

PHILOSOPHY AND IDEOLOGY IN JOHN 9–10 READ AS A SINGLE LITERARY UNIT*

Abstract: The article argues for five connected theses: (1) that against some older, quite established perceptions, but in line with a more recent trend, chapters 9–10 of the Fourth Gospel should be seen as a single literary unit, held together by a concern with a single motif: how to draw the proper conclusion about Jesus' identity from his acts (*ἔργα*), that is, understanding them as 'signs' (*σημεῖα*); going beyond the recent trend, the article claims that this single unit includes John 10:22–42, which scholars regularly see as independent; (2) that the text's articulation of *ἔργα* as *σημεῖα* may be fully grasped once one sees it in the light of the Stoic theory of the 'sign' (*σημεῖον*); (3) that the literary unity focused on the ability to read Jesus' *ἔργα* as 'signs' yields a thematic unity of the two chapters, which consists in the contrast between those able to do the proper reading (the blind man healed representing Christ-believers more generally) and those unable to do so ('the Jews'); (4) that the text operates centrally with the idea of behaving violently towards the other part and that it unilaterally ascribes the initiative for this to 'the Jews'; (5) that this move is an 'ideological' one.

The Scholarly Set-up and Present Aim

This article is part of a project in which I aim to show that philosophy of the ancient Stoic kind constitutes a far more integrated component of the Fourth Gospel than is usually recognised.¹ In order to show this I try to develop a kind of 'narrative philosophical' reading of John that claims that over clearly delimited bits of text, e.g. chapter 6 or chapters 7–8 as wholes, this author orders his narrative in such a way that certain philosophical questions are raised at the beginning of the text in order to be

* I presented the gist of the argument of this article at the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University, UK, in May 2013. I am grateful to the participants for stimulating reactions. A version (under half the size of the present article) is due to be published under the abbreviated title of 'Philosophy and Ideology in John 9–10' in a Festschrift that will appear in the USA. I am grateful to the co-editor of *Histos*, John Moles, for a number of excellent suggestions, not all of which could unfortunately be worked into the present text. The core idea of the article was worked out during a month's stay in April 2012 at the Danish Academy in Rome.

¹ See Engberg-Pedersen (2012) and Engberg-Pedersen (forthcoming). My claim about Stoic influence on the Fourth Gospel pertains primarily and directly to John's talk of the *πνεῦμα*. I am more hesitant concerning direct influence with regard to the Stoic theory of 'signs', which is the topic of the present article. See later on the 'heuristic' character of my use of Stoicism here. (For the same mixture of the 'genetic' and 'heuristic' approaches with respect to Paul see Engberg-Pedersen (2000 and 2010).)

answered towards the end through the narrative itself. For instance, at an early stage in chapters 7–8 John raises in his reader's mind the question of why it is that some people come to have faith in Jesus, whereas others do not. Towards the end, then, this question is also answered (in a manner that need not concern us here). In order to see this Johannine strategy, the reader needs two capacities: an awareness of philosophical issues like the one mentioned and an ability to engage in what I call a 'cumulative reading', where questions that are left hanging to begin with are not forgotten by the reader, but allowed to provide premises for answers at a later stage.

In the case of chapters 9–10 there is one great obstacle in traditional Johannine scholarship to this kind of reading, which is the wish of scholars to divide up the two chapters as we have them in two or three distinct sections (at 9:41/10:1 and 10:21/22), possibly even with their own separate histories.² It is true that there is a recent tendency among scholars not to pay too much attention to this tradition. But the tradition is still very much around and it would be incorrect to say that it has been conclusively rejected.³ That cannot of course be done here either. But if I wish to claim that the suggested call for a cumulative reading of this text is not just a figment of my own imagination, but one made by the text itself, I need to make some gesture in the direction of convincing the reader that the strategy of dividing up the text is not required by the text itself and cannot therefore call upon the kind of necessity often appealed to by non-unitarians. This fact—if it is one—would also serve to explain why the strategy has never been able to produce any general agreement among scholars.

In what follows, I shall present in the briefest possible outline a reading of John 9–10 that exhibits a high degree of coherence of the two chapters from beginning to end. The coherence is primarily thematic. It has to do with the ability to conclude from Jesus' acts—e.g. the healing in chapter 9 of the man born blind—to his identity as the Messiah. At the beginning (9:16) and end (10:41) of the two chapters the text identifies this ability as that of being able to see Jesus' acts as 'signs' (*σημεία*). Elsewhere in the two chapters, it spells out the precise character of a 'sign'. This, then, is one thing that keeps the chapters tightly together as a single unit. In this connection I shall also show that in its account of what goes into the ability to read a 'sign', the Johannine text is distinctly elucidated once one brings in the Stoic understanding of a 'sign' (again *σημείον*), as we know it from the 2nd-century CE philos-

² See below for references concerning the claims made in this paragraph.

³ For a good introduction to the issues surrounding the practice of 'analysing' the Fourth Gospel (a little bit like the Homeric poems) into distinct segments, see Brown (1997) 365–8.

opher Sextus Empiricus. But I also aim to display the exact ways in which John's concern with the theme of reading a 'sign' informs and gives meaning to everything else that is said in the two chapters. Here we shall address, among other things, the contrast drawn in the text between the healed man who was born blind (and the group of 'Christians' whom he represents) and 'the Jews' on the other side together with the contrast between their understanding of Jesus and the claims made by Jesus himself about his own identity.⁴ All of this, I shall show, is informed by the theme of being able to read a 'sign'.

