SPEECH-ACT AS A WAY FORWARD TO UNDERSTANDING A BIBLICAL TEXT

BY
ANDREW TAN

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INTRODUCTION

The Problem

No Fusion of Horizons. Preachers of the Bible and biblical scholars recognise the need and difficulty of bridging the gap between the ancient biblical text and the contemporary audience. For a preacher, his concern is to preach so that the Word of God can shape listeners towards godliness. For a biblical scholar, his immediate task is to understand the text correctly. Both of these related objectives are possible only if interpreters, both the preacher and the biblical scholar, are able to perceive things from the perspective of the text. By way of illustration, Winks[1] aptly underlines the gravity of the problem through Luke 18:9-14.:

> For any modern reader at all familiar with the text knows that (1) "Pharisees are hypocrites and (2) Jesus praises the publican. The unreflective tendency of every reader is to identify with the more positive figures in an account. Consequently, modern readers will almost invariably identify with the *publican* (his italics). By this inversion of identification, the paradox of the justification of the *ungodly* (his italics) is lost and the social implications for the reader ignored.

This example is especially instructive for our discussion: it demonstrates that despite the fact that the reader knows the emphasis of this parable, that Jesus told this parable so that the reader may identify with the Pharisee, yet he is unable to do so. The root of the problem is not intellectual inability. It goes deeper than that: the problem lies with the being of the reader, or in Heideggerian terminology, its a matter of *Dasein*, the existence of a person's being in its entirety as he relates to the world, [2] that affects directly his understanding of the meaning of an object. In

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1. Walter Wink, *The Bible in Human Transfomation: Toward a New Paradigm for Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 42–43.

2. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, Evanston: Harper & Row, 1962), 26, for his explication of *Dasein* in his two part division. He defines *Dasein* as "Everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being. Being lies in the fact that something is, and in its Being as it is; in Reality; in presence-at-hand; in subsistence; in validity; in Dasein; in the 'there is.'" Also, Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 32, explains *Dasein* as "Being is an issue for it."

Gadamer's term, it is a lack of a fusion of horizons,[3] that of the interpreter's and the object's. In other words, a reader's historical situatedness prevents him from understanding a text. Thiselton aptly summarises the issue involved for understanding a text:

> My horizons must contain a space within which the text can be intelligibly 'slotted' in terms of provisional linkages with the familiar that allow patterns of recognition. On the other hand the realisation that what seems familiar is not quite what I had expected or assumed it to be, necessitates an expansion of my horizons to make room for what is new.[4]

An Incomplete Understanding of a Biblical Text. Apart from lack of a "fusion of horizons" of the interpreter and the text, there is a more fundamental problem. If Austin is right that all utterances, including a biblical text, are the product of an illocutionary act defined as "the performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to the performance *of* an act of saying something,"[5] then understanding of texts by means of traditional exegesis may result in a loss of meaning of a text as it is based on a traditional belief that statements function to describe.[6]

An Under-Utilised Resource. Richard S. Briggs in his survey of the present state of research in speech-act theory six years ago, aptly observed that "speech act theory has obvious potential for assisting in the interpretation of texts (biblical and otherwise) . . . Despite a slow trickle of articles over the past 25 years, there have been only a handful of more extensive works

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3. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., trans. Garret Barden and John Cumming (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), 63, as a further development of the theory of his mentor Martin Heidegger, introduced a paradigm shift in how one should understand the meaning of objects. Although his point that there is no objectivity in meaning (only a meaning that is given by the effective community) is debatable, an issue that is beyond the scope of this paper, his contention that the historical situatedness of the reader affects his understanding of the meaning of an object in some ways is undeniable.

4. Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with Special Reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer, and Wittgenstein* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 45.

5. J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1962), 99–100 (his emphasis).

6. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 3.

making exegetical use of speech act insights."[7] This state in current research has not changed substantially.

In view of the above concerns, this paper will attempt to provide a way forward for biblical exegesis through the use of speech-act theory.

Methodology and Delimitation

First, I shall explain what speech-act theory is and the principles yielded by research of scholars that should be considered when using it for exegesis . Second, I shall demonstrate its methodology of intepretation by an exegesis of Psa 19. As it is not, at this stage of research, an independent exegetical methodology, I shall use it within the broad framework of traditional exegetical method. This paper will not provide an exhaustive exegesis but will be confined to details sufficient to illustrate the use of speech-act theory.

EXPLANATION OF SPEECH-ACT THEORY

Constituents of a Speech-Act

Vanhoozer correctly understands the essence of speech-act theory in J. L. Austin's book, *How to do Things with Words,* that "Austin's main point is that saying is also a kind of *doing*; many utterances are *performative*."[8] Austin understands the act of saying something to contain three linguistic acts. First, a "locutionary" act which contains the words uttered, e.g. "Jesus is Lord." Second, the most important element, its related "illocutionary" act which is the act in saying something. This would be the force or intent of what was said. It can be a warning, a

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7. Richard S. Briggs, "The Uses of Speech-Act Theory in Biblical Interpretation," *Currents in Research* 9 (2001): 230. Similarly, Scott A. Blue, "Meaning, Intention, and Application: Speech Act Theory in the Hermeneutics of Francis Watson and Kevin J. Vanhoozer," *Trinity Journal* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 183, correctly concludes that while "Watson and Vanhoozer incorporate speech act theory into their hermeneutical programs...Neither writer adequately demonstrates how speech theory can be *practically* [his emphasis] included in the process of interpretation."

8. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? : The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 209 (his emphases).

promise, or others, depending on the intent of the speaker. Third, the perlocutionary act which is a consequence of that saying, in which case the person who was told the words "Jesus is Lord" would respond by ceasing to resist God's working in his life if the illocutionary act is a warning, or if the illocutionary act carries the force of a promise, the perlocutionary act would be that the person would cease being afraid of adversaries.

Principles of Speech-Act Theory Application

Briggs makes an important observation that there is "confusion over whether speech-act theory is a tool for exegesis as it is already practised, or whether in fact it indicates that exegesis itself needs to be reconceptualised."[9] Speech-act theory has the potential of reconceptualising exegesis by its new understanding of an utterance that it constitutes an act. However, whether it has the potential to become a tool to the extent that it can provide a unique exegetical method remains to be seen. Despite it being still at a seminal stage after 45 years since Austin published his book *How to Do Things with Words,* investigations by various scholars have yielded and reinforced a few important principles.

These principles are not stand alone exegetical steps but are considerations to be factored into traditional exegetical methodology. I shall illustrate their use in the exegesis of Psa 19 later.

Identify the Illocutionary Force. The most important constituent of a speech-act, the illoucutionary act, as explained above, can be clarified and represented as *F* (*p)* where *F* denotes the "illocutionary force indicators." On identifying the illocutionary force indicator, Searle correctly suggests:[10]

> Illocutionary force "indicators in English include at least: word order, stress, intonation contour, punctuation, the mood of verbs, and the so called performative verbs . . . Often, in actual speech situations, the context will make it clear what the illocutionary force of the utterance is, without its being necessary to invoke the appropriate explicit illocutionary force indicator."

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9. Briggs, "Uses of Speech-Act," 230.

10. John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969), 30.

In short, Searle is referring to the literary context. *F* can take the form of a promise, a warning, etc. It acts with reference to a propositional content, denoted by "propositional indicators" (*p*).[11] Thiselton[12] makes an important observation from such a representation:

> Biblical texts frequently address the reader as *warnings, commands, invitations, judgments, promises, or pledges of love* [his emphases] . . . Thus in the previous section on Pauline Christology we argued that the confession "Jesus is Lord" (I Cor. 12:3) is neither simply *p* nor simply *F* but *F(p*).

The implication for exegesis is that because an utterance can be understood as the force of an illocution acting with reference to a propositional content, during exegesis, one needs to distinguish and identify in the text under study these two elements, *F* and *p*. The significance of this principle are two. First, it prevents the interpreter from confusing these two elements which are in fact to be distinguished. Second, instead of ceasing exegesis prematurely when one arrives at the semantical and syntactical meaning of words and sentences, it prods the interpreter to seek also the force of the semantical meaning of the words and sentence as it relates to the intent of the author or text the way he/it wants to communicate to the readers.

Identify the Direction of Fit. Some illocutionary acts can be categorised into either a world to word fit, or a word to world fit. Thiselton highlights its significance:[13]

> The second point is even more fundamental . . . Some illocutions have part of their purpose or "point", to "get the words (more strictly, their propositional content) *to match the world*." This is the case with *assertions*. But others have the inverse function: "*to get the world to match the words."* This is the case with *promises* and *commands*.

Searle uses an illustration[14] to explain the above principle. A person who goes to buy her groceries is being spied on by a detective. This shopper has a list of things that she intends to

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11. Searle, *Speech-Acts*, 31.

12. Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 294 (his emphasis).

13. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 294 (Searle's emphases).

14. John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979), 3-4.

purchase. Her objective would be to make the "world of reality" fit her list of groceries, that is, the words written in her list. The direction of fit is from world to word. On the other hand, the detective observes what the shopper buys from the world of reality and writes the items onto his list. His objective is to fit his list, that is the words he writes, to the world of reality. Thus, it is a word to world fit.

Austin categorises illocutionary acts as expositives, exercitives, behabitives, verdictives, and commissives. Searle has a different categorisation: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations. These categories are debatable but Thiselton[15] correctly reminds us that "the value of these categories is operational and pragmatic." He further correctly explains:

> *Assertive*s fit reality . . . in a *words-to-world* direction. *Directives* and *commissives* (which include commands and promises) fit reality in the opposite direction of *world-to-words*. *What is spoken shapes what will be*. *Expressives* may presuppose either direction of fit. *Declaration* in their very utterance *bring about* a particular direction of fit.

Identify Contextual Conditions. A speech-act is by nature performative. This necessitates what is uttered to be backed up by a context that can give credence to its fulfilment. Otherwise, such a speech-act is empty and not meaningful. Here, I have labelled what Searle understands as "institutional facts," "constitutive rules", and "fulfilment conditions," under a general term "contextual conditions" since these terms are sometimes not mutually exclusive. One may not have to identify all three of them as if they are distinct entities. However, delineations between these terms serve a practical purpose in helping the interpreter to be specific in his search for these conditions.

Institutional Facts. Searle rightly emphasises that "it is only given such institutions as the church, the law, private property, the state, and the special position of the speaker and hearer within these institutions that we can excommunicate, appoint, give and bequeath . . ." [16] Thus,

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15. Thiselton, *New Horizons*, 296.

16. Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 18.

certain illocutionary acts presuppose the existence of a structure of power, authority or privilege that can make fulfilment of an illocutionary act possible.

Constitutive Rules. More fundamental to these institutional factors are constitutive rules that support these institutional facts.[17] Constitutive rules are analogous to rules that govern a chess game without which the moves are meaningless. In the same way, a speech-act, e.g. a promise counts as the making of a promise under certain conditions.[18] Searle formulates them as "X counts as Y in context C."[19] This statement means that some factors present in context C causes the propositional content contained in X when uttered to carry an illocutionary force contained in Y. Such a formulation has a significant implication for exegesis. It means that the context surrounding an utterance not only aids understanding, but more importantly, it contains constitutive rules that give force to a locutionary act so that it becomes an illocutionary act.

Fulfilment Conditions[20]**.** This element is a general term that encompasses the above two elements but includes also other conditions. They are succinctly described by Austin's "convention" and "circumstances." He defines convention[21]

> as the existence of an accepted conventional procedure having a certain effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in circumstances appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked

Circumstance is defined as "circumstances in a given case [that] must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked."[22] The presence of these two rules, an

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17. So rightly Vanhoozer, *Meaning*, 245.

18. Searle, *Speech-Acts*, 37–39.

19. Searle, *Speech-Acts*, 33–35.

20. Searle, *Expression and Meaning*, 126.

21. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 14–15, 26.

22. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 34.

appropriate convention and circumstance will make a speech-act "happy", that is, it will successfully take effect.

Locating Contextual Conditions. The question is where and how does one locate these contextual conditions. Traditional exegesis requires the interpreter to examine the surrounding historical context and literary context to inform meaning. I would like to further suggest that we should *prioritise* the search for these contextual conditions in the literary context of the passage under study. The basis is not only because a word takes its meanings from its context, but also because authors sometimes intentionally create a literary worldview that helps form the constitutive rules within the text.

Several scholars have done work in this area. Tovey in his discussion of John's gospel, regards the implied author as attempting to establish the required institutional understanding for effective speech-acts.[23] A more thorough appropriation of speech-act theory into exegesis is the work by Dieter Neufeld who similarly regards the author as attempting to:

> create a literary world where the cash value of the christological statements is seen in corresponding ethical conduct and proper confession. Through the use of a series of creative antitheses expressed in the context of several apocalyptic speech-act circumstances, the author makes explicit the outer boundaries of actions that *constitute* [my emphasis] proper confession and ethical behaviour.[24]

The remaining of this paper will incorporate the above discussed principles into traditional exegetical method for exegesis of Psa 19.

APPLICATION OF SPEECH-ACT THEORY

I shall proceed as follows. First, I shall ascertain the main point of Psa 19 by locating the paragraph that contains the main point and then analysing it to define the main point. This will

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23. D. Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 84–97.

24. Dietmar Neufeld, *Reconceiving Texts as Speech Acts*, Biblical Interpretation Series (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 3–4.

identify the illocutionary force of Psa 19. As this holds the key to identifying the direction of fit and the contextual conditions, I shall devote more space to this task. With this, the direction of fit can also be identified. Second, with the illocutionary force and direction of fit known, I shall use them to identify the contextual conditions that support the illocutionary force of the psalm.

Identify the Illocutionary Force of Psa 19

Locating the Main Point of Psa 19. Psalm 19 can be divided into three paragraphs:[25] verses 1-7, using the motifs of nature and revelation, focus on the glory of God being proclaimed; verses 8-11 describe the Torah; verses 12-15 describe the psalmist response. Hence, grouping the verses by content, this psalm can be divided into the above three paragraphs: 19:1-7; 19:8-11; 19:12-15 [19:1-6; 19:7-10; 19:11-14 (English)].

The main point or thrust of this psalm is in verses 12-15.[26] This finds evidence in three observations. First, Craigie correctly explains that psalms in its essence, are a reflection of a covenant relationship with Yahweh and "psalmists are covenant writers..[who] respond to God in

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25. Han-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 1–59: A Commentary*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988), 268–69, like many form critics, regard this psalm as composed of two psalms: 19A (verses 2-7) and 19B (verses 8-15). He argues on evidence that they differ not "only in content but also even in the metrical form." More importantly, he argues that "Psalm 19B is to be set in different context." However, as convincingly refuted by Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 208–09, that "such a view...is not probable, for the strophic structure is so startlingly regular, based on six groups of three bicola each..." Nevertheless, whichever view is taken, it does not affect my analysis. As Kraus, correctly, on the fact that these two sections "have been combined in the transmission of the text," views them in his interpretation as effectively unified. See also the section "Locating the Main Point of Psa 19" which verifies that 19:1-7 is closely related to 19:8-11 and 19:12-15.

26. Ross J. Wagner, "From the Heavens to the Heart: The Dynamics of Psalm 19 as Prayer," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999): 257, also correctly sees verses 12-15 as the focal point of the psalm. He writes: "the petition collects the diverse waves of thought that resound throughout the poem and directs them towards the focal point of the psalm — the intense intimate encounter of the psalmist with Yhwh."

prayer, in praise, or in particular life situations . . . "[27] Thus, this being the only paragraph that the psalmist enters into conversation with Yahweh, it should contain the main point of the psalm.

