Triadic to Trinitarian: Kevin J. Vanhoozer's Application of J.L. Austin's Speech Act Theory

Joshua C. Stone
Liberty University, jstone@liberty.edu

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Abstract

The basis for Christian theology, the Bible, has come under considerable attack by decontructionalists in their attempt to disregard authorial intent and to prove that understanding the meaning of an author's words is an impossible task. Kevin J. Vanhoozer is an evangelical scholar who has done much in defense of authorial intent and has found fertile philosophical ground in Speech Act theory. This essay looks at Vanhoozer's use of J.L. Austin's variety of Speech Act theory to determine if Vanhoozer uses Austin correctly, then turns to Vanhoozer's bibliological use of Austin whereby he analogically applies Austin's Triadic formula of a speech act to the Trinitarian formula of the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture.

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Master of Divinity in Theology (Fall, '10) at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary in Lynchburg, Virginia.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy of language has quickly come to exercise significant influence in all areas of spoken and written communication. Concurrently, postmodern perspectives of hermeneutics have gained seemingly pervasive influence both on popular and academic levels. In the last half-century, "the author" appears to have "died" but words have gained new life, posing significant issues within the Christian church and its belief in the divine authority of the Bible. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, using the pioneering work of J.L. Austin, has presented a way of using the philosophy of language, particularly Austin and Searle's Speech Act theory, to develop a way of understanding God's relation to the text of Scripture. Vanhoozer presents God in divine communicative action whereby all the members of the Trinity have a particular role to play within the act of communicating to his people, particularly in relation to the Scriptures. A critique of Vanhoozer's use and development of Austin is appropriate in determining if Vanhoozer has used Austin properly, precisely, respectfully, and validly. Vanhoozer could run the risk of loosing Austin's intent while at the same time trying to save the intent of "the author." The following is an investigation of Vanhoozer's use of J.L. Austin, Vanhoozer's Trinitarian application of Austin's triadic formula of Speech Act theory, and his constructive theology of divine communicative act.

AUTHORITY OF HOLY SCRIPTURES AS ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN DISTINCTIVE

Before beginning a study on the relation of Vanhoozer's use of Austin toward a proper hermeneutic of Scripture and God's action of speaking, one must understand the classical, orthodox Christian position of authorial intent and authority of the Bible. The Jewish covenant community and the orthodox Christian Church have historically been rooted in the belief in the full divine authority of the Holy Scriptures in understanding God, the world in which the Church lives, and those outside the community of God. It was not until Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thinkers, both philosophically (Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, Spinoza) and theologically (Schleiermacher, Ritchel), that the idea of Scripture as non-authoritative entered onto the stage. For three hundred years this drama has been playing, which often and erroneously pairs philosophy against faith.[1] Belief in a divinely authoritative Scripture has always been a distinctive to the faithful Church, and particularly in the Evangelical tradition. Belief in the authority of Scripture and its ability to convey truth have been distinctives of the Church since its inception.

Few English-speaking modern writers have contributed more to Evangelical thought on the purpose and nature of Scripture than B.B. Warfield, a man deeply rooted in Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Augustine. For Warfield, inspiration, inerrancy, and divine authority are each a leg on a three-legged stool. In his work

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[1] Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1982), 20.

about the authority of the Bible, Warfield writes, "the Bible is an oracular book, - as the Word of God in such a sense that whatever it says God says,"[2] and "[the] attitude of entire trust in every word of the Scriptures has been characteristic of the people of God from the very foundation of the church."[3] An entire section of Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* is dedicated to the interconnectivity of "It says; Scripture says; God says."[4] In the mind and writings of Warfield there can be no question that Scripture not only has divine authority for the Christian life, but also has such authority because it is the oracle of God in written words.

