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A RESPONSE TO JON PAULIEN ON THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT IN REVELATION

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I want to express my appreciation to Jon Paulien for his attempts to summarize and evaluate the recent debate between Steve Moyise and me on the use of the OT in John's Apocalypse. He has made an excellent effort at accurately restating and assessing the two approaches. Among many good discussions, I want to highlight a couple. I especially like the way Paulien has explained the "fears" which Moyise and I have concerning the dangers in this hermeneutical debate. He says that we both "fear" what would amount to an uncontrolled allegorization of texts: I, because of the peril of "indiscriminate 'creation of meaning'" and Moyise, because of the "indiscriminate bias of interpreters who pick and choose textual evidence that fits their presuppositional lenses."[1] He also well observes that in debates over hermeneutics, regardless of which side one is on, both debaters want their "intention" to be understood, since "when one's own work is at stake at a practical level, one's intentions as an author resist open-ended interpretation as if by reflex."[2]

The following comments show areas where I would want to nuance Paulien's representation of my views.[3]

(1) First, he accurately says that I believe that "when NT writers quote the OT they are placing such texts in a new context and giving them new significance within that new context, but they are not altering what the original writer meant."[4] He notes that, in response, Moyise "feels that Beale's distinction between meaning and significance is a hermeneutical coverup."[5] Moyise made this conclusion because I did "speak of New Testament authors

[1]Jon Paulien, "Dreading the Whirlwind: Intertexuality and the Use of the Old Testament in Revelation, *AUSS* 39 (2001): 18.

[2]Ibid., 21.

[3]I remain content to let my previous article, "Questions of Authorial Intent, Epistemology, and Presuppositions and Their Bearing on the Study of the Old Testament in the New: A Rejoinder to Steve Moyise," be a response to other issues raised in Paulien's article, which I do not address below (*Irish Biblical Studies* 21 [1999]: 151-180).

[4]Paulien, 13.

[5]Ibid.

offering 'new understandings' of Old Testament texts 'which may have been surprising to an Old Testament audience,'" and since I even refer to these "authors offering 'new interpretations.'"[6] One of the main purposes of my subsequent response to Moyise (in *Irish Biblical Studies* [*IBS*]) was to clarify the distinction between "authorial meaning" and "significance," since I believed that Moyise had a misunderstanding of the way I conceived of the distinction. As I have read and reread Paulien's summary, I do not think he has sufficiently reflected the way I tried to elaborate on the distinction between "meaning" and "significance" in the *IBS* response to Moyise. I want to clarify this, since this is a crucial, if not *the* crucial, issue in the debate.

If one acknowledges on the epistemological level that an original authorial meaning is partially though not exhaustively recoverable from OT texts, then it is beneficial to distinguish between the enduring original meaning and how that meaning is responded to by subsequent writers, i.e., the "significance" of that earlier meaning. E. D. Hirsch says that "meaning" refers to the "entire verbal meaning of a text" and "significance" to "textual meaning in a context beyond itself" (in relation to a later time, a later mind, a wider subject matter).[7] At this point, I want to conclude my explanation by quoting a relevant, extended segment from my *IBS* article which lies at the heart of my approach and speaks directly to Moyise's objection, and which I think Paulien did not adequately summarize:

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

[6]Steve Moyise, "The Old Testament in the New: A Reply to Greg Beale," *Irish Biblical Studies* 21 (1999): 55.

[7]E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1967), 19; cf. also 2-3, 156.

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

These three aspects of interpretation do not collapse original meaning into the readers' response to that meaning. The two are still kept separate, though there is some overlap between "original meaning" and "significance" in the second step. It is helpful to expand a little on Hirsch's middle step, what Vanhoozer calls "extended meaning." Hirsch refers to this as an expansion of the original author's "willed type." I summarized and illustrated this in my book as part of the response to Moyise, but it bears repeating here (in connection with "significance") with another illustration from Hirsch. Civil codes are good examples of genres in which authors realize that no law can cover all the future instances which will fall under legitimate application of the law originally legislated. The principle of the originally formulated law must be applied to later instances to see whether or not it is relevant. If the new instance falls within the "willed type" of the original legal author, then the original law applies. For example, a traffic code may assert that a violation occurs when any wheeled vehicle on a public thoroughfare fails to stop at a red light. Suppose that years later a vehicle was created which had no wheels but moved instead on currents of compressed air. Does the law still apply to such a vehicle, since the formulation of the law explicitly referred to wheeled vehicles? The original intent of the law would apply to this new instance, since what was in view from the beginning was a "willed type" of "any vehicle." The law might be amended to include "'all vehicles serving the function of wheeled vehicles within the purpose and intent of the law.' The idea of a law contains the idea of mutatis mutandis, and this generic convention was part of the meaning that I willed." It should be easy to see