Second, both 19:1-7 and 19:8-11 contain vocabulary related to "revelation": 19:1-6 contains סָפַר ("tell"), נָגַד ("declare" [verse 2]); אֹמֶר ("speech"), דַּעַת ("knowledge"[verse 3]); דָּבָר ("word"), אֹמֶר ("speech"), דָּבָר (verse 4); מִלָּה ("utterance" [verse 5]); 19:8-11 contains תּוֹרָה (Torah) and its synonyms. Also, 19:8-11 is tied syntactically to 19:12-15 by the pronominal suffix in נִזְהָר בָּהֶ֫ ("is warned by them [the above mentioned תּוֹרָה and its synonyms]). Together, they imply that these three paragraphs are closely knitted.

Third, more importantly, that this paragraph is the climax of the entire psalm is signalled by the emphatic particle גַּם that puts emphasis on this paragraph. In summary, the main point of Psa 19 is in the paragraph 19:12-15.

Ascertaining the Main Point of Psa 19.

Structure and Translation of 19:12-15. The content of verses 12-15 and its structural indicators (גַּם [twice] and אָז) reveal four sections:

Section 1

גַּם

עַבְדְּךָ נִזְהָר בָּהֶם

בְּשָׁמְרָם עֵקֶב רָב

שְׁגִיאוֹת מִי־יָבִין

מִנִּסְתָּרוֹת נַקֵּנִי

Section 2

גַּם

מִזֵּדִים חֲשֹׂךְ עַבְדֶּךָ

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27. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1983), 40–41.

אַל־יִמְשְׁלוּ־בִי

Section 3

אָז

אֵיתָם

וְנִקֵּיתִי מִפֶּשַׁע רָב

Section 4

יִהְיוּ

לְרָצוֹן (A)

אִמְרֵי־פִי (B)

וְהֶגְיוֹן לִבִּי (B')

לְפָנֶיךָ (A')

יְהוָה צוּרִי וְגֹאֲלִי

Section 1

Even

Your servant is continually warned by them

Keeping them results in a great reward

Who can discern errors

From secret *sins* free me

Section 2

Even

From arrogant *sins*, restrain your servant

Let them not rule over me

Section 3

Then

I shall be blameless

and shall be free from great transgression

Section 4

Let it be

favourable (A)

words of my mouth (B)

and the meditation of my heart (B')

before you (A')

O Yahweh, my rock and my redeemer

Analysis of 19:12-15.

Section 1. This section contains two couplets, each comprises two cola. The first couplet contains the propositional content (*p*) while the second couplet contains the force indicator (*F*). That this is the relationship between the two couplets is evidenced by two observations. First, the second colon of the second couplet contains an imperative (נַקֵּנִי ["acquit me"]) which is a force indicator.[28]

Second, the relationship between the two couplets verify this. To understand the relationship, one needs to correctly understand the flow of these two couplets and the usage of two words. (1) נִזְהָר ("is warned") in the first colon of the first couplet in its verbal forms always refers to a warning where the person has yet to take heed.[29] In this context, it means the person has yet to obey God's word of warning. The function of this passive (niphal stem) participle in

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28. Searle, *Speech-Acts*, 30, correctly lists "mood" as a "force indicator device."

29. Its verbal forms occur a total of 19 times (e.g. Exo 18:20; Ezk 3:17, 18), and consistently refers to a warning yet to be taken heed of.

its predicate use emphasises that it is "an ongoing state of affairs."[30] The second colon in this first couplet emphasises cause and effect, that is, if the psalmist obeys the Torah, he will obtain a great reward. This finds evidence in the function of the infinitive construct with its attached preposition (בְּשָׁמְרָם) which in this use denotes cause.[31] In summary, the two cola in the first couplet emphasise that the psalmist agrees that he should obey the Torah. (2) The first colon of the second couplet is a rhetorical question which implies "no one". This coheres with the psalmist plea for help in the second colon. But the exact nuance of the word יָבִין ("discern") is debatable. I contend that it is not an *inability* to discern but a *refusal* to discern.[32] This finds evidence in the fact that in its verbal forms (qal stem), where the context is about man and sin, it always refers to a refusal to obey the Torah and not an inability to intellectually understand it.

In summary, the flow of the above three cola is that the psalmist, despite agreeing that it is good to obey God's laws, is unable to do so. These three cola thus lead into the final one: it is with this problem in view that he appeals "From secret sins, free me." The niphal participial form of the word סתר occurs only one other time in the same psalm (19:7). The emphasis there is that despite something being hidden, the sun's heat is able to detect it. Thus, the word here is a

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30. Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 625, correctly write that "more often, the [passive] participle describes as ongoing state of affairs, involving repeated ... or continuous ... action."

31. Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, 604, correctly notes בְּ may be temporal or causal. In this case, the subsequent context which focuses on reward rules in favour of the latter.