The authority that comes from Scripture has its source in the "inspiration" of Scripture. Inspiration is described by Warfield as "rendering that writing and errorless record of matters,"[5] further showing how authority, inspiration, and inerrancy draw from one another. Scripture's verbal nature must necessarily be part of the understanding and doctrine of inspiration, for inerrancy of the autographs have no place in the discussion without the words penned by the human authors.[6]

A representative example that the Scriptures are the Word of God in a verbal and authoritative sense can be seen in the contemporary theologian Millard Erickson. He attests to the verbal nature of revelation and even the divine source of the vocabulary that distinguishes certain writers of the Bible.[7] Erickson suggests that God worked through the writer's education, upbringing, and other areas to prepare him for the task of writing a particular book of Scripture. So the vocabulary, the particular verbiage used, is from God not in a "strict" sense but in a "direct" sense.

The emphasis on the language of Scripture by the Christian Church has created fertile ground for Speech Act Theory to make substantial inroads into the cache of evidence for the defense of an authoritative Bible. The emphasis of the words of Scripture as integral to the understanding and authority of Scripture compose a significant place in the formulation and presentation of inerrancy, infallibility, and authority that evangelicals purport. Thus, preserving the authorial intent is paramount to the theology and praxis of the Christian religion. If authorial intent is lost, much of Christian theology is lost with it.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF SPEECH ACT THEORY

The philosophy of language is one of the schools of philosophy that has held significant attention and gained much influence throughout the past thirty years.

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[2] B.B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), 106.

[3] Ibid., 107.

[4] Ibid., 299.

[5] B.B. Warfield and Archibald A. Hodge, *Inspiration*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1979), 17.

[6] Ibid., 19.

[7] Millard J. Erickson, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 243.

The nature, intent, uses, and conceivability of language has taken a prominent role in philosophy and theology in various degrees.[8] J.L. Austin pioneered what is now known as Speech Act theory, and his 1955 William James Lectures at Harvard University brought Speech Act theory to the foreground. This work established much of the terminology which philosophers and theologians use to speak about speech acts. Austin instructs that in some cases speaking something is not only describing it, it is actually doing it. Marriage, naming, and betting, among others, are examples of the doing of an act when something is spoken.[9] Austin also codified such words as speech act, performative act, locution, illocution, and perlocution.

Using Austin's conceptions and language, John R. Searle systematized and structured Austin's Speech Act theory first in *Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Searle developed the concept of doing-as-saying in suggesting that, when pressed to the how-do-you-know question, one may only answer in a linguistically constricted form,[10] thus language is the foundation on which knowledge rests. From a postmodern perspective, philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty have deconstructively assessed language and authorial intent, pronouncing the "death of the author" and of objective content-fulness[11] intended by the author in a body of text. The postmodern perspective of linguistic epistemology can be boiled down to this statement: "incredulity toward meaning."[12]

Kevin Vanhoozer realizes the potentially caustic effect that an overtly subjective reading of the Holy Scriptures could have on theology, for "one's view of God and one's view of Scripture are mutually *inclusive*."[13] Indeed, in postmodern linguistic epistemology there is great danger to Christian hermeneutics, for how we understand God and how we read his Word are inextricably linked. Some Christian philosophers have fallen into this trap, suggesting that the propositions of the Bible "fall short of expressing exactly what a speaker would wish," thus compromising the content-fulness.[14] It is the work of Austin and Searle that Vanhoozer uses to create an apologetic for the content-ful nature of language contra the thought of the deconstructionists. Vanhoozer uses Speech Act theory to counter the skepticism of postmodern linguistic epistemology, leading the understanding of language to a

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[8] Keith Graham, *J.L. Austin: A Critique of Ordinary Language Philosophy*, (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1977), 1.

[9] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 5.

[10] John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

[11] The vocabulary of John D. Morrison found in *Has God Said?* (Eugene, OR: Pickwich Publishers, 2006) is very helpful, including "content-ful," "content-fulness," "inscripturated," and "derivative Word of God." 'Content-ful' (ie. full of content) is used by Morrison to indicate that written or spoken forms of communication convey communicative substance contra the deconstructionalist perspective whereby language does not convey objective content to the hearer/reader.

[12] Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in this Text?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 16.

[13] Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture, and Hermeneutics*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 30.