that such a genre convention could be included in biblical literature which has legal, ethical, and theological content.

To come back full circle to Moyise's critique and question: why I am reluctant to say that "new understandings and interpretations" are not "new meanings" but "new significances." I am reluctant because I do not want to confuse original authorial meaning with the extension of that meaning or the application of that meaning. Indeed, one cannot judge whether a meaning is being extended or amplified unless there is a clear understanding of a determinate original meaning. And, of course, one cannot apply an original meaning to a new situation without knowing that original meaning. In this light, I am happy to equate "new interpretations or understandings" with "interpretative significance" or "meaningful significance" or even "*extended* meaning." I am loath to confuse *original* meaning with anything that is subsequently *derivative* of it. Consequently, I can understand that New Testament authors creatively develop "new interpretations" of Old Testament texts but not "new meanings," since that *could* be understood to indicate that what they develop is not organically related in some way to the earlier source text. I would not be "picky" about semantics if there were not the potential danger of sliding into saying that "new meanings" indicate something cut off from the conceptual roots of the base text. I am content to see "new meanings" as creative developments or outgrowths, but not "absolutely new" meanings. A feature of any good interpretation is some *essential* element of recognizability with the original meaning of the text being interpreted.

Of course, interpreters can wrongly interpret and have no idea of an original meaning (which is the conclusion many make about New Testament authors), but this is a different matter than saying that it is impossible for interpreters to gain some approximate understanding of the original meaning of a text. My "apple" illustration was an attempt to underscore the indelible line between some unchanging aspect of the original identity of a meaningful act of communication and the effect of that act (i.e., recontextualization through extended implications of "willed types" or applications or both). Moyise's illustration of the relation of an apple to fruit salad (or one could even compare apple sauce) might still be compatible with my idea and my own analogy of an apple in a decorative basket of fruit: there is still some identifiable aspect of the original apple, whether through sight or taste, though I think this illustration obscures the original identity of the apple too much. Moyise says that a better illustration should not be something corporeal (like apples), since texts do not have firm boundaries which protect them from being altered by changing contexts. Moyise offers less corporeal analogies of ripples in a pond which combine with other ripples and form new patterns or sound waves which interfere with one another. These analogies, however, seem to me to lose the distinction between some identity between the original ripple and the combination of other ripples or between the original sound

wave and the other sound waves which interfere with it.

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

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

Likewise a written communicative act is just as historical as any other

> act in history and its meaning is just as accessible. Of course, as in hermeneutics, so in the philosophy of history, there is debate about whether historians can objectively report history. Both the naive positivistic objectivist and the postmodern solipsistic, subjectivist skeptic are too extreme. The truth lies somewhere in between: historians do not record events fully as they actually happened nor are they unable to record anything that happened. Tom Wright calls this "critical realism," which applies both to the historian's as well as the interpreter's craft. In fact, ultimately, these are not two different disciplines.[8]

Hence, to interpret a text involves what one might call "thick description" (a phrase introduced by Vanhoozer[9]). Good interpretation needs to unravel, not exhaustively but to a significantly partial extent, the meaning imbedded in onion-like layers of a threefold communicative act: (a) the original proposition of authors, (b) the particular manner by which authors execute their literary act, and (c) the effect on readers intended by authors.

