

The Role of Faith in Historical Research

A Rejoinder¹

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ABSTRACT: In a review article in a recent issue of *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* Thomas L. Thompson, University of Copenhagen, has criticized my *Text and History* describing it as “religious apologetics” and a “faith-oriented understanding” of Israel’s history as opposed to his own scientific research. Much of the critique is no doubt an academic own goal, but it does raise some important questions relevant not only for the discussion with Thompson and other scholars with a so-called minimalists approach to the biblical history of Israel but also for the discussion on *why*, *how* and *when* to use harmonizations, locutionary/illocutionary language distinctions, genre-based explanations, etc., in the reconstruction and interpretation of Israel’s history by scholars with a faith-based, high view on the Bible.

Biblical Scholarship and Belief

When looking at your two paws, as soon as you have decided which of them is the right one, then you can be sure the other one is the left.

Winnie the Pooh

Thompson begins his review article by outlining the distinction between arguments of reason and arguments of faith made by the scholastic scholar Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa de veritate fidei catholicae contra gentiles*, and argues both implicitly and by assertion that this distinction between scientifically and theologically appropriate argument is still the yardstick for

1. A rejoinder to Th. L. Thompson, “The Role of Faith in Biblical Research,” *SJOT* 19/1 (2005) 111-134.

what can be accepted today as true scientific scholarship and what must be labeled apologetic, or faith-oriented “understanding.” Having dealt with this erroneous fusion of “religious history” and “objective history” in his 1974 *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, it has apparently come as a surprise for Thompson, that “[w]hile de Vaux, Mendenhall and Wright and many of their contemporaries viewed archaeological and historical research as potentially providing an argument which would threaten or compromise their faith, Edelman and a surprising number of biblical scholars today understand their faith as providing an argument in its own right, which legitimately affects their critical historical method – by all counts, a significant development in the implied theology of such argument.”² Thompson goes on to argue that “[t]his fusion of the spheres of faith and history among biblical historians ignores the function of biblical narrative and, at times, attributes to it such a very modern reportorial intention that any denial of such expectations is perceived as threatening the Bible’s integrity. Such conservative scholarship has been unprepared to acknowledge a rhetoric and worldview which is far from modern historicism and has been unwilling to consider criteria of truth other than those related to the rules of evidence for historical events.”³ Zooming in on my *Text and History* Thompson asserts that though I may have demonstrated “on one hand that the transmission of reliable historical information through oral tradition from a very early time *has not been shown to be impossible*, and on the other hand that *it is not unreasonable* to believe that the intention of the author of Kings is to render history the case has not been made.”⁴ As the history of Israel I propose to present is “unmistakably similar to John Bright’s (in)famous ‘history of the possible,’” Thompson finds it suggestive of “a degree of unfamiliarity with what actually had been at issue and argued in the first ‘deconstructive phase’ of the development of the ‘Copenhagen school,’”⁵ and argues that my “weakness in the history of scholarship and particularly in the development of the comparative method in modern biblical studies creates an insuperable barrier to [my] conclusions.”⁶ Thompson concludes that “[w]hat Kofoed argues is not science. Nor are his rules of evidence those that the world of secular history requires. Kofoed would have a biblical history – not a critical one. Fortunately, we already have the Bible’s story and do not need to write it again.”⁷ Without reducing or simplifying the criticism too much, Thompson’s criticism can, I think, be boiled down to the following issues: A number of contemporary scholars must be labeled neo-orthodox apologetics because they are muddling the distinction between faith and reason, engaging in unscientific research, ignoring the function of biblical narrative and using other rules of evidence

2. Thompson, “The Role of faith”, 112.

3. *Ibid.*, 113.

4. *Ibid.*, 113-114.

5. *Ibid.*, 117.

6. *Ibid.*, 131.

7. *Ibid.*, 133.

than required by the world of secular history. Though these issues are clearly interrelated, I will comment on them separately.

Faith and Reason

It is clear from Thompson's review article that one of his major concerns is to safeguard the academy from muddling up Thomas Aquinas' centuries' old distinction between faith and reason and oust from the scholarly society any researcher not measuring up to these principles in doing theology and science. A concern already expressed in a Danish context in his address to the annual meeting of *Collegium Biblicum* in 2003. Summing up what he believes to be the thrust of my thesis – "... as the history of Israel's Kings has not been shown to be impossible, it is therefore possible" – he continues to argue: "That such drivel is daily fare at the evangelically oriented Tyndale House in Cambridge is no more than can be expected. When such statements, however, are presented as the central arguments within Jens Bruun Kofoed's Århus dissertation, one must be concerned about the commitment to science within the theological academy in Denmark. Distinguishing what we know from what we do not know is not minimalism; it is – since ancient times – the beginning of science."⁸ Apart from scholars affiliated with Tyndale House, Thompson also mentions a number of scholars by name, who – in his opinion – do not meet the standards for scientific research, namely Diana V. Edelman, John Day, Kenneth A. Kitchen, V. Philips Long, several of the authors in the monograph *The Future of Biblical Archaeology* edited by James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard, and, of course, the present writer.⁹ What Thompson in reality argues is that there should be no place in the academy for these scholars. This becomes clear from the most recent expression of Thompson on this issue in an interview published at the *Biblical Foundations*' homepage:

For a biblical scholar, the way that faith influences his professional obligations raise a very serious question concerning conflict of interests. To the extent that a university scholar accepts the guiding principles of a specific faith, he or she is incompetent in the performance of their work as scholars. To the extent that an institution presupposes such a commitment, it is, I believe, incompetent as a university. Accordingly, among the premises I hold as professor of theology is the need to investigate and analyze the bible and religion in accord with the critical principles of secular scholarship, what I have often described as "secular theology." In my experience, secular theology or university scholarship in the field of biblical scholarship is incompatible with the premises of a faith-based scholarship, which belongs to the realm of apologetics, a pursuit which may have some legitimacy within the context of a particular faith community, but which in the public or "secular" sphere is inappropriate to both the civil service role of the university professor—and in di-

8. Thomas L. Thompson, "The Bible's Context as a Problem of Knowledge", *CBA* (2003) 7

9. Thompson, "The Role of Faith", 111; 113 notes 6 and 7; 128.

rect conflict with open and critical scholarly discourse. The legitimacy of such apologetics—exploring the rationality of the intellectual foundations of faith—is limited to propaganda fidei, as Catholics used to call it.