Thus far the first and longest part of the article. And here one might stop. I shall end, however, by suggesting that the proposed reading of the two chapters opens up for us also reading the text as a piece of ideology that aims at achieving certain rhetorical ends without itself quite knowing that that is what it does. Here we shall focus on the concrete, practical use of this religious text in a conflict of interpretations that situates it in a specific social situation (though still at a high level of generality): a conflict between the Johannine 'Christians' and those (whoever they are) represented in historical fact by the Gospel's 'the Jews'. I shall argue that the text makes an ideological move in two different, but connected respects: when it shows how an individual (here the man born blind) may gradually move towards becoming a more and more fervent follower of Jesus merely through his ability to read his healing as a 'sign' and when it claims that Jesus was 'forced' by 'the Jews' themselves to draw a line of separation between himself plus his followers and 'the Jews'. While it is certainly possible to read the text quite innocently, in the way it itself demands, from the perspective of Jesus and his followers, there are also features in it that call for applying to it an ideology-critical perspective that goes a long way towards showing how this text actually operates as a strategic tool in a situation of religious conflict.

⁴ In this article I shall follow the precedent of a number of more recent commentators (e.g. John Ashton, Xavier Léon-Dufour) and constantly speak about 'the Jews' in inverted commas in order to indicate throughout that I am not talking of any 'real' Jews at any point of time in antiquity, but only about the *Ἰουδαῖοι* as the Gospel writer constructs them. The inverted commas around 'Christians' are inserted in order to leave open the question to what extent the Johannine group that is articulated in the Gospel should be understood as being separate from Judaism. The fact that I shall read the two chapters as being very much concerned about *separating* the two groups does not necessarily imply that they stand, respectively, for Christianity as a new religion and Judaism as the old one.

Arguments For or Against Unity

Traditionally, there have been two points in the two chapters at which scholars have felt inclined to make a cut: between 9:41 and 10:1 and between 10:21 and 10:22. Is Jesus not introducing a quite new topic at 10:1? And should we not acknowledge the change of place and time at 10:22? As an example of this position one may mention C. H. Dodd who, while he did not allow himself to be seriously challenged by Rudolf Bultmann's extensive use of the cutter's knife, nevertheless felt that within chapters 9–10, which he did take as a coherent unit, something new began at 10:1 and 10:22.⁵ More in line with Bultmann and the idea derived from Eduard Schwartz of a series of literary 'aporiai' in John, is John Ashton, who even in the slightly less adamantly literary critical second edition of *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* insists that the beginning of chapter 10 constitutes one of those insurmountable aporiai.⁶ More recent scholars have accepted that the arguments for introducing a cut at 10:1 are insufficiently strong,⁷ but most scholars, even among

⁵ See the very nuanced discussion in Dodd (1953) 354–62. For Bultmann's practice see in general his commentary on John: Bultmann (1941).

⁶ Ashton (2007) 42–53 operates with four aporias. For his claim about a new beginning at 10:1, see p. 48 (his italics): 'Between the end of chapter 9 and the beginning of chapter 10 *the situation has changed*'—in a manner that Ashton then goes on to explain. I will suggest, however, that the 'change in situation' is one engineered by the Johannine Jesus himself, as begun already from 9:39 onwards. And 9:39–41 clearly *also* belongs together with the preceding part of chapter 9. Ashton speaks of a 'major break' at the end of chapter 9 (105) and further states: 'The break between chapters 9 and 10 is *so abrupt* that the opening section of chapter 10 ... must come from a later period, after the Jesus-group had broken away completely from the parent community' (114, my italics). However, it is impossible for me to see otherwise than that this supposedly 'abrupt break' derives from Ashton's antecedent concern for finding a 'development' in the relationship of the Johannine community with 'the Jews'.

⁷ There seems to be a general pattern here. Whereas (for the German tradition) in 1971 Rudolf Schnackenburg divided completely between chapters 9 and 10, in 2000 Klaus Wengst (2000) 351 saw the matter as follows: 'Was Jesus gegenüber seinen jetzigen Gesprächspartnern anführt, ist mit der Aussage in V.[9,]41 nicht abgeschlossen, sondern wird in 10,1–18 breit entfaltet. Die spätere Kapiteleinteilung suggeriert mit dem Beginn von Kap.10 einen Neuanfang, der nicht gegeben ist. Die in 9,41 begonnene Rede Jesu wird ja in 10,1 unmittelbar fortgesetzt. ... In V.[10,]19–21 wird diese Szene und zugleich auch der Gesamtzusammenhang von 9,1 an beschlossen. Die Feststellung, dass es "wiederum eine Spaltung"—jetzt wieder "unter den Juden"—gab, weist auf 9,16 zurück; und das Votum der zweiten Gruppe in V.21 bezieht sich ausdrücklich auf die zu Anfang erzählte Blindenheilung.' Similarly (for the American tradition), whereas in 1992 Charles Talbert (a 'literary' critic!) took chapters 7–9 and 10–11 together (Talbert (1992) 143–78), in 2006 Gail O'Day and Susan E. Hylan said the following (O'Day and Hylan (2006) 97, my italics): 'Chapter 9 should also be considered part of a larger unit that includes 10:1–21. This unit follows a pattern familiar from the healing story of John 5:1–47: a healing

the most recent ones, feel that something new begins at 10:22.⁸ As a contrast to this situation, it is highly noteworthy that a great Johannine scholar like Frédéric Godet from the pre-Bultmann and pre-Schwartz period was able to see the whole of chapters 9–10 as a single unit.⁹ I agree, but for reasons not addressed by Godet.

A Thematic Unity

The decisive consideration to my mind lies in the way the two chapters develop a distinct theme, which is that of concluding from Jesus' acts to his identity. (i) The theme is introduced already at 9:3–4 when Jesus claims that the man born blind has suffered from his illness 'in order that God's works (*ἔργα*) may be revealed in him' (9:3) since 'we', that is, Jesus, 'must do the works of the one who has sent me' (9:4) as long as he is in the world (9:5). (ii) After the man has been healed (9:6–12) and the Pharisees have begun to complain about Jesus' healing on a Sabbath (9:13–15), we get the usual motif of a schism among those present. Some among the Pharisees declare that

episode (9:1–12), the controversy generated by the healing (9:13–41), and an interpretive theological discourse by Jesus (10:1–18). *In understanding chapter 9, it is helpful to remember that the chapter divisions of our Bibles were not part of the original manuscripts and sometimes can interrupt rather than aid our reading of the text.*' Most trenchant (for the French tradition) is perhaps Xavier Léon-Dufour, S. J. (1990) 327: 'Si on néglige la division artificielle en chapitres, on voit que le discours prolonge la controverse. Le lecteur passe aisément de l'une à l'autre: derrière les brebis qui écoutent la voix du berger, il reconnaît le miraculé fidèle à Jésus, et derrière les intrus dans la bergerie, les chefs de la synagogue qui ont chassé l'ex-aveugle. Le double Amen de 10,1, par lequel commence le discours, confirme la continuité du texte, car cette formule introduit d'ordinaire l'approfondissement d'une affirmation précédente de Jésus, d'autant que l'auditoire reste le même. L'interrogation finale des juifs (10,21) renvoie d'ailleurs à l'épisode du miracle.'