32. Thus incorrectly, Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 1–72*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 114, who interprets it as that "'errors' seem to be actions the psalmist consciously did and only later learned were sins" goes against the entire grain of the contextual flow. Similarly, Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 73, who regards the sins as "unintentional sins". Also, John Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London, New York: T & T Clark International, 2003), 111. Contra John Goldingay, *Psalms: Volume 1, Psalms 1–41*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 294–95, who correctly understands the sins referred to as "may be secret plots that precede actual wrong deeds..." Terrien, *The Psalms*, 213, is equivocal, allowing for both possibilities.

heightening of the above sense: it denotes the most hideous kind of sin. For these sins, the psalmist asks God to מֵנִסְתָּרוֹת him from them. Goldingay[33] aptly translates it as "free":

> The OT makes a number of references to acquitting the guilty, but always in order to affirm that God does not do so and that human beings should not . . . It is therefore unlikely that the psalm is asking for cleansing in the sense of acquitting existent wrongdoing . . . But *nāqâ* (niphal) can denote being free or empty, and the piel verb here seems to have an equivalent meaning.

More importantly, such an interpretation also coheres with the flow of the preceding context. In summary, the above analysis verifies that the first three cola form the propositional content (*p*) and the final colon is its force (*F*). Thus, the illocutionary force of this section is a plea to God for help to overcome the strangle hold of sin over the psalmist.

Second 2. This section again begins with the emphatic particle גַּם. It functions not as a parallel to "section 1" but a further heightening. This fits the above emphasis, that is, what began as a plea to God for help to free him from sin, climaxes in stronger language, both in terms of vocabulary and the imperative mood: חֲשֹׂךְ ("restrain" [imperative]) and אַל־יִמְשְׁלוּ־בִי ("rule" [qal imperfect jussive + adverb of negation signifies a prohibition). Thus, "section 2" contains a more pronounced illocutionary force of the above section. Together, the illocutionary forces of these two sections inform "section 3."

Section 3. This section is an inference drawn from the above two sections. Two observations hint at this. First, it begins with an inferential particle אָז. Second, it picks up synonymous vocabulary of the above sections "blameless"; "transgression"; נקה ("free"). Thus, it contains the intent of the preceding two sections and hence the illocutionary force of Psa 19:12-15 which is a plea to be blameless, that is , to be accepted by Yahweh and counted as having kept the covenant between him and Yahweh.

Gathering together the analysis of sections 1 to 3, the propositional content (*p*) in sections 1 and 2 together with the illocutionary force indicator (*F*) in section 3 implies that the

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33. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 294–95.

illocutionary force of Psa 19:12-15 may be represented as $F^{\text{Request to God for Acceptance}}$ (p = to be free from sin).

Section 4. This section begins with a divine jussive יִהְיוּ , indicating a request from an inferior to a superior. As it is a "third-person expression of volition,"[34] it acts as a illocutionary force indicator. This request of the psalmist is framed by a chiasm as indicated by its outer ring A A' which contains a consonance of ל and its inner ring B B' which are semantically synonymous. The preposition לְ in both A A' and B B' are directional. Thus, this directional לְ is another illocutionary force indicator that reinforces the force of the divine jussive יִהְיוּ. What the psalmist requests to find favour before Yahweh are "the words of my mouth" and "the meditation of my heart". These are two sides of the same coin. In places where פֶּה ("mouth") and לֵב("heart") occur in parallelism, they emphasise two aspects. First, when what a person thinks in his heart is consistent with what he says, then that would be a true reflection of his nature.[35] On the other hand, when what he says is not consistent with what he thinks, then that is not a true reflection of who he really is.[36] In other words, the psalmist is requesting that God finds him wholly acceptable in his sight.

The psalmist then concludes with an address to God: "my rock and my redeemer." This is not a general address but is chosen in view of the psalmist's needs. In line with the flow of the preceding context where his main concern is that he be found acceptable before God and free from the bondage of sin, this address emphasises that the psalmist's ability to have victory over sin comes from God. In other words, the psalmist's desire in section 4 is only possible through the help of God as "rock and redeemer." Seen in the light of the preceding analysis, section 4 is basically a refrain of section 3 and hence contains the same illocutionary force.

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34. Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, 568.

35. 1 Sam 2:1; Job 31:27; Psa 17:3; 49:3; Pro 16:23; Ecc 5:2; Jer 23:16.

36. Psa 55:21; Isa 29:13; Ezk 33:31.

Identify the Direction of Fit

The illocutionary force indicator *F* is a request of the psalmist to God to be accepted by him, that is, that he accepted on grounds that he has kept his part of his covenant with Yahweh. The propositional indicator *p* is to be free from sin. Thus, the illocutionary force can be represented as $F^{\text{Request to God for Acceptance}}$ (to be free from sin). This implies the direction of fit is from world to word. In other words, the world is the status of acceptability of the psalmist before God; the word is the state of being accepted by God.

Identify Contextual Conditions

In order to fit a world to a word, contextual conditions must be present. More specifically, the psalmist's request to God for acceptance (force indicator *F*) and his desire to be free from sin (propositional indicator) must presuppose conditions appropriate for their actualisation so that, in Austin's terminology, the speech-act can be "happy".

Contextual Conditions for $F^{\text{Request to God for Acceptance.}}$ First, an institutional fact must exist so that when the psalmist requests to God for acceptance, he has reasons to believe that his prayer will be granted. This institution is the covenant between the psalmist and Yahweh expressed by "my rock and my redeemer".