I find the issue terribly important, particularly as evangelical scholarship is undergoing a development that in many ways reminds me of what occurred among Catholic scholars in the 1950s and 1960s. More and more evangelical scholars have acquired competency—especially in the cognate fields of biblical scholarship—over the past generation and have shown themselves at times to be as competent (in the sense as above question 1) within these narrow fields as critical scholars generally. They now stand at a turning point where they are undergoing a very serious struggle for academic recognition which goes hand in hand with an equally serious struggle for academic integrity, which, for many of the individuals involved, is consonant with personal struggles of faith.¹⁰

The crux of the matter is, therefore, whether Evangelical scholars, should continue to claim a place at the table of higher education or concede that faith is a mindless exercise that prevents us from doing scientific research and excluding us from taking a position in the academy? The answer may have been quite straightforward when Thompson studied with Kurt Galling and published his thesis some thirty-forty years ago (and that is probably the reason why he constantly refers to the scholarly debate in the 50ies, 60ies, and 70ies), but I find it astonishing that he seems completely unaware of the changes that have taken place in the academy in general since the heydays of modernism in the interrelated fields of epistemology, hermeneutics and heuristics, and that it has become academically old school not to be aware of and clarify one's own axioms or "control beliefs" as Nicolas Wolterstorff labels it. Thomas Aquinas' slogan "Faith Seeking Understanding" is a good example. One could argue, by the way, that *credo ut intelligam*, 'I believe in order to understand,' is a more appropriate description of Augustine's epistemology than of Thomas' and that Thomas' approach to the relationship between faith and reason rather should be described as *intelligo ut credam*, 'I think in order to believe,' but no matter which slogan we choose, it has to be interpreted. What is meant by 'faith' or 'believe'? What do 'understand' and 'reason' mean? And who are the interpreting "we"? It may have been quite clear in the early 70ies, when Thompson in his monograph (which he refers to repeatedly) stated that

...those who do take history seriously, the neo-orthodox have set up an exceedingly serious barrier to any acceptance of the biblical tradition as constitutive of faith; for not only has 'archaeology' not proven a single event of the patriarchal traditions to be historical, it has not shown any of the traditions to be

10 Biblical Foundations, "Thomas L. Thompson on Faith Based Scholarship," Interview published Tuesday, April 4, 2006 at the Biblical Foundations Homepage [<http://www.biblicalfoundations.org>]. Accessed November 7, 2007.

likely ... of what we understand about the formation of the literary traditions of Genesis, it must be concluded that any such historicity as is commonly spoken it must be concluded that any such historicity as is commonly spoken of in both scholarly and popular works about the patriarchs of Genesis is hardly possible and totally improbable.”¹¹

Today, however, it has to be explained who “those” are and on which pre-suppositional basis “those” argue that “we” do take history seriously while “they,” i.e., “the neo-orthodox” don’t. When Thompson finds that “a surprising number of biblical scholars today understand their faith as providing an argument in its own right, which legitimately affects their critical historical method,” it *is* “by all counts, a significant development in the implied theology of such argument.”¹² What Thompson fails to recognize, however, is that this is true not only of arguments put forward by “neo-orthodox” *Evangelicals*, but the very hallmark of scholarly dispute in Late Modern/Neo-Modern/Postmodern academy. Scholars have long recognized that axioms or “controlling beliefs” are not only basic to *Geisteswissenschaft* but also to the so-called exact sciences or *Naturwissenschaften*, and that such axioms or beliefs “legitimately affects” the critical analysis and interpretation of scholars in all academic quarters. Thompson is begging the question, therefore, how *his* axioms or control beliefs affects *his* critical method. And I am not using “belief” here in the sense of personal spirituality, but as a term for the axiomatic framework guiding or *controlling* a given scholars’ interpretations.

11. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 1974) 327-328. I use this only as an example of “interpretational communities,” since I agree with Thompson that Wright’s search for the “finger of” God in the historical events themselves is epistemologically impossible since we have no direct, unmediated access to these events. This doesn’t mean, I’m afraid, that I go free of Thompson’s 1974 charges, since, as I have argued elsewhere, the texts themselves claim that historical events are decisive and that Christian faith, consequently, depends ultimately on questions of historicity. I thus agree with Bullock, that “...the biblical genre of history is different from the modern genre. In the latter case, factuality is uppermost, at least uppermost in reporting the authenticity of the event ... In comparison, the biblical view of history is much more an intentional blending of fact and interpretation. In view of that blending, the historical-critical method has tried to sort out the two factors and has put a value assessment on each of them. In general, it has made the message (interpretation) more important than the medium (history). Perhaps on the other side of the spectrum, the maximalists have made the medium more important than the message. Either position falls short of an accurate representation of the biblical genre. It seems, in fact, that Sailhamer’s emphasis upon the text, while not denying the authenticity of the event, but merely shifting the focus to the meaning rather than the historical fact, is beneficial. Did the event occur? Indeed it did, but that is not the issue,. The issue is the meaning of the event. The biblical writer assumes its historical authenticity and endows the text with its meaning. For reference and discussion cf. my “Historie, litteratur og teologi i Gammel Testamente,” *Hiphil* 1 [<http://www.see-j.net/hiphil>] 2004. Accessed November 7, 2007.

12 Thompson, “The Role of Faith”, 112.

So, what are Thompson's controlling beliefs? Is he a classical foundationalist or positivist arguing that we cannot believe a proposition unless we have positive or objectively certain evidence for that proposition? And that God, since we cannot produce objectively certain evidence for his existence, does not exist or – if he does exist – cannot be known but as the subject of faith? And that theism in any form, accordingly, must be ruled out, leaving atheism or agnosticism as the only sensible alternatives as far as worldview is concerned? If Late Modern/Neo-Modern/Postmodern epistemology has shown us *anything* it is that such an epistemology only creates an even bigger problem, since it immediately raises another question, namely whether we have evidence for our evidence! Says C. Stephen Evans in a critique of Van Harvey's epistemology:

To stop a regress, it appears that I must have some evidence that either requires no evidence or that I am willing to accept without evidence. If I don't have enough evidence of the former sort, then it appears I am stuck with the latter. Harvey says I can accept no authority without critical examination of that authority that gives me a basis for certifying that authority as reliable. However, if I can accept no authority without first critical examination, then how can I possibly gain any reliable basis for my critical examination? Surely some authorities must be accepted (some "witnesses") in order to put into question others ... Actually, it appears to me that Harvey is mistaken in the picture he accepts (perhaps unconsciously) of the historian as a godlike being who bestows authority on certain fortunate sources ... It is true that knowledge of the historical circumstances of an historical source may give an historian insight into ways that sources may be unreliable, and thus sometimes the historian is rightly suspicious of sources. But this suspicion must be balanced by suspicion of the historian towards her own biases.¹³

There seems to be only two ways out of this epistemological impasse, namely either to turn one's blind eye to the problem and deny that "evidence that either requires no evidence or is acceptable without further evidence" functions as a controlling belief system on par with other controlling belief systems, *or* affirm in the open, that the word "legitimate" as in "legitimately affects their critical historical method" is true not only of one's own epistemology but possibly also of others'. When Thompson asserts, therefore, that "[d]istinguishing what we know from what we do not know is not minimalism; it is – since ancient times – the beginning of science,"¹⁴ he simply *cannot* make such a distinction without first answering the question *How* do we know, what we claim to know? This is precisely where Iain Provan has brought epistemological rigor and soundness into the discussion by pointing

13. C. Stephen Evans, "Critical Historical Judgment and Biblical Faith," in Ronald A. Wells (ed.), *History and the Christian Historian* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) 50. The fullest statement of Van Harvey's position is found in his book *The historian and the Believer*. New York: MacMillan, 1966).

14. Thomas L. Thompson, "The Bible's Context as a Problem of Knowledge", *CBA* (2003) 7

out that the question is *not* whether a given scholar believes in God, god, or anything else, but the epistemologically based *heuristic* question of whether a source should be approached with a principled suspicion and subject to verification *or* approached with an epistemic openness and subject to falsification before it can be trusted. This is a matter of scholarly debate, of course, but both Evans and Provan have clearly demonstrated – at least in the eyes of the present writer – that we know what we know “to the extent that we know it at all, primarily through the testimony of others about it”, that “[t]estimony lies at the heart of our access to the past,”¹⁵ and that we should approach the Biblical testimonies precisely the same way we approach testimonies in general, namely with an epistemologically open mind, trusting them *unless* we are compelled to do otherwise. The point is that the Bible should neither be subject to *more* or *less* scrutiny and testing than other sources, and it does *not* follow from this, Provan underlines, that such an approach to the Biblical testimony is un-critical. Says Provan:

It is naturally the case that as a matter of fact the testimony of others may sometimes be untrustworthy. Maps may mislead; subjects may fail to tell the truth to psychologists; scientists (including archaeologists) may fake their research results or simply produce poor interpretations of the data; witnesses at a trial may commit perjury; and the bearers of tradition may distort the past, whether by accident or design. It is clear, then, that among the tools that individuals bring to the task of comprehending reality, critical thinking must be among the foremost. I am by no means advocating, in insisting on the inevitability of our reliance on testimony, a blind faith in testimony, whether it concerns present or past reality. Given the mixed nature of testimony, this would be a far from rational approach to it. Yet just as autonomous agency in normal adult life does not necessitate the renunciation of dependence on others, so autonomous thinking is entirely compatible with fundamental reliance on the word of others as a path to knowledge. We need only conceive of critical thought, not as the enterprise of working exercise of controlling intelligence over the testimony that we receive, so that such judgments as we feel able to make about its truth or falsehood are indeed made. Neither blind faith in testimony, nor radical suspicion in response to it, is necessary. We require merely what I characterize as ‘epistemological openness’...¹⁶

The first trajectory of this train of thought is that a number of assertions so fundamental to Thompson’s critique must be judged invalid or at least be qualified. First of all, Thompson’s *implicit* assertion that the academy has learnt nothing new on the relationship between faith and reason since the heydays of scholasticism, and that Thomas’ distinction should still be the standard for scientific research today, collide head on with Late Modern/Neo-modern/Postmodern epistemology, hermeneutics and heuristics. Thompson’s

15. Iain Provan, “Pyrrhon”, 418.

16. Provan, “Pyrrhon”, 419, note 8, referring to his 1998 article “In the Stable With the Dwarves.” Cf. also Evans, “Critical Historical Judgment”, 45ff.

persistent, *explicit* assertion that neo-orthodox scholars cannot “take history seriously” and that they should be ousted from the academy, must at least be qualified as a statement from one interpretational community about scholars from another interpretational community. This trajectory has an avalanche-like breakdown effect on a number of Thompson’s other assertions, which we will deal with in due order.

A History of the Possible

Thompson claim in his review article that my work is similar to what earlier maximalists have done: “The history of Israel Kofoed proposes to eventually present and which is hypothetically projected in this prolegomena is unmistakably similar to John Bright’s famous ‘history of the possible.’ For those who remember, it was the challenge to this method by Noth, which set in motion the initial changes in the perspective of historians of ancient Israel and Palestine.”¹⁷ What Thompson argues both implicitly and explicitly throughout the article is that 1) *if* I had remembered, i.e., been familiar with the scholarly debate in the 50ies, 60ies and 70ies, I would have recognized that I reinvented the wheel by only repeating what others have done before, and 2) that my work fails to make the *positive* argument. My thesis is “[p]ossible, perhaps, but the argument has not been made; nor has [I] shown it to be likely.”¹⁸ My discussion on authorial intention “does not present such an analysis, however cursory,”¹⁹ and my methodological discussion is therefore described as “unsubstantiated.”²⁰ And Thompson is right! I have not made such a case, true, but that was not my point! I do not claim my statements on the mentioned possibilities to be completely novel observations (though considerable amounts of data and approaches has emerged since the heydays of John Bright and Martin Noth), but I do use them in a novel context by applying them to the discussion on the genre of the biblical texts in the light of modern genre research. And since both Noth and Bright published their works before the “literary turn” in biblical studies, the context has changed drastically. I fail to understand why my use and refinement of long known positions should be a reinvention of the wheel or a modern version of Don Quijote’s chasing windmills, as argued in the 2005 internet discussion on my book.²¹ But Thompson is doing precisely the same by returning to Wellhausen’s dictum that the biblical texts reflect the time of the writers. That is, not by repeating his long known conclusions as such, but by placing

17. Thompson, “The Role of Faith”, 117.

18. *Ibid.*, 114.