⁸ For instance, Klaus Wengst (2000) 351 continues directly after the quotation given above as follows: 'Zwischen 10,21 und 10,22 liegt ein deutlicher Einschnitt vor. Denn in V.22f. begegnet einmal mit Chanukka eine neue Zeitangabe, und es wird zum anderen auch der Ort gewechselt, indem jetzt Jesus an einer bestimmten Stelle des Tempels vorgestellt ist.' This view is shared by most others.

⁹ Godet spoke in 1903 (II. 354, my italics) of 10:22–42 as 'eine zweite Rede, die zwar ein wenig später und bei einem andern Besuch in Jerusalem gehalten, aber *dem Inhalt nach nur die Fortsetzung der vorigen Rede ist*'. For his argument, cf. 380: 'In Kap. 7, 19–24 hatten wir Jesum bei einer am Laubhüttenfest gehaltenen Rede auf die Thatsache der Heilung des Lahmen (K. 5) zurückgekommen und so die in Jerusalem mehrere Monate früher (5, 17–47) bei dem vorhergehenden Feste begonnene Rechtfertigung vollenden sehen. Ebenso ist es hier.' And compare his overall account on p. 209. Even Godet, however, did not see the specific connection that I shall claim binds 10:22–42 tightly together with everything else in chapters 9–10.

‘this man is not from God’ since he does not keep the Sabbath (9:16). But others say: ‘How would a man who is a sinner be able to do such signs?’ (9:16). The latter people, then, are able to conclude that Jesus must be ‘from God’ since his acts are ‘signs’. They see them as ‘God’s works’ as in 9:3.

However, ‘the Jews’ in general are not persuaded and address first the man’s parents (9:18–23) and then the man himself (9:24–34) in what turns out to be a most striking conversation. To begin with the man declares that he does not know whether Jesus is a sinner: what he does know is that Jesus has healed him (9:25). When ‘the Jews’ then declare that they do not know from where Jesus comes (9:29), the healed man declares that that is just what is so illogical (*θαυμαστόν*) about the whole situation: *they* do not know from where Jesus comes—‘*and yet* (*καί*) he opened my eyes’ (9:30)! This leads to a cogent piece of reasoning on the part of the healed man (9:31–33). (iii) He first establishes a premise that he takes to be shared by all (‘we know ...’):

First premise. God does not listen to sinners; only if a man is pious (*θεοσεβής*) and does God’s will does God listen to him.

Next he recalls the enormity of what Jesus has done:

Second premise. It has never been heard since the beginning of time that somebody has opened the eyes of a man born blind.¹⁰

Then the conclusion follows:

Conclusion. *Had* he not come ‘from God’ (so that he is no sinner), he *would* not have been able to do anything (of that kind).

In other words, the fact that Jesus *has* performed such an unheard-of feat *proves* that he is no sinner, but instead comes from God. Once more the logic of a sign is explicated in counterfactual form: this man *would not have been able to do anything* if he *had not been* ‘from God’.

After a brief conversation between Jesus and the healed man, in which he confesses to the Son of Man (9:35–38), and another brief conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees, in which Jesus accuses them of spiritual

¹⁰ It has been suggested to me (by John Moles) that the time reference in 9:32 *ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος οὐκ ἠκούσθη ὅτι* may contain a hint back at 8:58 where Jesus has claimed that *πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι ἐγὼ εἰμί*. Thus half-unwittingly, the healed man will be intimating already here what he is next led to believe in his conversation with Jesus in 9:35–38. The idea is suggestive and in reading the Fourth Gospel one must always keep one’s ears open to such hints.

blindness (9:39–41), we then have the long speech about the good shepherd (10:1–18), which is followed by yet another ‘schism’ among ‘the Jews’ (10:19–21). (iv) Here we have one more case of the theme of the sign when some of ‘the Jews’ declare against the others that Jesus’ ‘words’ (namely, the whole preceding speech) are not those of a man who is possessed by a demon (as the others have just claimed of Jesus): ‘*would* a demon be able to open the eyes of the blind?’ (10:21).

Then follows the new situation during the Feast of Tabernacles and an apparently new theme when ‘the Jews’ surround Jesus and ask him to declare himself openly: is he the Messiah (10:24)? Jesus’ reply refers both back to chapter 9 (as did 10:21 about opening the eyes of the blind) and also to the shepherd speech at the beginning of chapter 10, thereby giving coherence to the text as a whole. He *has* told them, so he says—but they do not believe him (10:25a); moreover, (v) ‘the works (ἔργα) that I do in my father’s name, those bear witness about me’ (10:25b; cf. chapter 9)—*but* they do not believe him since they are not among his sheep (10:26; cf. 10:1–18).