The above expression has covenantal overtones as its only other usage (Psa 78:35) reveals: when Israelites were under chastisement by Yahweh, they "remembered" (זכר) to look to him, their "rock and redeemer,"[37] for help. As to who this Yahweh is, the context below explains: their remembering to look to him for help stands in contrast to 78:42 where they did not remember (זכר). This contrast implies that 78:35 and 78:42 are related and should inform each

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37. Sheri L. Klouda, "The Dialectical Interplay of Seeing and Hearing in Psalm 19 and Its Connection to Wisdom," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 10 (2000): 190, notes that "גאל ... 'Redeemer' is peculiar to Hebrew, and there are no known cognates." Noting its various use in the OT, she concludes that "the term 'redeemer' emphasises the principles of strength, might, power, and the application of the term to Yahweh magnifies his omnipotence, particularly in light of his continual deliverance of Israel over the course of biblical history." This observation strengthens the institutional fact that supports the psalmist's plea for help.

other's meaning. He is the one who saved them out of Egypt. This salvific event rests upon the fact of a covenantal keeping God as evidenced by the fact that in giving them the book of the *covenant*, Yahweh recalls again the salvific act in Egypt (see Exo 20:1, 2ff; c.f. 23:8, where the law given is described in relation to the "blood of the covenant").

Thus, the psalmist is confident that his illocutionary act, a request to find acceptance by Yahweh will be successful because Yahweh will keep his covenant so that his people can continue to live within his favour. The above institutional fact is also a constitutive rule: it is the existence of such a covenantal relationship that gives credence and meaning to the request.

Contextual Conditions for *p*. The psalmist's plea (19:12-15) to God for deliverance from sin is predicated upon contextual conditions (including institutional facts, constitutive rules, and conditions of fulfilment as discussed above). They are contained in the psalm which the psalmist, in order to provide credence to his illocutionary act, has created. Hence, by examining the context of this psalm, these condition are identified as Yahweh as redeemer, the life giving qualities of the Torah of God (19:8-11); and the all pervasive glory of God (19:1-7).

Yahweh as Rock and Redeemer. The psalmist's request to be freed from sin requires the existence of an institutional fact — Yahweh as "our rock and our redeemer." In other words, only Yahweh is capable of freeing him from sin.

Effectiveness of God's Law in Light of 19:8-11 . In the first colon of "Section 1", the psalmist uses the pronominal suffix in נִזְהָר בָּהֶם ("is warned by them") to encapsulate the entire description of the Torah (19:8-11). The psalmist use of such a law is that he might be continually warned "by them" (בָּהֶם) so that he can maintain a holy living. The extent to which the law is effective is first explained by the preceding context in 19:8-11. Taking cues from repeated motifs, this paragraph can be delineated into three sub-sections: 19:8-9; 19:10; 19:11.

Analysis of 19:8-9. Verses 8 and 9 comprise four cola each with the structure "the Torah of Yahweh [a construct noun in its various synonyms + a genitive] and its effect [using a verbal form] on man." The emphasis is that the Torah, described by various synonyms, is able to

bring benefits to the individual. These four cola are analysed in turn. (1) It restores the soul: in places[38] where נֶפֶשׁ is the object of the verb שׁוב , it always means to be brought from a state of misfortune to a state of life. (2) It makes wise (חכם) the simple (פֶּתִי): these two words occur together only in one other place (Pro 21:11) where פֶּתִי refers to a scoffer. This is the usual meaning (Pro 1:22; 7:7) in many of its occurrences. More importantly, it fits the present state (19:12-13) of the psalmist who seems to be caught in some kind of a sin. (3) The Torah of God rejoices (שׂמח) the "heart". But how Torah brings joy is unclear. The word used to describe the Torah of God is described as יָשָׁר. In places where this word and שׂמח occurs together,[39] the joy always comes from Yahweh as a gift to the righteous in heart. Hence, joy comes not from the Torah[40] but from *obedience* to the Torah. (4) The Torah of God (מִצְוָה) enlightens the "eyes [עַיִן]." In the only other parallel occurrence (Num 15:39) where these two words are used, the מִצְוָה can restrain him from falling into sin by what his "eyes" see.[41]

Analysis of 19:10. Verse 10 also comprises two cola each with the structure "the Torah of Yahweh [a construct noun + genitive] and its nature [described by a verbal form]." Their content is about the innate quality of the Torah of God. (1) That יִרְאַת יְהוָה ("the fear of Yahweh") refers here to Torah is evident from its usage elsewhere (Psa 34:11; Pro 1:7; Isa 33:6) and the fact that it is sandwiched between Torah's synonyms. However, consistently in its usage, its emphasis is always Torah *applied* to bring fear of Yahweh as opposed to just being a synonym of Torah.[42] This fits what follows where it serves to prepare the grounds for his application

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38. Ruth 4:15; 1 King 17:21,22; 2 Chr 6:38; Job 33:30; Psa 23:3; 35:17;25:13; Jer 22:27; 44:14 (3x); Lam 1:11; 1:19.

39. Psa 32:11; 64:11; 107:41.

40. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 292, incorrectly without evidence comments that there "is joy in knowing what God's will is and in therefore being able to do it ..."

