ideas and issues. The good interpreter will be able to draw on insights which have been furnished by wrestling with the questions the text addresses and with rival ways of construing and resolving them. Initially, one’s capacity in this field may well develop by means of extensive interaction and dialogue with the text in hand. More appropriately, we might say that our reading of a text is like a dialogue with an author or speaker whose action continues across space and time into the present to inform and develop our judgments and latent human capacities.

This is clearly the case with Scripture. Deep and profound elucidations of the text depend on spiritual insight and on theological sensitivity as well as on standard linguistic, literary and historical skill. This is as it should be if the interpretation of a text is the interpretation of a human achievement, for this is inevitably set in the stream of human life, thought and action. Out of the richness of their experience, the depths of their theological acumen, the storehouse of their ability to communicate their proposals, the great interpreters take the reader into a new world of wonder and challenge where fresh horizons are encountered and prevailing capacities are developed. It is impossible to capture what is at stake here in a set of formal rules or in conceptual analysis of the underlying assumptions and principles. These have their place, but they are no substitute for direct exposure to those who have already mastered this art and
can share it with others. In this respect it is difficult to surpass what Robert Traina instantiates for those fortunate enough to have been his students.

Notes


5. This is surely correct in principle for, although there are significant differences between poetry and prose, it is clear that one can perform similar speech-acts in poetry as one normally does in prose.


11. See Robert A. Traina, Methodical Bible Study (Wilmore, Kentucky: Private Publisher, 1952), pp. 57-59.