What follows takes further the double theme of Jesus’ herd and his relationship with God (10:27–30), which leads to an attempt by ‘the Jews’ to do violence to Jesus (10:31). Again, however, the theme of Jesus’ works comes up: (vi) ‘Many fine works (ἔργα) have I shown you from the Father: which one of them is it that makes you (wish to) stone me?’ (10:32). But ‘the Jews’ are not interested in Jesus’ works (10:33). Instead, we get a small conversation regarding the legitimacy of Jesus’ claim to be ‘son of God’ (10:34–36). But the works come back once more: (vii) ‘If I do not do my father’s works, do not believe in me. But if I do them, even if you do not believe in myself, believe in the works *in order that you may realise and understand that* the Father is in me and I am in the Father’ (10:37–38). Here, in spite of the conceit of distinguishing between Jesus ‘himself’ and the works, the latter retain their function as premises for a conclusion about Jesus.¹¹

Finally, after a change of place (not, now, of time) we get the last reference to what Jesus has done and this time by means of the technical term of a ‘sign’: (viii) ‘And many came to him and they said: “John (the Baptist) did not do any sign, but everything that John said about this man was true”’ (10:41). That is, Jesus *has* done ‘signs’. ‘And many came to faith in him there’ (10:42).

¹¹ John Moles has perceptively commented that 10:38 constitutes an ‘inclusio’ with 9:3 that at the same time recapitulates the step-by-step logic of the two chapters, which consists in moving from focusing on the ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ (9:3) that are shown in the healing of the man born blind to the *implication* of those ἔργα, which has to do with Jesus’ own identity (10:38).

Thus, eight times during the two chapters we get the theme of Jesus' works (*ἔργα*) and what they show or should show. Twice—at the beginning (9:16) and end (10:41)—the works are specifically identified by the technical term as 'signs'. Twice too—at the beginning (9:16) and end (9:30–33) of the story about the healed man—the logic of the sign is spelled out in counterfactual form. But the theme is also kept alive three times in chapter 10 (10:25, 32, 37–8) before it is reintroduced as that of the 'sign' (10:41). It seems quite clear, then, that there *is* a unity of theme here focusing on the ability or otherwise of reading Jesus' works as signs of his relationship with God.¹² But what exactly is that theme and how does it give meaning to everything else that is said in the two chapters? We will now address these two questions in turn.

What is a Sign—the Stoics?

Human beings have been reflecting on the notion of a sign for centuries. Some of the first philosophers to do so were the ancient Stoics. Since—as has been argued, for instance, by Gitte Buch-Hansen and myself¹³—the Fourth Gospel may presuppose a basically Stoic understanding of the *πνεῦμα* ('spirit'), it might be a good idea to take a look at that other part of Stoicism: the Stoic theory of the sign (the *σημείον*). Our best evidence for that comes from Sextus Empiricus (*Adv. Math.* 8.244–56, see *SVF* II.221–3 (pp. 72–4)). In his analysis Sextus makes use of a number of examples. They all derive—quite suggestively—from some form of medicine. Let us initially list them here:

- (1) 'If this woman has milk in her breasts, this woman has given birth'—namely, in the (recent) past.
- (2) 'If this man has coughed up bronchial cartilage, this man has an ulcer in his lung'—namely, in the present.
- (3) 'If this man has been wounded in the heart, this man will die'—namely, in the future.

There are a number of features that serve to define a Stoic sign. First, a sign is something 'intelligible' (*νοητόν*). It is not a thing or event, for instance (from example 1) the case of a particular woman who has milk in her breasts.

¹² Am I the only person who has seen that point (or at least its importance)? If so, the reason probably lies in my interest in a philosophical notion like that of a 'sign', which I go on to explicate here.

¹³ See Buch-Hansen (2010) and Engberg-Pedersen (2012) and (forthcoming).

Instead, it is a ‘proposition’ (an *ἀξίωμα*), namely (in the same example), ‘the fact that’ (in Greek *τό* + the infinitive) this woman has milk in her breasts. This already shows that when one speaks of signs, one is operating at the cognitive level, the level of understanding the world and saying something about it. Second, a sign is the antecedent in a logical implication, whose form is ‘if this, then this’. Sextus therefore considers all forms of this implication that are logically valid depending on the truth value of its antecedent and its consequent and decides that since a sign must (itself) be true and must also be ‘representative of something true’ (*ἀληθοῦς παραστατικόν*), only the implication that has an antecedent that is true and a consequent that is also true qualifies as the one that defines a sign. Third, Sextus also adds, however, that it is only one form of the ‘if true, then true’ implication that will serve to define a sign. In addition, it must contain a ‘nature’ that is ‘indicative (or revelatory) of the consequent’ (*ἐκκαλυπτικήν ἔχειν φύσιν τοῦ λήγοντος*). For instance, in example 1, as Sextus goes on to say, ‘the former fact is revelatory of the latter (*ἐκκαλυπτικόν ... τὸ πρῶτον τοῦ δευτέρου*). For by attending to the former, we make a grasp of the latter (*ἐκείνω γὰρ προσβάλλοντες κατάληψιν τούτου ποιούμεθα*)’.

What is the ‘nature’ or ‘character’ that makes a sign ‘revelatory’ of the consequent? Sextus does not raise this question, but his examples suggest that it is the fact that what is stated in the consequent either *causes* or *is caused by* what is stated in the antecedent. In example 1, what is stated in the consequent (the fact that this woman has recently given birth) *causes* what is stated in the antecedent (the fact that she has milk in her breasts). In example 3, what is stated in the consequent (the fact that this man will die) *is caused by* what is stated in the antecedent (the fact that he has been wounded in his heart). In either case, there will be a ‘revelatory’ process from the sign (*σημείον*) to the ‘signified’ (that of which it is a sign, called *σημειωτόν* by Sextus).

A fourth and final feature of the Stoic theory of the sign is that sign and ‘signified’ are both present here and now. A sign is *παρὸν παρόντος*, a ‘present’ indicator of something ‘present’. The reason is precisely that both sign and ‘signified’ are ‘propositions’ and not actual things or events in the world. Thus, for instance, in example 1 the consequent is not ‘this woman has given birth’ (in the past, that is, as the event itself), but ‘the (present) fact that this woman has (in the past) given birth’. Similarly, in example 3 the consequent is not ‘this man will die’ (in the future, and once again as the event itself), but ‘the (present) fact that this man will die (in the future)’. The distinction may appear contrived (though in fact it is not), but what it shows is precisely this: that in speaking of a sign of something, one is operating at the cognitive level and trying to say something about how the world should be *understood now*,

as it were in *relation* to the way the world itself either *has* behaved, *is* behaving or *will* behave.