41. In a similar vein, Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, 182; Davidson, *Vitality*, 72.

42. Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary (Paternoster: Hendrickson, 1999), 108, misses the point when he comments that "unlike other psalms, the

(19:12-15). Such a Torah "endures forever." In other words, Torah incalcates a fear of Yahweh that gives the individual permanence, stability and security. (2) Torah here is described as מִשְׁפָּט. This word often occurs in the contexts that indicate that it is not only the Torah of Yahweh, but it is his decision that has an outworking in the lives of the individual[43] (Psa 9:5; 99:4; Isa 26:9; Isa 50:8). Such a nuance coheres with the significance of "the fear of Yahweh" as discussed above. Such a Torah is "righteous altogether." In other words, the one essence of its quality is "righteousness."

The above mentioned qualities (19:8-10) of Torah are not some general descriptions. In light of the psalmist's present state of being caught in some sin, it is a directed description tailored to the needs of the psalmist. This applies also to 19:1-7 as explained below: its content is specifically directed at the needs of the psalmist expressed in verses 12-15. A final word about the connection of these two sections is in place: the quality of the Torah (19:10) predicates its effect (19:8-9). This adds strength to the Torah.

Analysis of 19:11. This section comprises two cola with a common content that the Torah of Yahweh is very desirable. In keeping with the subsequent context where the psalm is applied, this section serves as a transition from the potential use of the Torah and its innate qualities to its application (19:12-15).

Effectiveness of God's Law in Light of 19:1-7. This paragraph can be divided into two sections: 19:1-5a and 19:5b-7 as their content indicate. I posit that the function of this paragraph is to reinforce the emphasis of 19:8-11, that the Torah of God is all pervasive, which implies that it is all powerful. This reinforcement is couched in terms of "the glory of God is all pervasive."

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fear of the Lord here refers not to the attitude of faith in God but, in keeping with its parallel expressions, to the codified faith of written Torah."

43. Goldingay, *Psalms 1–41*, 293, astutely comments that this colon "declares that God acts decisively and faithfully and that humanity is also called to do so."

To arrive at that conclusion, I shall analyse 19:1-5a and 19:5b-7 to verify that this is the main point of 19:1-7.[44] Then I shall show that 19:1-7 is to reinforce 19:8-11.

Analysis of 19:1-5a. The flow of 19:1-5a shows that the emphasis of this section is "the glory of God is all pervasive." After declaring that the "heavens are telling [מְסַפְּרִים] of the glory [כָּבוֹד] of God," (19:2), the psalmist in subsequent verses focuses on explaining the scope of this מְסַפְּרִים ("telling") using various synonyms: נָגַד (verse 2); אֹמֶר, דַּעַת (verse 3); דָּבָר, אֹמֶר, דָּבָר (verse 4); מִלָּה (verse 5). The emphasis of that "telling" is its pervasiveness: speech is poured forth "day to day" and "night to night" (verse 2); there is no place where their speech, voice and words are not heard (verse 3); their "line [or "voice"] has gone out through *all* the earth" (verse 4a); "their utterances [has reached] to the *end* of the world" (verse 4b). And the object of the above participle מְסַפְּרִים and its synonyms are the "glory of God."

Analysis of 19:5b-7. Second, that 19:5b-7 also continues the thought of the preceding section is indicated by several clues. First, the pronominal suffix in "in them [בָּהֶם], he has placed a tent for the sun") is a masculine plural whose only possible referent is the antecedent הַשָּׁמַיִם ("heavens"), a masculine plural noun. Here, as often in poetic genre, the sun's heat is a synecdoche for the sun, and the sun a metonym for the heavens. Second, the course the sun takes is described as "its rising is from one end of the heavens . . . to the other end of them;" the psalmist concludes this section by "there is nothing hidden from its heat." The emphasis is that the heat of the sun is all pervasive. This coheres with the emphasis of the preceding section (19:1-5a). Thus far, what the above analysis has yielded is that 19:1-7 emphasises that the glory of God is all pervasive in its proclamation. This is demonstrated by the sun's heat. That this section is closely connected to 19:8-11 has been shown (see above in "Locating the Main Point of Psa 19"). But the important question remains as to what the connection is.

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44. Wagner, "Psalm 19 as Prayer," 250, also correctly comments that "the exact content of this 'speech' (אמר) and 'knowledge' (דעת) remains unspecified, but clearly it concerns God's glory and work."

Connection of 19:1-7 and 19:8-11. That 19:1-7 and 19:8-11 are closely knitted is evident in their common vocabulary related to "revelation" (as shown above). The precise nature of that connection lies in the thrust 19:1-7: the "glory [כָּבוֹד]" of God. A survey of its use shows that the glory of God has saving power for an individual whose life is in life danger (Psa 29:9; 115:1; c.f. 1 Sam 4:21). Isa 40:1-17 is instructive. It is set in a context of bringing comfort to nation of Israel, Yahweh's covenantal people. Their hope in God is realised when "the glory of the Lord [כְּבוֹד יְהוָה] will be revealed" (Isa 40:5). That this revelation brings salvation is substantiated by 40:9-17 where his salvific acts are enumerated. Also pertinent to our discussion is 40:8 which reads "The grass withers, the flower fades". This refers to human powers prevailing over Israel. The prophet contrasts these powers which threaten the safety of Israel to that which will rescue them — "the word of God [which] stands forever." In other words, "the glory of Yahweh" is synonymous to "the word of God."[45] Such an understanding coheres with two facts. First, it explains why the glory of God is proclaimed by synonymous words related to "revelation." Second, the subsequent context in 19:8-11 emphasises precisely this point: the Torah of God brings life.