(2) Paulien states that he is not sure that Hirsch "would agree with the specific use that Beale has made of his work in relation to Revelation."[10] He says that I affirm that NT writers "respect the larger context of OT writings . . . not primarily in terms of an individual writer's intention for a specific time and place" but with respect to how they perceive a particular passage only with reference to how it fits into the broader plan of canonical history.[11] Actually, this represents only part of my view. I have always affirmed both that "the immediate authorial intention" of a passage in its historical particularity needs careful scrutiny, and then attention needs to be paid to how other parts of the canon shed light on the broader meaning of the particular text. Both are important, but the former must be done first in order to see what organic links there are between the source text and other texts related to it.[12]

[8]Beale, 156-162. The reader needs to consult my article for footnote references to quotations and references from Hirsch and Vanhoozer, which I have deleted in the above quotation because of constraints of space. In addition to the preceding illustrations of recontextualized apples, apple sauce, fruit salad, and golf, Moyise's illustration of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony (cited by Paulien, 17) also has potential, but I would need to hear further elaboration in order to determine if his understanding of the illustration fits well into my hermeneutical approach.

[9]K. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), e.g., 282-285, 291-292, 331-332.

[10]Paulien, 19.

[11]Ibid., 19-20.

[12]As examples of how I see both the necessity of a "narrow and wide-angle interpretative lens," see my following articles: "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4-14 and Romans 9," *Trinity Journal* 5 (1984): 129-154; "The Old

All of this is to say that I think my application of Hirsch fits not only his general view of authorial intention, but also his view of "willed types," on which I have elaborated at point #1 above!

On a related issue, Paulien concludes that NT authors did not "exegete" the OT "in the sense that we do so today" (i.e., in a descriptive scientific sense). He explains: "When they studied the OT, they were not driven by the need to understand the human intentions of an Ezekiel or a Jeremiah, but by the desire to be more effective in communicating the gospel as they understood it."[13] Paulien then gives a caveat to this by acknowledging, in agreement with me, that "they were not reckless in their reading" [of the OT] and that they "were offering an interpretation of the OT that they believed the OT writers would have given had they been alive to encounter Jesus."[14] My interpretation of this last comment is that the NT writers were concerned even with the human intention of OT prophets in their immediate historical situation, since they would have believed that God inspired them to speak to Israel for a particular purpose which was important to understand also for the distant future. To say, as Paulien does, that their main focus was not "to understand the human intentions of an Ezekiel or Jeremiah" but rather to be "effective in communicating the gospel as they understood it" is to affirm that they were not too concerned with what the OT originally said, which I think is an overstatement.

(3) A third issue I want to clarify is Paulien's claim that I challenge "Moyise to show that his rejection of authorial intention is not part and parcel of a rejection of a faith-based perspective on the claims of Scripture."[15] In fact, I do not "challenge" Moyise about this, though I do raise the issue in the course of my response whether it is appropriate in the midst of the postmodern *Zeitgeist* to "ask the epistemological question, 'are John's presuppositions true, and if so, should the answer not have a bearing on his

Testament Background of Reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5-7 and Its Bearing on the Literary Problem of 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1," *New Testament Studies* 35 (1989): 550-581; "The Hearing Formula and the Visions of John in Revelation," in *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J.P.M. Sweet*, ed. M. Bockmuehl and M. B. Thompson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997), 167-180; this last article is especially to be seen in the foundational light of an earlier article, "Isaiah 6:9-13: A Retributive Taunt Against Idolatry," *Vetus Testamentum* XLI (1991): 257-278). Another example would be the Passover lamb text of Exod 12 (as perhaps Num 9:12 and Ps 34:20) which must be first understood before one attempts to perceive how John 19:13-31 conceives of that passage in application to Jesus' death. Therefore, I wholeheartedly agree when Paulien says: "A believer in the divine superintendence of Scripture can also be interested in the human writer's intention" (Paulien, 20).

[13]Paulien, 19.

[14]Ibid., 20.

[15]Ibid., 15.

interpretative approach?'"[16] This, however, does not necessitate that a scholar who rejects John's presuppositions could not, nevertheless, affirm that John's interpretation of the OT is consistent with the authorial intention of OT authors (intriguingly, Hirsch does not identify himself with any particular theological or religious truth claims and certainly, as far as I can tell, would not say such claims affect the hermeneutical enterprise).