In the light of this philosophical understanding of a ‘sign’, let us now go back to John.

What is a Sign—John 9–10?

The first thing to be said here is that the claim I shall advance is not that John explicitly and directly presupposes the Stoic theory of signs. I am not saying that John had read, understood and applied the Stoic theory of signs to his own account.¹⁴ Instead, I am claiming that bringing in the Stoic theory throws additional—and quite striking—light on what is ‘already’ there to be found in the Gospel itself, as we have indeed already partly discovered. In this sense I am applying the Stoic theory to John for ‘heuristic’ purposes. I would, however, claim that the Johannine text does reveal what one might call a philosophical interest or awareness, simply by its recurrent insistence on spelling out the logic in a ‘sign’. Only, this interest and awareness cannot be directly anchored in knowledge of the Stoic theory. In spite of this qualification, the Stoic theory of signs may help us to see more clearly two features of John 9–10 that have already been present—though only somewhat indistinctly—in the previous analysis of the text. One feature is fairly general, the other more specific. Let us begin with the latter.

John 9:30–3. We already know the importance of this text in the overall context both of chapter 9 and of chapters 9–10 as a whole. Let us put it under renewed scrutiny. ‘You do not know from where he is, *yet* he opened my eyes!’ Here the healed man opposes a concrete fact to his opponents’ bewildered, general speculations about Jesus. When he speaks of the situation as being ‘illogical’ or ‘strange’ (*θαυμαστόν*), he also seems to be already presupposing that they should have been able to do better, namely, to *deduce* an answer to their general speculations *from* the concrete fact. And that, of course, is precisely the deduction that he then goes on to present to them in 9:31–33. What, then, is its exact logical form?

9:31. The text begins by stating a general connection between an ability to do something and the ‘moral’ character of the agent vis-à-vis God. Here the weight lies on the latter point (the moral character): the agent must not be a ‘sinner’; he must be *θεοσεβής* (‘God-fearing’) and one who does God’s will. Still, when it is said that God ‘hears’ him, it must be implied that we are talking about the agent’s *doing* something that God *helps* him to do *since* he is

¹⁴ Why not? Because there is an insufficient amount of linguistic match in John with the technical vocabulary of Stoicism.

not a sinner. We should understand this verse, then, as stipulating a general connection between acts (of a certain kind) and the *character of the agent vis-à-vis God*. This connection takes the form of a first, general premise:

- (1) God only helps people to act who are *θεοσεβεῖς* and do God's will.

9:32. Here the text then describes the quite extraordinary character of what Jesus has in fact already *done*, his particular *feat* that we already know (from 9:30) to be also a particular fact: 'he opened my eyes'. This description of Jesus' act takes the form of a second, particular premise:

- (2) Jesus' particular feat was quite extraordinary.

9:33. Then follows the conclusion, which of course is—informally put—that Jesus was only able to do (with God's help, one must presume) his extraordinary act (cf. premise 2) *because* he falls under the group of people who are *θεοσεβεῖς* and do God's will (cf. premise 1). Note, however, the exact logical form in which the writer puts this point. He *would not have been able* to do anything (of the extraordinary feat described in 9:32), *unless* he were 'from God' (in the form described in 9:31). This counterfactual may be directly converted into the following form: '*if* this, then this'—that is, *if* Jesus did do the extraordinary feat that was described in premise 2 (and we know that he did), *then* he has the *character* described in premise 1. Quod erat demonstrandum.¹⁵

What we have in the whole argument of 9:31–3 are two things, then. One is a formulation in 9:33 in explicit, technical form of a 'sign' if one applies the Stoic theory of signs: if this (and we can see it now), then this (and we can now posit it). As the Stoics said: by attending to the former (the healing: the sign), we make a 'grasp' of the latter (Jesus' identity: the signified). In accordance with the Stoic examples of a sign (and here in particular example 2), we may articulate as follows the 'Stoic' logic of Jesus' healing of the man born blind:

- (3) If this man (Jesus) has healed a man born blind, then this man is from God.

¹⁵ Compare Godet (1903) 362, who on 9:31–3 says this (and no more; still, it is far better than what one finds in most other treatments): 'Die Beweisführung ist bündig; V. 31 ist der Obersatz, V. 32 der Untersatz; V. 33 die Schlussfolgerung.' He goes on immediately to say this about 9:34: 'Geschlagen von dieser unerbittlichen Logik, die sich auf den ganz einfachen Grundsatz stützt: Was ist, ist, geraten die Widersacher Jesus in Wut.' Godet could read a text.

The other thing we may derive from the healed man's argument is the point made in 9:31–2 concerning the inner connection between acts (of the relevant kind) and the agent's character. What this point articulates is the feature of the sign—in the Stoic theory—that is spoken of as a 'nature' or 'character' in the antecedent that is 'indicative (or revelatory) of the consequent'. In other words, Jesus' acts as exemplified here by his healing of the man born blind (its extraordinary character which makes it the case that it can only be done by one who is *θεοσεβής* and does God's will) are *intrinsically of such a kind that they reveal the consequent*: that Jesus himself, the agent of those acts, is from God. That is why some people do draw the proper conclusion from Jesus' *ἔργα*—and others who do not *should* have done so.