19. *Ibid.*, 115.

20. *Ibid.*, 116.

21. Posting to the *biblical-studies* discussion list in June 2005 [<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/biblical-studies/>]: Messages #7831, #7832, #7838, #7842, #7843, #7850, #7853, #7854, #7857, #7867, #7876, #7877, #7878, 7879.

them in a new context.²² Is that bringing scholarship forward? It depends, I think, on your paradigm. Forwards in one's paradigm is backwards in another's. It is thus fully understandable why my thesis and the argumentation behind it must be regarded as nothing new, chasing imaginary windmills and a step backwards from Thompson's point of view. But not necessarily from a *scholarly* point of view. Especially not in the post-Kuhnian era. What I try to argue in my book is that choosing another paradigm influences both the questions you ask and the choices you make when multiple interpretations are available. This is why I spend so much time discussing the infamous possibilities. There would be only one paradigm, e.g., Thompson's, if no other interpretations of the biblical texts were possible. By repeating and refining what has already been said about other possibilities concerning, e.g., the reliability of oral and/or written transmission, it has been my modest intent to show that the positivistic idea of scientific research as pure logic is flawed, that we all base our interpretations on certain pre-suppositions or controlling beliefs, and, not least, that the same data often can be explained by different theories. By pointing to other possibilities than the skeptical stance towards reliable oral/written transmission taken by others, I want to open a discussion on the role our presuppositions play. If it is possible to argue - by analogy - both for a manipulated and a reliably preserved oral/written transmission of historical information, on what grounds do we then choose between them? Sometimes the "source material" can be almost compelling in itself, but usually that is not the case. So on what grounds do we make our choices? What I am arguing for is not a different *interpretation* (in the singular) of the sources, but for the epistemological *legitimacy* or *validity* of a different heuristics and *therefore* the possibility of different *interpretations* (in the plural). Thompson's critique that I don't remember or fail to understand the history of scholarship therefore completely misses the mark. I may not have done what Thompson wanted me to do, but that's frankly not my problem. In the summary discussion on possible histories of Israel in my book I state that "different, even mutually contradictory, histories can be right on their own terms," and at least in my reading of the paragraph it is precisely what Thompson's fellow members of the European Seminar on Historical Methodology Hans Barstad and Philip Davies acknowledges:

Barstad is no doubt right when he predicts the future for biblical historiography as "a history characterized by a multiplicity of methods."²³ And Davies' plea that what we need in the future are "multiple histories" so that we "may learn in how many different ways 'history' may be represented" may be a good one²⁴. We do need a multiplicity of new histories with different perspectives on, for example, Israel's history that deal fairly, of course,

22. See, e.g., Thomas L. Thompson, *The Origin Tradition of Ancient Israel: The Literary Formation of Genesis and Exodus* 1-23 (JSOTSup 55; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987) 51;62.

23. Hans Barstad, "History and the Hebrew Bible," 51-52.

24. Philip R. Davies, "Whose History?" 121-122

with the facts of the ancient Near East. They are only to be welcomed. What we do not need, however, are histories that do not present to the readers a full discussion of the philosophical and epistemological assumptions that have determined their choice of methods and the basis for their assertions. Repeating Davies' call for good historiographies may therefore serve as an appropriate conclusion to this chapter: "One is not to discourage the production of good historiographies, and encourage people to read many of them, so that they may learn in how many different ways 'history' may be represented, and perhaps even ask themselves why these stories differ."²⁵

If Thompson acknowledges – however hesitantly – that it *is* possible to write a different history of Israel on different heuristic grounds, why is it that he refuses to discuss the path-dependency of his own readings and describe – as he has done persistently since 1974 – such histories as bogus histories? I am perfectly aware that Davies does not share my axioms and controlling beliefs and that he may not include, e.g., Provan, Long, and Longman's *A Biblical History of Israel* in his category of "good historiographies," but he at least invites scholars working from different heuristic points of departure to make their histories available for public discussion.

Heuristics

Thompson's critique of Diana Edelman in the introductory part of his review article is yet another example of comparing oranges with apples and missing the mark. Thompson criticizes Edelman's historiographical method for muddling Thomas' distinction between faith and reason and for presenting "a similar, yet more fragile, theological preference for faith, 'possibly divinely inspired,' as creating a more adequate basis for historical argument than the lack of faith, and therefore gives critical preference to scholars who themselves affirm the religious belief in the traditions to which their research relates."²⁶ My intention here is not to defend the method of Edelman – that she is very able to do herself! – but to point out, once again, that Thompson fails to address the relevant epistemological and heuristic issue behind the thrust of Edelman's paper (and my dissertation). What Edelman argues is that "[a]ll historians of Yehud in the Persian period would agree in principle that their task is to identify primary and secondary artifactual and literary sources that might provide relevant evidence for various aspects and issues associated with the province in the years between 538 and 333 BCE and then to evaluate these sources to determine what evidence they think they actually contain," and adds, in an interesting footnote, that "an exception might be my respondent, T. Thompson, whose scientific approach to generating data eliminates all details that cannot be independently verified from a second source, and who tends to eliminate secondary material from consideration as potentially legitimate sources of information from the outset, with the result that these are not

25. *Ibid.*, 122. The paragraph as a whole is quoted from my *Text and History*, 112.

26. Thompson, "The Role of Faith", 111.

evaluated at all. He might not agree with my claim of what constitutes an agreed principle here.”²⁷ Edelman continues: “Once done, their next task is to create understanding by arranging their critically evaluated ‘data’ in an interpretive framework that provides meaning by attributing cause and effect in order to suggest ‘why’ something took place... Differences emerge between historians already in the carrying out of the first step in the historical enterprise.”²⁸ Edelman acknowledges readily that Thompson’s heuristic “approach to generating data” is scientific, but instead of explaining why he – as an “exception” – chooses to eliminate “all details that cannot be independently verified from a second source,” and “to eliminate secondary material from consideration as potentially legitimate sources of information from the outset, with the result that these are not evaluated at all,” Thompson criticizes Edelman’s choice of the opposite as a muddling of the one and only academically acceptable distinction between faith and reason. On what epistemological grounds he is doing so he chooses not to tell us.