[14] Clarke Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 155.

place where a text, particularly the Bible, can be read and viewed with binding authorial intent.

<div align="center">THE BASICS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY</div>

It is crucial to understand the basics of Speech Act theory in order to properly assess Kevin Vanhoozer's use of it. Austin presents the idea that, in certain areas of language, to say something is to do something.[15] He presents speech acts as performative statements where the proper individual in a proper setting utters a certain kind of statement in the proper context; thus, the statement actually does something.[16] Austin uses the example of the marriage ceremony. When a groom says "I do" to a bride during a marriage ceremony before a congregation, priest, and family, that act of uttering the phrase "I do" actually marries the man to the woman, even before a marriage certificate is signed or a ring is placed on a finger. But, if this scene played out during a wedding *rehearsal*, it would be void.[17] In order for a performative action to be "happy,"[18] the ceremony and setting must be in place.[19]

There are certain performatives that cannot simply be verbalized in a direct way. In order for certain actions to be, they must be spoken. It is the difference between "I insult you" and "You are ugly." The former has no performative significance, but the latter does.[20] Austin expounds on situations that exist verbally and implicate an individual to present or future action, as in saying, "I apologize."[21] In order for the performative of "I apologize" to be happy, one must act upon the implication from which that statement compels them toward. If a man says "I apologize" to his wife for an insult but then immediately insults again, the performative was not happy. Or, if one says, "John's kids are bad" when John has no children, this performative is void.[22] Therefore, the actual words, the meaning of the words, and the action that the words require are all-important. These three elements make up a speech act.

Austin presents speech acts as triadic, consisting of the locution, illocution, and perlocution. A locution is the "act of saying something" and is the first necessary part of communication.[23] It is the basic physical act of uttering noises that make words which make sentences. The illocutionary act goes hand-in-hand

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[15] Austin, *Words*, 8.

[16] Ibid., 27.

[17] Ibid., 20.

[18] Austin uses the term 'felicitous' and 'happy' synonymously. A 'performative' is 'happy' when the intended result of the performative is accomplished for the right reasons within the right context, and not when one of the performers is under duress or accomplishes the performative on accident. See pages 14-15 in Austin's *Words* for further explanation.

[19] Ibid., 22.

[20] Ibid., 31.

[21] Ibid., 46.

[22] Ibid., 51.

[23] Ibid., 94.

with the locution in that Austin says to perform a locutionary act is also "*eo ipso* to perform an illocutionary act." The illocutionary act is the performance of an act in saying something.[24] Austin has difficulty finding the proper words to separate the locution from the illocution, for they are closely linked and almost intermingle with one another. The primary difference between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act is "the performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something."[25] The perlocutionary act is the consequential effect of the locution and illocution, or what happens due to the locution and illocution.[26] The locution, illocution, and perlocution make up a speech act, and an example of such is when a man hears "Shoot her!" (locution), the man was urged to shoot her (illocution), and the man was persuaded to shoot her (perlocution).[27]

Austin stresses that the illocutionary act is the lynchpin of speech acts, or the act that hinges the perlocution and locution together for significance.[28] Illocution is the most important element within a speech act because it specifies the content of the utterance,[29] and the most important aspect of the illocutionary act is that it *makes explicit* the content.[30] Therefore, the content-fulness of the entire speech act lies within the illocutionary act.

KEVIN VANHOOZER'S USE OF SPEECH ACTS

Kevin Vanhoozer is one of the most influential evangelical scholars to use Speech Act theory against the skepticism of postmodern literary epistemology. Through his study of the philosophy of language, Vanhoozer has found great potential in the work of Austin and Searle to overcome the dichotomy of personal-propositional revelation. The primary idea taken from these men and Speech Act theory is that speech acts "allows us to transcend the debilitating dichotomy between revelation as 'God saying' and 'God doing'. For the category of speech-act acknowledges that saying too is a doing."[31]

Vanhoozer presents the Bible preeminently as the collection of God's speech acts.[32] God as a communicative agent and Scripture as the reliable and

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24 Ibid., 98.