Against this background we may note two other texts in our two chapters that draw on the same logic of the sign. 9:16 is an obvious example since here the Pharisees who respond positively to the healing do so by saying this: 'How would a man who was a sinner be able to (in Greek: *πῶς δύναται*) do such signs?' Since 'How would a man' of 9:16 equals 'Nobody would' of 9:33, the Pharisees here make use of exactly the same logical form as we have seen in 9:33. And the point is clear: if Jesus can do this (as he in fact has), then (by all the considerations that the healed man himself will then *go on* to spell out in 9:31–2) *he must be 'from God'* (as the other Pharisees have just denied). We have also already noted that the positive Pharisees even use the technical term of a 'sign' about Jesus' act: it is a *σημεῖον*.¹⁶

The other relevant text is 10:37–8 (within the context of 10:31–9) right at the end of the two chapters. As we saw, Jesus here explicitly distinguishes between believing in 'me' and believing in 'my *ἔργα*' and even states that 'the Jews' should do the latter *in order that they may come to see* something about Jesus himself (and so, one presumes, come to believe in *him*). It is immediately obvious that this line of thought directly presupposes the understanding of Jesus' *ἔργα* and their relation to his identity that has been spelled out in the two earlier texts in chapter 9. Indeed, one might even say that by spelling out in 10:37 that Jesus' *ἔργα* are not just (as 9:3 had it) *ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ* ('God's works') or (as 10:32 had it) *ἔργα ... ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς* ('works from the Father'), but even *ἔργα τοῦ πατρὸς μου* ('my father's works'), Jesus points in advance (before the little argument of 10:38) to the feature of his acts that makes them

¹⁶ Here one might feel that we are in fact so close to the Stoic theory that one might be tempted to postulate a direct relationship. However, I will resist the temptation and stay with the 'heuristic' claim. The reader may dislike this kind of vacillation. But the claim for direct influence will always depend on the *extent* of overlap, either in thought or language. And there is no calculus that will determine when there is *sufficient* overlap for it to be valid to claim direct influence.

‘indicative (or revelatory) of the consequent’. Acts like these are so intimately connected with God that their character falls immediately back on the agent. In that way they become ‘*my father’s* works’.

So much for the specific features of our two chapters that are—I would claim—quite strikingly illuminated when one brings in the Stoic theory of signs as a heuristic tool. At a more general level it seems fair to say that the Stoic theory helps to emphasise another feature that is evidently there in the text, namely, its concern with understanding or knowledge. A few references for this must suffice. At 9:3 Jesus states that the man’s blindness serves the purpose of making God’s *ἔργα* become apparent. So, people should *learn from* the healing. Then there is the fundamental idea that Jesus is acting as the ‘light of the world’ (9:4–5) when he is making the blind man able to see. There is also the constant play on what people do or do not ‘know’ (*oida*; 9:12, 20, 21, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31). Finally, there is the emphasis that we noted in 10:14–15 on the mutual ‘knowledge’ (*γινώσκειν*) of Jesus’ sheep and Jesus himself plus Jesus himself and God, an emphasis we may now supplement with Jesus’ claim in 10:38 that ‘the Jews’ should believe in his acts in order that they may ‘come to perceive (*γνώτε*) and know (*γινώσκετε*)’ the truth about himself. In fact, *everything* in these chapters (as elsewhere in this Gospel) is about knowledge.

That immediately fits with the Stoic theory of signs since, as we saw, it very distinctly places the sign at a certain ontological level, which is precisely a cognitive one. In Stoicism, reading a sign is a matter of *seeing conceptual connections* at the cognitive level *about* events that take place—as it were directly—in the world itself. In the same way, all the dialogues and monologues that make up chapters 9–10 of the Fourth Gospel are about how to *read* the facts about the world. These discourses all operate at this cognitive level, which is not directly that of the world itself but one of how to understand it. The three specific texts we have noted that expressly address the issue of *concluding* something about the world from something else make this cognitive level transparent. But the text as a whole is operating at the same level.

Let us now turn to our second overall question. If John’s handling of the notion of a sign in chapters 9–10 tallies with the way the notion is understood within Stoicism, then how does that handling give meaning to everything else that is said in the two chapters?¹⁷

¹⁷ When I gave a version of this paper at Durham University, UK, Stephen Barton asked whether Jewish apocalyptic and the view developed by Andrew Lincoln (2000) of the Fourth Gospel as a kind of legal proceeding between Jesus and ‘the Jews’ were not better models for understanding the text’s talk about ‘signs’ than Stoic logic. My answer

Who Can Read Jesus' Works as Signs?

Once one has seen the pervasiveness throughout the two chapters of the theme of being able to read Jesus' works as signs, one will also more or less immediately see that the two chapters are structured around the idea of a contrast between some people who have or acquire that ability and others who do not. The stellar example of the former type is of course the man who was born blind but was then healed by Jesus. Chapter 9 as a whole is clearly focused on showing a development that he undergoes from just being around, being healed by Jesus and repeatedly telling the story of that healing (9:1–17) to his gradually realising who Jesus actually is (9:24–38). Here the relationship between 9:17 and 9:38 is revealing. To begin with, when asked whom he takes Jesus to be, he replies (somewhat vaguely), 'a prophet'. By contrast, at the end he confesses Jesus as the Son of Man. There clearly is a development here.

This development is in focus in the man's conversation in 9:24–34 with 'the Jews', which plays on what he 'knows' about Jesus (9:25—but then also 9:31–3) and what 'the Jews' 'know' about him (9:24, 29, 30). What 'the Jews' 'know' is either false (9:24) or a sign that they do *not* know the truth about Jesus (9:29). By contrast, what the man 'knows' is either a fact, namely, that he has been healed by Jesus (9:25, 30), or the truth about Jesus that *he* is precisely able to *deduce from* that fact (9:31–3). Thus the man becomes the stellar example of those who are able to read Jesus' works as signs when he *spells out* (in 9:31–3) the logic of the sign. It is true that he needs a little help from Jesus in 9:35–8 to get to the final insight. He concluded on his own that Jesus was 'from God' (9:32), but he is made to see by Jesus that Jesus is 'the Son of Man'.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the man himself becomes a model in this story for those who are able to read Jesus' works as signs.

By contrast, the Pharisees and 'the Jews' more generally are precisely those who are *not* able to conclude to Jesus' identity from his acts. This is made abundantly clear in their conversations with the healed man both in 9:13–17 (especially 9:15–16) and in 9:24–34. And it is stated explicitly by Jesus himself in his reply in 10:25–6 to their question whether he is the Messiah

was (and is) that one thing does not exclude the other and that the use of the concept in chapters 9–10 that I go on to explain must in any case be incorporated in a full account.