I have already in my *Text and History* and most recently in an internet article argued how both Thompson’s and Niels Peter Lemche’s rules of evidence – especially their definition of a primary source – are not those that the world of secular history requires.²⁹ Thompson, in the aforementioned internet exchange, describes the Biblical text as “a secondary literature” and that it “is in many ways comparable to Manetho, Berossus and Philo of Byblos ... but certainly not inscriptional materials such as the Tel Dan inscription or the Mesha Stele,” which he describes as primary texts. This is confused language. Both in my *Text and History* (Excursus, p.41-43) and in my internet article, I point out the confusion between the heuristic categories primary/secondary and firsthand/secondhand:

According to this distinction, a source may still be secondary even if its information is taken from an earlier extant source. In other words, it is secondary if the author does not provide more information than we could obtain from another source. A source is primary, however, if it stems directly from an eye- or ear-witness or, importantly, a later account that relies on an earlier nonextant source. In other words, a primary account is the oldest extant source available. The distinction between “primary” and “secondary” has to do, therefore, with the value or importance of the witness rather than its contemporaneity with the event it purports to describe. Secondary sources are unimportant as witnesses, since they only repeat what is already known. Primary sources will always be of importance, since they constitute the first extant information we have on a given event, person, or something else. It is crucial, therefore, that the terms “primary” and “secondary” sources are distinguished from the terms “firsthand” and “secondhand” witnesses. A

27. Edelman, “Writing a History”, 1.

28. *Ibid.*, 1.

29. Kofoed, *Text and History*, 42; “The Critical Dates and History: How to Avoid Being Hit by the Boomerang from Copenhagen,” www.bibleinterp.com (April 2005). Accessed November 8, 2007.

firsthand account will always be a primary source, but the opposite does not apply, because a secondhand account may be the oldest extant witness and therefore a primary source.³⁰

In conventional, mainstream heuristic theory it is simply wrong to describe the biblical texts all together as secondary sources, since the texts contain both primary and secondary evidence. In cases where we have earlier extant sources, e.g. in the case of Sennacherib's 701 B.C. siege to Jerusalem or the 587 B.C. fall of Jerusalem, the biblical evidence is secondary. In cases where no earlier extant information exist, however, the biblical text is primary evidence. And even in texts that are judged secondary as a whole may contain small pieces of primary evidence. They may represent perspectives or provide information absent in the primary sources. Thompson's descriptions of the biblical texts as a particular form of antiquarianism and as secondary sources are problematic, therefore, in the light of the latest research on the genres of history writing and the categories of mainstream heuristic theory.

I do not argue, of course, that Thompson *must* accept, e.g., the Biblical texts as a primary source, but that he fails to argue on what epistemological and heuristic grounds he chooses to downgrade non-contemporaneous, written sources as secondary sources, and to admit in the open that Edelman is just as "scientific" in her terminology and choosing. Thompson's heuristics has been demonstrated by a number of scholars to be based on positivistic pre-suppositions,³¹ and I fail to see how Thompson can avoid being hit by his own boomerang, when he argues that "distinguishing what we know from what we do not know is not minimalism; it is – since ancient times – the beginning of science." While the latter is true, the former is certainly not, if a non-positivistic selection of sources is granted any validity at all as an accepted direction in the science of history. Thompson is in his full right to dispute such a validity but then, of course, he is certainly up against more than just Evangelicals, and given that he after all acknowledges the "scientific" validity of such a direction, it is obvious that his positivistic use of sources produces a minimalistic history of Israel compared to histories written on the basis of different epistemologies and heuristics. In this light the label "minimalism" seems quite legitimate.

30. Kofoed, *Text and History*, 42, where references to standard Scandinavian curriculum in heuristics can be found.

31. See, e.g., William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2001. Iain W. Provan, "Ideologies, Literary and Critical: Reflections on Recent Writing on the History of Israel." *JBL* 114 (1995) 585-606. Avraham Faust, *Israel's Ethnogenesis. Settlement, Interaction, Expansion and Resistance*. London: Equinox, 2006. Jens Bruun Kofoed, "Epistemology, Historiography, and the 'Copenhagen School.'" In V. Philips Long, David W. Baker, and Gordon J. Wenham, *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 23-43.

Function of Biblical Narrative

A third point of criticism offered by Thompson concerns the function of Biblical narrative, that is, the question of genre and authorial intent. It is the fusion of the spheres of faith and history among Biblical historians that “ignores the function of biblical narrative and, at times, attributes to it such a very modern reportorial intention that any denial of such expectations is perceived as threatening the Bible’s integrity. Such conservative scholarship,” Thompson adds, “has been unprepared to acknowledge a rhetoric and worldview which is far from modern historicism and has been unwilling to consider criteria of truth other than those related to the rules of evidence for historical events.”³² Thompson, again, accepts the possibility (argued by Baruch Halpern and V. Philips Long, and quoted by me with approval) that the Biblical authors wrote with historical intent, but adds that

[w]hile one might confirm the necessity of the verdict of ‘*not impossible*,’ the reeds of Halpern and Long remain strikingly hollow. I and others have, on the other hand, argued and have argued often that, on the literary level, much of biblical narrative – including substantial sections of 1-2 Kings – *does* prevent us from assigning such consciousness and intent. Biblical narrative – and 1-2 Kings is hardly unique in this respect – is paradigmatic and pedagogical in intent. Biblical literature often reflects functions of instruction and parable.³³

Thompson is absolutely right in pointing to the issue of genre as a key question, but again I think he reads my book, not on its own premises, but on his own. My book is not about analyzing Thompson’s analysis of the biblical text or the route that took him there. He may have wished I did that, but I didn’t. And, again, criticizing me for not doing something I didn’t set out to do is pointless, jousting a knightless Rosinante. What I am trying to do is to ask whether other interpretations than Thompson’s can account for the same data, and - provided this is the case - to which degree the presuppositions underlying Thompson’s and other’s paradigms influence the choice of interpretation. From this point of view it is only natural to use a person’s position only on the basis of literature written by this person fairly late in his lifetime since I am not questioning the possibility of this position but its *necessity*. Yes, I do disagree with Thompson’s interpretation of the texts, but that is not the main issue in my book. Methodology is. Whether I succeed to demonstrate that other interpretations can account for the same data is not for me to judge, but the reader of my book must at least acknowledge that this is my expressed intention and voice a possible criticism accordingly.