25 Ibid., 99. In *How to Do Things with Words* Austin explains the difference between locution and perlocution implicitly by presenting instances of successful speech acts instead of extrapolating on an analytic definition of both. For more information on the differences and distinctives of locution and illocution, see John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* pages 22-26, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology* pages 154-155, John D. Morrison *Has God Said?* pages 65-71.

26 Ibid., 101.

27 Ibid., 102.

28 Ibid., 103.

29 William P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 13.

30 Ibid., 26.

31 Kevin Vanhoozer, *A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures*, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 147.

32 Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 131.

authoritative source of the recordings of his speech acts is the source from which a properly biblical hermeneutic comes. The covenants found in Scripture are the focus of the Bible, and the speech acts are the "principle mode in which God is 'with' his people."[33]

Vanhoozer presents the triadic formula of Austin's speech acts as a Trinitarian formula for the Godhead's communicative action. The Father is the locutionary agent who speaks, begets, and sustains primarily through the "providential involvement in the lives of the human authors of Scripture."[34] The Father uses humans to create a mighty speech act in and as Holy Scripture. Jesus Christ is the illocutionary agent because he is what is conveyed in the Trinitarian speech act. The Logos has content and intent within his action. The action of the Logos is objective because it is determined by the speaker. The perlocutionary action is the Spirit's work in relation to the reader's understanding of the inscripturated Word of God.[35] The Spirit "delivers" or "brings home" the words to the reader, thus compelling him toward an action, whether belief, repentance, or something else. It is through the idea of God as a communicative agent that Vanhoozer sees Scripture as a divine act in which the Father speaks/begets the Son who sends the Holy Spirit to make clear his message and call for adherence to the message.

Vanhoozer does not stop at God's action through a speech act but builds a bridge from God's speech act to his Scripture act. This is the key to anchoring his theology of divine communicative action on content-fulness and not allowing it to drift into either liberalism (cf. Schleiermacher) or extreme postmodernism (cf. Derrida). Vanhoozer calls this a "covenant of discourse" which brings together philosophy and theology.[36] The Bible is the "divine-human communicative action" where "its locutions and illocutions are the result of a double agency."[37] Drawing from Luther, Calvin, and even Karl Barth's understanding of inscripturation, Vanhoozer points out Luther's statement that closely follows his Christian use of Speech Act theory that "God's works are his words…his doing is identical with his speaking."[38] Historicity is integral in the speech act to Scripture act process, for without the historicity of a text, meaning is only potential.[39] For Vanhoozer, Scripture must always be seen as a historically bound book, for it was written at a particular time for a particular people, but is applicable at all times to all peoples.

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[33] Ibid., 149.

[34] Ibid., 154.

[35] Ibid., 155.

[36] Ibid., 161.

[37] Vanhoozer, *Pathway*, 178.

[38] Kevin Vanhoozer, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, edited by Sung Wook Chung, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 56.

[39] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 178.

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF VANHOOZER'S APPLICATION OF SPEECH ACTS

Upon initially reading Vanhoozer's Trinitarian use and development of Austin's triadic presentation of speech act, an evangelical may be very eager to accept Vanhoozer's suggestions. It seems so orthodox because it is Trinitarian and focuses on Jesus (illocution) as the center of what conveys truth. But one must first investigate if Vanhoozer deals correctly with Austin. Is Vanhoozer's illocution and Austin's illocution the same? And what of the perlocutionary elements of an oral speech act compared to the perlocutionary elements of the Holy Spirit within the reading of Scripture?