To summarise how 19:1-7 is connected to 19:8-12: the glory of God that brings salvation is God's word. It is transmitted in the form of "speech", "words", "telling" and "utterances" and is all pervasive. Its pervasiveness is illustrated by the fact that nothing escapes the heat of the sun (Psa 19:7). This pervasiveness of the glory of God (19:1-7) informs the meaning of the subsequent paragraph about the Torah of God (19:8-11): the Torah of God is capable of penetrating into every recess of sin. It is this institutional fact that lends credence to the

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45. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 52, concurs: "Humanity can neither save itself nor hinder the one who determines to save. The sense of contrast is heightened by the appearance of *all flesh* in vv. 5 and 6, and by the fact that both stanzas end with reference to certainty because of the mouth/word of God."

psalmist's hope (19:12-15) of escaping the bondage of sin so that his relationship with Yahweh can be invigorated to result in his acceptance by Yahweh (19:15).

CONCLUSION

A Summary of Speech-Act Interpretation

A speech-act comprises three parts: a locutionary act, which is the words in the utterance or statement; an illocutionary act, which is what the utterance intends to achieve; and the perlocutionary act, which refers to the consequence of the illocutionary act. In using speech-act theory for interpretation, this paper highlighted the need to identify several elements: (1) the illocutionary force $F(p)$ which is produced by an illocutionary force indicator F acting on a propositional content p; (2) the direction of fit which can be a world to word or a word to world fit; and (3) the contextual factors which support the illocutionary force which include institutional facts, constitutional rules and fulfilment conditions.

I then applied this theory to interpret Psa 19. (1) To identify the illocutionary force, the psalm was examined for its main point which was identified to be located in 19:12-15. After an exegesis of this section, I identified its thrust to be a plea to God for acceptance, that is, that the psalmist may be found by Yahweh to have kept his part of his covenant with Yahweh. I concluded that the illocutionary force indicator (F) is a request for acceptance by God. F acts with reference to a p which is to be free from the bondage of sin. When F acts on p, the result is the illocutionary force $F(p)$. (2) The direction of fit is a world to word fit. The world is the psalmist's status of acceptance by God. The word is the state of being accepted by God. (3) Once $F(p)$ and the direction of fit were identified, my search for the contextual conditions became more specific. One possible search area for these conditions was within the psalm itself. I argued that this should be given priority because a word find its meaning within the immediate literary context, or in other words, the worldview of psalm 19 which the psalmist has created. These should be conditions that would make two entities reachable. First, F, which is acceptance

by God, is achievable because the psalmist addresses God as "my rock and redeemer." This expression epitomises an existing covenantal relationship between the psalmist and Yahweh. It is the existence of such a relationship that that obliges Yahweh to save the psalmist. Second, for *p*, which is to be free from the bondage of sin, to be attainable, the psalm provides an institutional fact: the Torah of God (19:8-12) and its invigorating power as illustrated by the pervasive glory of God (19:1-7).

A Response to Interpretation Problems

At the beginning of this paper, I underlined three problems that may undermine exegesis. Below is my response to these difficulties in the light of this paper. First, interpreters face the problem of a lack of a "fusion of horizons," that is, a reader's historical situatedness prevents him from understanding a text. Although this paper did not demonstrate in concrete steps how that can be achieved,[46] it has shown that speech-act theory steers an interpreter's effort towards it in a twofold way. First, when applying speech-act theory into interpretation of a biblical text, the interpreter's main task is to identify the illocutionary force that will produce a perlocutionary act. As these acts are in essence application, the interpreter will be constantly reading the text with a view to application. In this way, he is constantly prodded to fuse his horizon with that of the text's. Also, as the interpreter needs to identify the contextual conditions that will aid an illocutionary act to take place, at the end of the process, he will be clearer and more convinced than before as to why the illocutionary act, and hence the application of a biblical text, can take place. In this way, knowledge of these contextual conditions shape the *Dasein* of an interpreter so that he begins to allow the text to speak to him.

Second, I also mentioned that it is an under utilised resource. As mentioned above, Richard Briggs made an important observation that there was "confusion" among scholars over whether speech-act theory could be used as an exegetical tool or if it functioned to indicate that

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46. As mentioned in the introduction, it is not the intent of this paper to address Gadamer's major contention that not only is objectivity of meaning difficult, it is impossible.

exegesis needed to be re-conceptualised. This perhaps explains the reticence of interpreters to use speech-act theory causing it to be an under utilised resource. It is my hope that this paper, by having provided some clarification of how this theory may be practically applied, may stir some to use it. However, as the present state of speech-act theory research now stands, despite its usefulness, it serves only as a complement, not a replacement, of traditional exegetical method.

Third, I also underlined that doing exegesis through traditional exegetical methodology alone presents a potential loss of meaning because it tends to neglect the illocutionary force of a passage which should be the aim of exegesis. Seen in this light, scholars who argue that speech-act theory indicates that exegesis needs to be reconceptualised are right because understanding how a statement works semantically and syntactically is penultimate. What is ultimate is understanding a statement's illocutionary force. This paper, by showing how speech-act theory may be practically applied, offers a way forward. In this way, the Word of God can be heard in all its intent and significance.

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