As for modern genre research, I was still in kindergarden when Thompson wrote his first papers in the 60ies. But is it really true that the literary turn made a headway in Biblical studies as early as in the heydays of Noth and Bright? And even if it was *felt* in the early 60ies, what’s the point? Shouldn’t a discussion of the genre of history writing concentrate on literature after, say

32. Thompson, “The Role of Faith,” 113.

33. Thompson, “The Role of Faith”, 128

1990? And if modern genre research is not something which postdates Martin Noth, shouldn't one use the latest theory on the market? I think Marincola, e.g., is representative when he states that "the whole notion of 'antiquarian' literature has recently been seen as problematic,"³⁴ so on what grounds do Thompson decide that biblical literature is the product of a particular form of antiquarianism? If Marincola's cautions hold, the notion "antiquarianism" must be abandoned as a fitting genre category.

So, what questions do we ask and what literary methods should we use in determining the texts' genre? I think we both agree on the 19th century mantra that the Bible should be treated as any other literature. But doesn't that mean that we need to ask the same questions as historians and literary critics ask of non-biblical texts? I think, yes. And this is precisely the reason why I find the "Greek" taxonomy unsatisfactory. I agree that *if* you measure the biblical texts with the antiquarianism/historiography yardstick, the biblical texts come closer to antiquarianism than to historiography. But why use these categories, when modern genre research has pointed out that they are insufficient and inadequate tools for describing history writing? There may be other approaches and methods than those of Ricoeur and Marincola, but we definitely need to move in that direction. I still think Ricoeur's distinction between the documentary, explanatory and literary levels in the genesis of a historiographic text is one of the best observations on the relationship between historical information and deployment of literary devices, since it cautions us not to mistake sophisticated use of literary devices for fiction. And I still think it can be demonstrated by using these literary methods that the biblical authors at least *intended* to write history. Not as a primary goal, but, nevertheless, as an integrated part of their theological, religious, or didactic intentions. Instead of 'ignoring the function of Biblical narrative' such an approach rather *respect* what Meir Sternberg has phrased, namely that the Biblical narrative *functionally speaking* is regulated by a set of three principles, ideological, aesthetic, and historiographic.³⁵ That does not mean the author(s) succeeded in doing so, but it makes a huge difference whether one gives the text the benefit of doubt and declares it innocent until proven guilty or the opposite, in an assessment of their success. I may have misread Thompson, but the impression I get – and this is at least true for Provan also – is that Thompson comes very close to declaring the authors guilty of not being successful in writing history until proven innocent, and that only firsthand (primary in Thompson's taxonomy) archaeological evidence can change that verdict. Such a reading is no doubt justifiable within the positivistic paradigm, but the question is, again, whether the presuppositions hold. And my criticism would be that, since this is *not* how historians in general treat their sources, it is a use of double standards if we hold the biblical texts

34. The full quote and more detailed discussion can be found in my *Text and History*, 233.

35. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: University of Indiana press, 1987) 41.

to a higher standard than other ancient Near Eastern texts. Such an approach does not treat the biblical texts like any other literature, and if the biblical texts are treated as guilty until proven innocent, the same principle must at least be applied to all other texts as well. Instead of doing that, I find it much more in line with modern historical and literary theory to give the biblical texts the same benefit of doubt as is given by historians to other texts, and postpone our verdict until we have compared the apparently historical information in the biblical texts with comparable literature. And how can we compare the biblical texts with comparable extra biblical texts without having an established genre taxonomy like Hallo's categories "canonical", "monumental" and "archival,"³⁶ Mieroop's "commemorative records" and "chronographic texts,"³⁷ or more refined categories as "military report", "initiary" etc.? Instead of using insufficient and inadequate *Greek* genre descriptions or inventing genre labels that prevents us from reading the Hebrew Bible in its proper cultural context, we should take the lead of scholars who recognizes a number of authorial intents and literary aspects to be present simultaneously, and scholars who break up the Hebrew Bible as a multi-genre, *sui generis* literary work that can be readily compared in its parts with similar literary sources from the same cultural stream. To the first category belongs, first of all, Meir Sternberg, who, in his *Poetics of Biblical Narrative* argues that the biblical narrative should be seen as a literary "complex" with a multifaceted nature. The *function* of Biblical narrative, according to Sternberg, must be described in terms of three regulating principles, namely ideological, aesthetic, and historiographical.³⁸ Provan opts for precisely the same set of regulating principles, when he describes the Books of Kings as narrative, historiographical, and didactic literature.³⁹ As the texts themselves, at least in the majority of scholars' view, do betray historical intent, *Biblical* historiography should be described as a combination of these three principles. Tyler F. Williams is very much to the point, therefore, when he remarks in a recent *blogosphere* discussion on historiography that

I would argue that historiography is a narrative that combines these three principles — ideological, aesthetic, and antiquarian — in order to present a coherent representation of the past according to accepted conventions. These three principles — ideological, aesthetic, and antiquarian factors — must be considered when reading any history writing. These three principles can be discerned in all historiography, whether premodern, modern, or post-modern. In premodern times the first two elements were given prominence, in modern

36. William W. Hallo, "Sumerian Historiography," in H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (eds.), *History, Historiography and Interpretation* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984) 9-20, and idem, "The Limits of Skepticism," *JAOS* 110 (1990) 187-199.

37. Marc Van de Mieroop, *Cuneiform Texts and the Writing of History*. London: Routledge, 1999.

38. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 41.

39. Iain Provan, *1 & 2 Kings*. Old Testament Guides. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987.

times the third element was often privileged, while today I would hope that historians would recognize all three elements. It is a false antithesis to suggest that because a text is ideological, theological, literary, or artistic, that it therefore does not qualify as historiographic ... Note carefully what I am not saying: I am not saying that all historians are created equal, or that all works of historiography are equally useful. There are bad historians and bad historiographies. The work of the contemporary historian of the ancient world is to sift through the works of the ancient historians and, while taking into consideration their ideology and aesthetics, come to some conclusions in regard to their historiographic value. More on this later.⁴⁰

As far as the second category is concerned, that is, scholars who break up the Hebrew Bible as a multi-genre, *sui generis* literary work in parts that can be readily compared with similar literary sources from the the same cultural of stream, a wide range studies – both as far as subject and epistemic viewpoint is concerned – has demonstrated a number of biblical texts embedded in larger works to conform to literary conventions in Israel’s neighboring regions. I think James Hoffmeier’s reply to Niels Peter Lemche’s rhetorical question “Has evangelical – fundamentalist scholarship if you want – ever produced one single new important idea in OT studies? Or has it been totally apologetic?” is embarrassingly pertinent, not only as evidence of the abovementioned comparative literary analysis, but also to Thompson’s old school allegation of Evangelicals’ muddling of Thomas’ distinction between faith and reason and corresponding inability to do scientific work.