¹⁸ Barrett (1978) 364 comments on 'the otherwise surprising use of the title Son of Man' here by referring to 12:34 (itself referring back to 12:23) and suggesting that this title is specifically connected with the motif of Jesus appearing as judge: cf. 9:39. This is helpful since it connects directly the theme of judgement with that of seeing (the blind man healed) or not-seeing (the seeing Pharisees, who are actually 'blind'). Generally, the 'title' of Son of Man is connected with the motifs of Jesus' resurrection and return: cf. in the Fourth Gospel already at 1:51, 3:13–21 etc.

(10:24): they are not able to believe him when he *says* that he is (10:25a) nor are they able to draw the appropriate conclusion from his works (10:25b–26).

In short, based on the idea of being able to conclude from Jesus' works to his identity, the two chapters draw a picture of a contrast between some people who do have that ability and others who do not. Nobody, I should think, will disagree with this reading.

The Resulting Contrast—9:34–10:21

Then comes a further point, which has not been generally seen. It is that the text connects the ability of the healed man with the inability of 'the Jews' in a manner that eventually results in a full and direct contrast between what the healed man has gradually come to represent, namely, the group of believers in Jesus as the Messiah, and 'the Jews' as representing a settled group of opponents and enemies of Jesus. This contrast is drawn in 9:34–41 but has wider implications for chapter 10, too.¹⁹

In 9:34 'the Jews' declare their superiority over the healed man. Reflecting the motif that was introduced at the beginning of the chapter (9:1–3) that there might be a connection between the man's being born blind and some sin on the part of his parents (a suggestion that Jesus rejects, 9:3), 'the Jews' now state that the healed man himself was born 'in sin', not just with respect to his eyes, but 'as a whole' (*ὅλως*): then how could he teach them anything?! As a consequence, they 'throw him out' (*ἐκβάλλειν*, 9:34). Here, then, 'the Jews' insist on rejecting the conclusion that the healed man has gradually reached concerning Jesus' origins, and they cap their rejection by drawing a physical boundary between him and themselves.

By contrast, when Jesus hears that they 'had thrown out' the healed man (9:35, again *ἐκβάλλειν*), he himself seeks him out and engages him in the conversation about the Son of Man (9:34–8) which ends with the man's final confession of Jesus. This is not all, however. For Jesus himself now also brings the contrast into the open between the healed man and the Pharisees (9:39–41). Where he was (literally) blind, but has now become seeing (both literally *and* 'spiritually'), the Pharisees, who are not literally blind and who claim to be ('spiritually') seeing, nevertheless remain in sin (9:41), obviously because they are in fact '*spiritually*' blind (as seen from Jesus' perspective).

¹⁹ For the 'two-level drama', in which the blind man is not only someone healed by Jesus but also the representative of those Jewish Christians who have been expelled from the synagogue because of their confession of Jesus (thus Lincoln (2005) 284), see in general Martyn (1968/1979), who brought the motif to full scholarly consciousness. My own point rather concerns the way this theme is being *developed* in our text, and indeed from chapter 9 *into* chapter 10.

Thus when Jesus states that he has come into the cosmos to judge so that those who are not seeing may come to see and those who *are* seeing may become blind (9:39), he is directly contrasting the healed man (as an example) with the Pharisees and ‘the Jews’ more generally.

Now—and this is the structural point that has not been generally seen—the contrast between the healed man, who was ‘thrown out’ by ‘the Jews’, and the Pharisees and ‘the Jews’ themselves, as the contrast is spelled out in the final verses of chapter 9 (9:39–41), *leads directly into* chapter 10, where Jesus describes, in the form of a parable, the relationship between himself and his herd, on the one hand, and his (or the herd’s) enemies, on the other hand. Here the ‘herd’ evidently stands for those who have come to have faith in Jesus *on the model of the healed man*, of whose ‘conversion’ we have just heard. By contrast, the shepherd’s enemies are ‘the Jews’.²⁰

Then it is highly noteworthy—and in fact additional proof of the textual connection across the chapter division at 10:1—that in the parable itself (10:1–5), Jesus employs exactly the term of ‘throwing somebody out’ (again ἐκβάλλειν) that we found in 9:34 and 35. Here, however, those who are ‘thrown out’, and indeed, by the shepherd himself (10:4), are *his own* sheep. Moreover, they are ‘thrown out’ from the original sheepfold, which in some way or other represents the boundaries of the Jewish people.²¹ What we see here is that the text constructs a causal sequence: *because* ‘the Jews’ had in the first place thrown out the healed man, when he had drawn the correct conclusion about Jesus’ origins from his acts, and in accordance with the fact that Jesus himself had then *reacted* to that violent act on the part of ‘the Jews’ by helping the healed man to a final confession of Jesus as the Son of Man, *therefore* Jesus on his side is also forced to throw his own people *out* of the sheepfold and to walk away in front of them and with them in his train (10:4). In relation to the imaginary centre of everybody’s attention—the sheepfold—the acts of the two parties (‘the Jews’ and Jesus) mirror one another exactly. Where ‘the Jews’ throw the healed man out in order to keep the valued object or ‘field’ for themselves, Jesus on his side throws his own people out of the valued object or ‘field’ and leads them away from it in order to keep *them* for himself.²²

²⁰ This reading is also suggested by Léon-Dufour (1990).

²¹ The precise interpretation of the various figures that turn up in the parable is highly contested. For the sheepfold, however, compare Barrett (1978) 369: ‘This, then, is the fold of Judaism, which contained the first disciples and also the unbelieving Jews, of whom the former were to be joined by Gentile believers’ (Barrett is here referring to 10:16).