As was previously stated, Austin's definition of locution is the utterance of certain noises, certain words with a certain construct, and with a certain meaning. Vanhoozer's definition as the Father's activity of locution is the "utterer, begetter, and sustainer of words." The word "beget" is laden with theological significance, for the Son is "eternally begotten from the Father." The Son being the Logos and the Father being the Logos-emitter follows well with Austin's Speech Act theory until one looks at the speech act as a unit. Austin constantly focuses on a speech act that is "felicitous" or "happy," meaning that after the utterance is spoken and the content is apprehended by the listener/reader, then an action (perlocution) is done by the hearer. Unless this happens, the speech act is "unhappy."[40] Therefore, the locution and illocution must be completed in order for the event to be a speech act in the full sense. Problematically for Vanhoozer, Jesus is eternally begotten from the Father so there cannot be a "closing" of the divine speech act because there is never a closing of the filial relationship of the Father and the Son. This leaves a speech act in Austin's definition as insufficient for describing the filial relationship within the Godhead.

The use of "speech act" within Vanhoozer's corpus of writings often takes various forms and can appear to be inconsistent. For example, Vanhoozer says that "the principle mode in which God is 'with' his people is through speech acts,"[41] referring to the written Word of God. But later in his writings he refers to a "speech act" as the acting of the Son through the illocutionary force of his action, making it difficult to determine when he is speaking of communicative action of the Bible or communicative action within the Trinity.

Vanhoozer is bold when he states that an illocutionary force is what makes a speech act count.[42] Austin never went this far nor did he use the word "count." The illocutionary act and force do not determine whether the act counts, but only if the act has content. The perlocutionary element of a speech act is the part that "counts" in the sense of a speech act being happy and achieving the desired effect.[43] In

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[40] Austin, *Words*, 115.
[41] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 149.
[42] Ibid., 155.
[43] Austin, *Words*, 120.

Christian theology, it is the death of the Son that makes available salvation, but it is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that seals it.[44]

The perlocutionary element within Austin's Speech Act theory is the most difficult to discern of the three acts, but he does consistently emphasize the consequential aspects of perlocution. Perlocution is what is done because of the speech act, and for Vanhoozer, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. The third person of the Trinity empowers, indwells, and illuminates the reader to the person and work of Jesus.[45] Vanhoozer sees the explanation of perlocutionary acts as the most beneficial to Christianity, because the perlocution points back to the illocution like the Spirit who points back to the Son through the inscripturated Word of God.[46] This movement in the speech act is through the illocution to the perlocution, and the Holy Spirit is the one who makes the perlocutionary element efficacious for the reader.[47]

Other than the few vocabulary and interpretive issues, Vanhoozer deals very accurately with Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*. He stays true to the authorial intent and does not manipulate any of the terms, ideas, or uses to fit into a preformed argument. The previous issues were the only salient problems with Vanhoozer's interpretation of Austin, but all other uses are aligned with Austin. Therefore, the next question that should be raised must be the jump from the spoken speech act to the written speech act. Is this possible and appropriate with Austin?

WRITTEN SPEECH ACTS: AUSTIN'S INTENT?

Austin very rarely addresses the transmission between the spoken speech acts and those speech acts being conveying in written text. This is of utmost importance to Vanhoozer and any Christian interested in using Speech Act theory in defense of the authoritative nature of the inscripturated Word of God. The question remains that, if Austin was interested in *speech* acts, how may we use him for *written* acts? Two places in Austin's writings give adequate grounds for the transmission of spoken word to written word.

Austin deals with six devices for happy performative actions. They include the following: mood, tone of voice, cadence, emphasis, adverbs and adverbial phrases, connecting particles, accompaniments of the utterance, and the circumstances of the utterance.[48] These categories help the speaker to understand what the performative action is intending in doing, also known as the illocutionary force. These six performative actions are performed by the speaker. An example is an accompaniment of the utterance, which includes winks, pointings, frowning, or

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[44] Ephesians 1:13

[45] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 889.

[46] John 20:31

[47] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "From Speech Acts to Scripture Acts," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation, vol. 2*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Moller, (Grand Rapids, MI: Paternoster Press, 2001), 43-44.

[48] Austin, *Words*, 73-76.

other physical signs. This is very difficult to convey in writing unless the writer includes "and he winked" or some other indication. Another example includes the circumstance of the utterance. If a young and healthy man tells a friend he may have his farm when he dies, it holds much more significance if that same man was on his deathbed or seventy years of age. Once again, this is difficult to convey in writing unless explicitly expressed.