One of the most prolific OT scholars over the past 30 years, and he is an Evangelical, is Francis I. Andersen ... The Regis Professorships at Oxford and Cambridge are held by Evangelical Scholars, Hugh Williamson and Robert Gordon. I doubt I need to review their contributions, nor those of Gordon McConville & Gordon Wenham. Let me mention a few from the USA: K. Lawson Younger, Jr. *Ancient Conquest Accounts* (JSOT 1990). This study by my Trinity colleague is the best available comparative study on ancient Near Eastern military historiography which studies NE texts alongside the Joshua narratives. He has also authored numerous important articles. Joe Sprinkle, *The Book of the Covenant: A Literary Approach* (JSOT 1994) offers some new valuable insights. Andrew Hill (Wheaton College) , *Malachi - Anchor Bible Commentary* (1998), in my view the best commentary available on this prophetic book. Cynthia Miller (U. Wisconsin), *The Representation of Speech in Biblical Hebrew Narrative: A Linguistic Analysis* (Harvard Semitic Monographs, 1996) *The Verbless Clause in Biblical Hebrew: Linguistic Approaches* (Eisenbrauns, 1999). William Schniedewind (U. California Los Angeles), *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge University Press, 2004) *Society and the Promise to David* (Oxford University Pres, 1999). *The Word of God in Transition* (JSOT 1995). Please notice that none of these books are

40. Tyler F. Williams, “The Nature and function of Histori(ograph)y,” entry at *Codex Blogspot* [<http://biblical-studies.ca/blog>] September 24, 2005. Accessed November 7, 2007.

published with religious publishers, but highly respected academic presses. CUP, OUP, JSOT, etc. only publish studies that advance scholarship and not theologically motivated apologetics! Then too they are a significant number of Assyriologists, Syro-Palestinian archaeologists and specialists in Near Eastern texts who have also made valuable contributions to Old Testament studies. Here I would include the works of Kenneth Kitchen and Alan Millard (both of Liverpool University), Theodore Lewis (Johns Hopkins University), Richard Hess (Denver Sem), Daniel Fleming (New York University), John Monson & Daniel Master (Wheaton College). All of the above have authored books and articles that have offered “new important” ideas that have truly advanced OT studies, rather than simply riding on the latest rage of Alttestamentlers.⁴¹

I fully concur with Sternberg, Provan, Hamilton, and Hoffmeier, and maintain that the ground for claiming, as Thompson does, that “on the literary level, much of biblical narrative – including substantial sections of 1-2 Kings – *does* prevent us from assigning such consciousness and intent,”⁴² is very shaky indeed, and that such a reading is based on inadequate and idiosyncratic genre descriptions that do little justice to the cultural stream in which the texts have been created and run contrary to norms and taxonomy required by modern genre research. And from Hoffmeier’s list alone it is clear, that it can indeed be argued from relevant comparative material that the so-called historical books of the Hebrew Bible also contain parts that betray a clear historical intent and that the embeddedness of these parts in a multigenre work is suggestive of an historical intent in the texts as a whole.

Public Discussion

When you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it.

Winnie the Pooh

A final issue that has to be commented on is Thompson’s implicit claim that Evangelical scholars should be ousted from the academy. Thompson is in his full right, of course, to argue that neo-orthodox, Evangelical scholars do not take history seriously, but if there is any lesson to be learned from recent discussions in the field of epistemology and hermeneutics, it can only be taken as a *legitimate* claim within his own interpretational community, and failure to acknowledge this makes scholarly exchange between his and other interpretational communities extremely difficult if not downright impossible.

41. James K. Hoffmeier, “An Open Letter to Niels Peter Lemche,” *Hiphil* 2 [http://www.see-j.net/hiphil] (2005) 2. Cf. also my “Fact and Fiction in the Ancient Near East: The Assyrian Royal Inscriptions, the Babylonian Chronicles, and the Books of Kings in the Hebrew Bible,” *Hiphil* 1 [http://www.see-j.net/hiphil] 2004. Accessed November 8, 2007, and the examples mentioned in my *Text and History*.

42. Thompson, “The Role of Faith,” 128.

Thompson is also in his full right to wish for an axiomatic cleansing of secular universities from scholars with a non-secular or theistic worldview. The question is, however, whether it is desirable to maintain such a ghetto-like isolation of interpretative communities, instead of promoting an atmosphere of open discussion in acknowledgment of the path-dependency of one's own interpretations and with respect for other scholars' differing axioms and controlling beliefs? I hope not, and cannot but notice that such a hope has recently been expressed also by scholars from both "camps" in the debate.⁴³ This is true not only of biblical archaeologists and *Alttestamentlers* but importantly also in the neighboring field of history, where neither the linguistic turn nor postmodern attacks in the form of philosophical impositivism (e.g., Hayden White's *emplotment* theory) and anti-referentialism (Roland Barthes and J. F. Lyotard) has led to the prophesized end of history.⁴⁴ Instead it is maintained that "history will flourish in a revitalized public arena" if new definitions of truth and objectivity are created in an environment of "pragmatism, practical reason and public realm."⁴⁵ This influential and oft-quoted suggestion by Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob is important, because it aims at bridging the gap between interpretational communities in historical research by insisting that it is possible to establish criteria for a constructive dialogue without sacrificing the holy historiographical cows of *critical enquiry* and *historical truth*, and it is interesting that guidelines for scholarly exchange suggested recently by the abovementioned biblical scholars follow the same line. Iain Provan's argument, e.g., that his epistemic openness does not entail an uncritical democratization of historical truth is fully in line with Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob's call for an informed redefinition of objectivity, and V. Philips Long's call for self-disclosure of deep-level commitments as a basis for constructive scholarly exchange is precisely what Appleby, Hunt, and Jacobs mean by "pragmatism" and "public realm", since – as Pooh phrases it – "[w]hen you are a Bear of Very Little Brain, and Think of Things, you find sometimes that a Thing which seemed very Thingish inside you is quite different when it gets out into the open and has other people looking at it." The point being that without such a self-disclosure and engagement in public discussion, scholars run the double risk of isolation and obscurantism by staying in Provan's infamous "stable with the dwarves" and maintaining arguments