Therefore, Paulien misses the mark when he asserts that a major "disconnect" between my approach and that of Moyise is in my acceptance of not only human but divine authorship of Scripture, whereas Moyise holds only to the former.[17] It is possible for a scholar who disagrees with the notion of divine inspiration of Scripture to agree that a NT author is executing an interpretative development of an OT text consistent with and organically related to the original intention. While I think that divine authorship enhances this kind of hermeneutical integrity, from a *limited* epistemological viewpoint, such an understanding does not require this theological undergirding.

I would say, on the other hand, that those scholars who take a conservative Hirschian hermeneutical approach without basing it on, at least, the presupposition of the existence of a personal God who reveals himself are, from a full-orbed epistemological perspective, inconsistent. This may sound like a radically dogmatic assertion by those who believe no religious truth claims can be made. The reason, however, for the assessment is that I believe there is an inextricable link between a Christian, theistic biblical worldview and epistemology, including how people know that they know anything in reality, including what an author has said. Hirsch himself, for example, while making no theistic worldview claims, affirms, following the philosopher Husserl, that the mind can "demarcate" meaning of a communicative act so that the meaning remains constant over time (and, I would add, can be recalled by the interpreter and rewritten to inform other interpreters of an original intention). I would agree with other theologians that the enduring basis for an ongoing determinant meaning which can be retrieved from texts is the assumption of a sovereign, omniscient, and transcendent God who comprehends the true, determinant, and exhaustive understanding of all texts because he stands above the creation he has constructed and over the various social constructs his human creatures have erected, yet he has created them to be capable of sharing partially in his attributes and, consequently, to be able to perceive some kind of "determinant meaning

[16]Beale, 171.

[17]Paulien, 20; note, however, that in the first line of the very next paragraph Paulien does say I "only" imply his contention.

of the communicative acts" of fellow-human beings.[18]

In this connection, Paulien posits that I claim that a "hermeneutic of love," ultimately based on Christian truth claims, is crucial in not selfishly twisting another author's perspective to serve one's own ends.[19] One could, however, be an atheist and still hold to such a hermeneutical ethic. Paulien presses this further and says that my view entails that a loving approach would require readers "to take seriously" Scripture's claim to be "the product of a single, divine, authorial purpose."[20] This statement also does not represent my view. Precisely, I maintain that such a loving perspective means that one will try to hear what the intention of another's communication is, not carelessly or consciously twist that meaning to make it something else which suits the purposes of the interpreter. Once we understand the meaning of another person, then we can assess its truth claims and decide whether or not to accept or reject them. The point is that a "hermeneutic of love" does not entail accepting the truth claims of another but only of trying truly and earnestly to hear what the other has said.

I do say at the conclusion of that discussion, however, that an ethic of love is based epistemologically on the "Christian, theistic biblical worldview."[21] But many who disagree with the Christian faith nevertheless could hold to an ethic of love and would, in some cases, base such an ethic on other truth claims. Of course, my own perspective is that a theistic outlook, especially the Christian worldview, makes more sense of moral values such as love than do nontheistic vantage points. I believe that *ultimate* meaning for anything in creation, whether in the area of ethics or hermeneutics, comes from and is made possible by God. This would not prevent Moyise and me from coming to agreement about the interpretative task, but it does mean that we might well disagree about the epistemological, philosophical, and theological underpinnings of such a task.

(4) Finally, Paulien says that the contribution of Moyise's work, as well generally of "deconstructionism" and "reader-response" criticism, is to be aware of the limits of their ability to interpret accurately and, therefore, to be humble about the possibility that their particular interpretations may be incorrect.[22] I heartily agree (and the point I make about the "hermeneutic of love" comes close to making a quite similar point). Nevertheless, the lesson of humility is a "bonus prize" or residual

[18]See Beale, 170, n. 65.

[19]Paulien, 15.

[20]Ibid., 16.

[21]Beale, 179.

[22]Paulien, 18-19.

benefit of more radical literary criticism, and one can benefit from it without "buying in wholesale" to the main approach. I would make the same assessment of Moyise's work as well.