Austin leaves great opportunity to understand speech acts as text acts in his qualification of the tone of voice, cadence and emphasis. He explains the difference in understanding of the phrase 'it's going to charge' with the use of an exclamation point for a warning, a question mark for a question, and both a question mark and exclamation point for a protest.[49] The use of time, cadence, and emphasis are arguably the most significant of these performative devices, and I suggest that the difference between a warning, question, and a protest becomes even clearer when the speech act is written. Again, in this circumstance the content of the performative action is better conveyed when written. This opens wide the opportunity for speech acts to become text acts.

The second major point supporting Vanhoozer's presentation of text acts is Austin's declaration that in certain instances a performative speech act can become even more explicit when written down. As a review, a performative action is a speech act when something is "at the moment of uttering being done by the person uttering."[50] Austin says that a performative must have a reference, and that reference may either be the person speaking in the first person, or "in written utterances (or 'inscriptions'), *by his appending his signature* (this has to be done because, of course, written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are)."[51] This is a direct link for speech acts to become text acts (and thus Scripture acts), even the possibility that text acts may be the clearest way to communicate content. John Searle makes this point even sounder by his definition of speech acts: "Speech acts are characteristically performed in the utterance of sound or the making of marks."[52] Thus expanding on Austin's theory, speech acts are valid both as spoken and written acts, and the written act may even provide greater clarity or explicitness to the act.

TRIADIC TO TRINITARIAN

It has been shown that Kevin Vanhoozer has dealt appropriately with the work of J.L. Austin, thus providing the option of speech acts as text acts. A further

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[49] Ibid., 74.

[50] Ibid., 60.

[51] Ibid., 60-61.

[52] John R. Searle, "What is a Speech Act?", in *The Philosophy of Language*, 3rd edition, ed. A.P. Martinich. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 134. Vanhoozer has much to say regarding Searle's categories of speech acts and his use of these categories for understanding canonical speech acts. For more information on Vanhoozer's use of Searle's categories of Speech Act theory as it pertains to salvation, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, (Lousiville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 65-66.

explanation is needed in Vanhoozer's use of speech acts as Trinitarian in nature. One must ask if speech acts can properly be seen as an economic working of Trinity, and if so, what of "unhappy" speech acts? What if there is an absence of perlocutionary action of the reader?

In order for Speech Act theory to apply to the Trinity, a proper understanding of the economy of the Godhead is needed. An ontological Trinity alone would not allow the distinction between the three acts of a speech act. Thus, Vanhoozer states that the Trinity is "not merely the manner of origin (e.g., begetting, breathing) but the sum total of their multifarious relations." Therefore, there is an interdependence upon one another within the Trinity, and, in this sense, the works are what determine and configure the Godhead.[53] Vanhoozer is working backward, using Speech Act theory to support the economic nature of the Trinity. He makes a particular point to say that he is not pointing at a philosophical perspective and comparing the Trinity to Speech Act theory. His use of the Trinity comes from the "literary crisis about textual meaning" brought about by postmodernism, making the point that his position is explicitly theological and not a justification of a particular "interpretive approach."[54]

How does one see the myriad of threefold distinctions within Vanhoozer's works and not suggest that the Trinity is simply an *ad hoc* threefold analogy to help substantiate Scripture as a divine text act? The answer to this question is the pith of Vanhoozer's constructive bibliology. He uses the language and philosophy of Austin and others but allows the Trinity to have *mysterious superiority* over Speech Act theory. He does not attempt to rectify all the paradoxical aspects of the Trinity by forcing them into a philosophy of speech acts. He readily admits to the human imperfection of language and allows for tensions and disagreements between the Trinity and triadic speech acts.[55] These tensions include the orthodox position that the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father and the Son," but to Austin one may go from locution directly to perlocution but never with content.