43. Tyler Williams, "Beyond Minimalism & Maximalism: Some Modest Observations on the Historiography Debate." Entry in *Codex Blogspot* [<http://www.biblical-studies.ca/blog>] December 14, 2005. Accessed November 7, 2007; V. Philips Long, "Conservative Scholarship – Critical Scholarship: Can We Talk?" *The Bible and Interpretation* [<http://www.bibleinterp.com>] March 2005. Accessed November 8, 2007; "Renewing Conversations: Doing Scholarship in an Age of Skepticism, Accommodation, and Specialization," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 13.2 (2003); Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman, "*The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*," *The Bible and Interpretation* [<http://www.bibleinterp.com>]. Accessed November 8, 2007.

44. Kofoed, *Text and History*, 12f.

45. *Ibid.*, 282.

and interpretations based on a blinkered worldview that is incompatible with the real world and, for the same reason, disputed by scholars outside one's own interpretational community. We often argue, as E. L. Greenstein expresses it, "as though we all shared the same beliefs and principles, as though the field were all built upon a single theoretical foundation. But it is not.... I can get somewhere when I challenge the deductions you make from your fundamental assumptions. But I can get nowhere if I think I am challenging your deductions when in fact I am differing from your assumptions, your presuppositions, your premises, your beliefs."⁴⁶ Being up-front about our deep-level commitments and being willing to discuss them "in the open" is therefore an *a priori* for a meaningful scholarly exchange. In many ways a banal observation, of course, since this is what is required from students at *all* educational levels, but apparently also an observation we need to *keep* in mind, since it is too often ignored by scholars to whom it really should be a matter of course. This is also true of two other general principles for sober, constructive scholarly exchange, namely avoiding the danger of *ad hominem* arguments and misrepresentation.

I don't think many would disagree with the fundamental character of these general principles of striving for an open discussion in the public realm and avoiding the dangers of *ad hominem* attacks and misrepresentation in scholarly exchange. The real problem lies in how to tackle and overcome the problem of how disagreements on deep-level commitments influence our interpretation *once these commitments have been disclosed*. "Common sense" or "practical reason" is often appealed to as criteria for how our controlling beliefs should be allowed to guide our interpretations. But what is meant by "common sense"? Does it mean that we should simply go along with the majority view? That we should accept the historical critical principles of probability, analogy, and correlation? Or something else? It is obvious that "common sense" is *not* a fixed concept and that application of such a "common sense" principle will also be influenced by deep-level commitments, and therefore useless in overcoming the disagreements. Appealing to common sense or the majority view seems not, therefore, to be the right way to go. My own suggestion would be to argue for a refinement of the "bracketing" principle suggested by Tyler Williams in the ever present debate in the *blogosphere* on the possibility of meaningful scholarly exchange between the minimalists and maximalists. "How can we engage meaningfully," Williams asks, "in a debate with whom we may have significant methodological and metaphysical differences?"

The first step would be to be up front about our lower-level commitments. We need to be clear about our method and our metaphysics. This sort of full disclosure will not, of course, produce peace and harmony among us ... but it will help us understand where we all are coming from. After this, we can then see if we can find a "middle discourse" to engage one another. We need to agree on the rules of the game before the game starts. Here I wonder if the

46. Quoted from Long, *Renewing Conversations*, 8.

most fruitful approach may be to work on the level of the historical-critical method and bracket any metaphysical commitments -- at least initially. Then, for those of us who may share similar metaphysical commitments, we may take the conversation further. Of course, perhaps I am being hopelessly naive to think that we can ever really “bracket” our metaphysical commitments, or that we can ever agree on method (there really isn't any such thing as the historical-critical method!), or that we could even agree on what argument is more plausible than another. What we can agree on, however, is to treat each other with respect, try to understand each other's views, and stop with the labels, ad hominem arguments, and making grandiose claims of “proof” on insufficient evidence.⁴⁷

As Tyler Williams himself stresses, it would be naïve to imagine that scholars would betray their own deep-level commitments by such a “bracketing,” and I, for one, would not be willing to sacrifice my scholarly integrity by engaging in a scholarly exchange *as if* I shared my opponents' positivistic axioms and controlling beliefs. And I would not, of course, require my opponents to bring such a sacrifice either. That would simply be dishonest scholarship. Williams is, however, pointing in the right direction, since I believe there is *something* that can be “bracketed” in *some way* which may help us bridge the great axiomatic divide. Not everything done by the historian is equally influenced or controlled by deep-level commitments. There is no theistic or atheistic radiocarbon dating, e.g., only theistic and atheistic *uses* of radiocarbon dating, and I would suggest therefore, a distinction between analytic tools, which are agreed on as “joint property” by, e.g., the theistic and atheistic scholar alike, and the axiomatic grounded method that makes *use* of a particular tool. Between the data and *theories* on the data, in other words. I am fully aware of the borderline character of such a distinction, since deep-level commitments are often decisive not only for which interpretation we choose, but also for which tools to use. But even with this caveat in mind, I think the distinction is useful as a guide for determining the border between what is the common basis for our historical enquiry, and where our deep-level commitments begin to influence the way we work with this common basis. Instead of creating dishonest scholarship and axiomatic betrayal, such a refined “bracketing” of our controlling beliefs or metaphysical commitments increases the “transparency” of our interpretations and historical reconstructions and thus helps us understand, respect and acknowledge the validity and coherence of our opponents' views within *their* interpretational framework. In this way it becomes clear to both our interpretative opponents and ourselves how far we can get on the agreed-on-level and where it is our deep-level commitments that guides our interpretational choices. By so doing we preserve our own scholarly integrity while, at the same time, paying respect to scholars with differing views thereby acknowledging – with a reformulation of Gerhard von Rad's famous dictum – that the scholarly community of

47. Tyler F. Williams, “Beyond Minimalism”, 2005. Accessed November 7, 2007.

historians searches for a critically assured minimum – the picture painted by the individual historian tends towards his axiomatic maximum. In this regard we can all be maximalists, and that’s something, isn’t it?!

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