Paulien's final evaluation that both my approach and that of Moyise are equally needed to "provide a necessary balance for interpretation"[23] is, in my view, too diplomatic, and I cannot agree (though I doubt that Paulien is surprised!). Simply put, I believe that a trait of any valid interpretation is some element of recognizability with the original meaning of a text, and, as far as I can tell, Moyise would not define interpretative validity in this manner. Instead, Moyise affirms that readers create meaning not ultimately anchored in original authorial intent. Therefore, it is not clear to me what Paulien means when he says that hermeneutical truth lies somewhere between my view and Moyise's. I have already conceded that readers can "create" meaning, but a meaning, at least, implied by and partially derivative of authorial intent. If one goes further than this concession, then one places the reader in a sphere separated from all significant links to a text's original meaning, which appears to be Moyise's position.

It is true that the humble attitude often associated with the "hermeneutic of suspicion" can be well utilized by those seeking a text's original meaning, but, as I have just underscored above, this can be done without accepting the methodological essence of that hermeneutic (indeed, to say that "humility" is a trait of one hermeneutic and not another is to assume that the other

[23]In this regard, Paulien positively cites Moyise's illustration of the variety of potential interpretations of John 4:16-20 and the difficulty of interpreting that text as evidence of his reader-oriented approach (Paulien, 16-17). But most texts are not so potentially difficult. Furthermore, I am not convinced that this text is as difficult as some contend: one needs to discern the main point of the narrative in John's context in order to determine whether or not it is proper and germane even to ask the interpretative questions about "blame" for exploitation (see ibid., 17, n. 80). Finally, merely because there may be several equally competing and possibly incompatible interpretations of a text does not mean that this is evidence of postmodern intertextuality. Accordingly Paulien says, apparently because of competing interpretations of a text, that since it is "impossible for any one individual to perfectly grasp the meaning of a text . . . it seems to Moyise that postmodern intertextuality must be true 'to *some degree*.'" But I know of no scholar who believes that there can be a "perfect grasp" of a text's meaning; therefore, what Moyise (and/or Paulien) must mean in the preceding quotation is that is "impossible for any one individual to grasp the meaning of a text with reasonable certainty (i.e., with degrees of probability about the validity of an interpretation)." There may be also multiple interpretations of many texts, and these may not be mutually contradictory but supplemental (like layers of an onion). To have knowledge of, say, only one layer of meaning is to have some, though not complete, apprehension of intent. The upshot of this response and my earlier *IBS* article is to argue that interpreters can typically have some definite knowledge of authorial intentions, though, of course, not exhaustively. For this reason, the notion that readers are doomed to remain essentially agnostic about meaning is, in my view, a conclusion which is too skeptical.

hermeneutic is "arrogant," and that would be reductionistic and, therefore, unfair). The lessons of humility from a reader-response position provide an attitude which is subservient to and one of the means to the end of "a hermeneutic of retrieval." An attitude of humility is not the unique possession of and does not have to be seen as inextricably linked to deconstructionism or radical reader-oriented approaches, but can be integrated well (and, I would say, necessarily) into a "hermeneutic of retrieval." Consequently, for "Hirschians" to be humble in interpreting does not mean that they are practicing a "hermeneutic of suspicion" and "balancing" out their interpretative approach. The ultimate goal in reading writings from the past (especially Scripture, but also good literature) is not to conclude that we cannot be certain about any meaning of any text because of our human limitations,[24] but to learn from them in order better to "retrieve" meaning and let the meaning we glean from them guide our lives. And, I would add, the ultimate goal of all such reading is that our lives would glorify the divine Author of meaning (hence, *contra* Paulien, I would disagree that "the ultimate goal" is "authentic experience," which sounds like an echo of Bultmann's hermeneutic). I suspect that the very fact that Moyise defines meaning as "communication" and not, like me, as "the intention of the author" (at least, this is Paulien's view of the distinction) indicates a significant divide between us on both epistemological and methodological grounds!

Conclusion

Paulien has endeavored to summarize a very thorny debate, and I congratulate him for his effort to be even-handed and fair. He has certainly striven to practice a "hermeneutic of humility and love" as well as a "hermeneutic of retrieval," in reading and interpreting my writings and those of Moyise. I would say on the basis of the above discussion that he has truly understood our determinate authorial meanings but not exhaustively.

[24]Paulien, 21.