Another tension between Vanhoozer's Trinitarian communicative act and Austin's Speech Act theory is the influence the Holy Spirit has in illuminating the inscripturated Word of God about the ontological Word of God to the reader. Jesus tells us that the entire Bible is written about him.[56] Scripture also tells us that the Holy Spirit illuminates the reader to the truth of Jesus.[57] This is the reverse of the triadic speech act formula of Austin. The perlocutionary act does not contribute to the illocutionary or locutionary act, for speech act is a one-way street.[58]

In Speech Act theory, the perlocutionary act must happen in order for the act to be "happy." This is not the case with a divine communicative action. Vanhoozer talks of the "effectual call" of Word and Spirit whereby the primary role of the Holy

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[53] Kevin Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions?", in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin Vanhoozer, (Grand Rapdis, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 66.

[54] Vanhoozer, *Text*, 456.

[55] Ibid., 457.

[56] Luke 24:27

[57] John 14:26

[58] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 200.

Spirit is to "*minister* the Word." It is possible to have "Gospel preaching without regeneration." Once again, there can be a successful or "happy" divine communicative action without a "happy" perlocutionary effect.[59] This is a foundational bifurcation of the thinking of Austin and the theology of Vanhoozer.

The next question may be, "How is Scripture used in the divine communicative act?" The answer to that question is Vanhoozer's "penultimate" thesis in the connection of speech acts, text acts, and the perlocutionary effect. "The Spirit speaks in and through Scripture precisely by rendering its illocutions at the sentential, generic and canonical levels perlocutionarily efficacious."[60] Using the thought of William Alston to substantiate his point, Vanhoozer connects the reliance of the perlocution on the illocution for the purpose of stressing the authorial intent within the perlocutionary force. Scripture is used within the context of divine communicative action, whereby the locution of the Father with the content of the illocutionary act of the Son brings the efficacious perlocution of the Spirit, all within the context of Scripture.

CONCLUSION

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: "I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god."[61] The issue of content-fulness and the words of Scripture are of utmost importance to the Church and the believer. Indeed, without the content-fulness of Scripture the foundation for which our salvation is based is in jeopardy. Kevin Vanhoozer uses the work of J.L. Austin fairly, accurately, and respectfully to develop a constructive understanding of how the Triune God is able to disclose himself in divine communication. Vanhoozer does not *ipso facto* force a Triune understanding of the Godhead into Austin's triadic speech act formula, for he stays within the pre-established Biblical and creedal boundaries. Nor does Vanhoozer confine himself by Austin's work but expands and elucidates Austin's work, for Vanhoozer intends Speech Act theory to be applied analogically, not as a formula to be *ad hoc* applied. The work Vanhoozer contributes to the Christian understanding of revelation, inscripturation, and divine communication is crucial weaponry for use on the battleground of authorial intent.

Vanhoozer shows how the philosophy of language, particularly Speech Act theory, can help Christians understand a proper relationship between God and the world. God communicates with his people, and Speech Act theory helps one understand in what capacities God has communicated. It remains to be seen if the "author" will die or live, but Kevin J. Vanhoozer has done much to keep him alive.
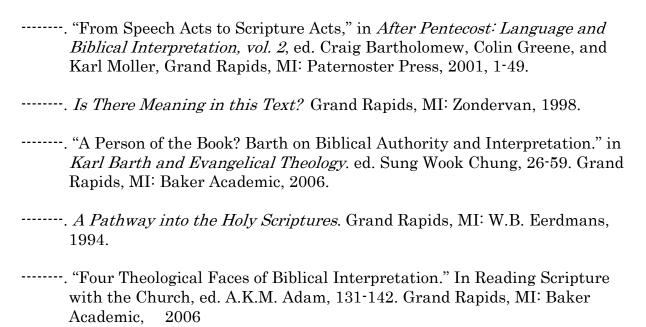
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[59] Kevin Vanhoozer, "Effectual Call or Causal Effect?: Summons, Sovereignty and Supervenient Grace," *Tyndale Bulletin*, 49.2 (1998): 248.

[60] Vanhoozer, *First Theology*, 200.

[61] Isaiah 44:6

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