²² Lincoln (2005) 292 also notes the use of ἐκβάλλειν in both 9:34–5 and 10:4. When he states that the verb occurs with ‘quite different connotations’ in either place, he is of

Read in this way, the theme in 10:1–18 is no longer how people may *come to* have faith in Jesus (as in the case of the healed man). Rather, Jesus' 'herd' is now already established (by 9:35–38 and 39–41 taken together) and may therefore be fully contrasted with 'the Jews'. Thus 10:1–18 should be understood as the *direct consequence* of the movement in chapter 9 that led to the drawing of a clear and explicit contrast between those who were able to see (like the healed man) and 'the Jews', who were not. Chapter 9 describes the development *towards* 'spiritual' sight, a development that then ends with an explicit contrast with those who have physical, but precisely not 'spiritual', sight. Chapter 10:1–18 then rehearses the final character—and its contrast with 'the Jews'—of the new group (the 'herd') that has been established as a result of the development described in chapter 9. However, in describing this change from 'becoming' to 'being' the text is also keenly interested in maintaining a distinct causal sequence. It was 'the Jews' who began things, by using violence in order to keep the cherished value object for themselves. Then Jesus had to react, equally violently, by removing his own people from the cherished 'field'. Incidentally, this strategic claim about 'the Jews' is also very forcefully prepared for in 9:22–3, with the first of the three famous references to the practice of 'the Jews' of making anybody who confessed Jesus as the Messiah ἀποσυναγωγός, which is almost identical in meaning with the use of ἐκβάλλειν in 9:34 and 35.

It follows from this reading that the chapter division at 10:1 does violence to the movement of the text. In fact, 9:39 should be understood as a verse that both summarises the development that has taken place in chapter 9 and also gives the 'title' for the contrast that Jesus draws in 10:1–18 between his own 'herd' and 'the Jews'. The Pharisees of 9:40–41 are 'spiritually' blind and remain in their sin. *In fact* ('Truly, truly I say to you ...', 10:1), they are like the thief and robber who enters the sheepfold illicitly (10:1). But the one who enters through the door is etc. (10:2).²³

We have no time here to comment in detail on the parable of chapter 10 and its exposition by Jesus. Suffice it to say that it is full of themes that reflect the self-understanding of the *fully* established 'Christian' group a long time after the events themselves: that the shepherd has come to give his sheep 'life' (10:10); that he lays down his soul for them (10:11); and that he has sheep

course in a sense right. In another sense he thereby misses the point I go on to articulate on the use of violence.

²³ Léon-Dufour (1990) is of course entirely right in his comment on the use of the phrase Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν in the quotation given in n. 7 above.

from outside the sheepfold (of Judaism) who will join the other sheep so as to produce a single herd with a single shepherd (10:16).²⁴

Noteworthy, in the light of our comments on the notion of ‘throwing out’ the Jesus people, is also the amount of violent language that is used by Jesus of the good shepherd’s opponents. They attempt to force their way into the sheepfold (10:1). They only aim to steal and kill the sheep in order to offer them up for sacrifice (10:10). If they manage to get in charge of the sheep, they will leave them in the lurch when they see a wolf approaching, ‘and the wolf grabs (*ἀρπάζειν*) and disperses them’ (10:12). Here the term for ‘grabbing’ is taken up again in 10:28–9 when Jesus declares that he gives eternal life to his own sheep (cf. 10:26–7) so that they will never die (contrast this with the act of the shepherd’s enemies in 10:10) ‘and nobody will (be able to) grab (*ἀρπάζειν*) them from my hand’ (10:28, repeated in 10:29). In all this, whereas the good shepherd is full of care for his sheep (see not least 10:11–18, but also 10:28–30), his opponents are full of violence. And the point? Once more that violence begins with ‘the Jews’. When Jesus acts violently and ‘throws out’ his sheep from the sheepfold, he is only forced to do so by his opponents’ behaviour and he acts in order to save the sheep.

We should conclude that 10:1–18 describes the fully ‘Christian’ group—probably the Johannine group itself—that has been created when sufficiently many people have come to have faith in Jesus in the way described in chapter 9 through the stellar model of the healed man. But the three verses that conclude this section of the text (10:19–21) also show that precisely this genesis of the group has not been forgotten. When ‘the Jews’ react to Jesus’ words (note *λόγους*, i.e., not his acts) in the usual way with a schism (10:19), many of them declare that he has a demon and should not be listened to (N.B. 10:20), but others reply that those words (here *ῥήματα*: the actual sound-carried words that stream from Jesus’ mouth) are not those of a man who is possessed by a demon. And then they refer, as we know, to Jesus’ acts: ‘would a demon have been able to open the eyes of blind people?’ (10:21). Thus what is basically at stake (in chapters 9–10 as a whole) is the ability to read Jesus’ *acts*, and to read them as the signs that they are. Then one will also be able to *hear* his *words*. In this way the end of 10:21 ties the whole of 10:1–21 tightly together with chapter 9.

²⁴ Against J. Louis Martyn (1996) and Ashton (2007) 113 n. 31, who take the ‘other sheep’ to be ‘groups of “Jews” who professed faith in Jesus’ (Ashton), I remain convinced by the traditional view among scholars that they stand for Gentiles. (See, e.g., Barrett (1978 [1955]) 376.) Bultmann, of course, took 10:16 to be a later interpolation. But one needs to have Bultmann’s confidence in one’s own judgement vis-à-vis the transmitted text in order to be able to accept that.

The Ultimate Issue—10:22-42

With 10:22 we get a change of scene, both in time and place. We already know the close thematic connections with both 10:1-21 and chapter 9. For the former note now this: when ‘the Jews’ surround Jesus in Solomon’s stoa in the temple and ask him to declare himself ‘openly’ (*παρησίᾳ*), *that is*, no longer in parables as in 10:1-18, whether he is the Messiah (10:24), Jesus’ reply partly (10:26-7 + 28-9) refers back to the sheep of the parable. Thus there are two clear hints that 10:22-42 is meant to be read in direct continuation of 10:1-21. And for the latter: Jesus’ reply also repeats the point from chapter 9 of the need to be able to read Jesus’ works as witnessing about himself (10:25). As we also know, the same theme is taken up later in the new section (at 10:32-33 and 37-38) and in the concluding reference to the kind of *σημεῖον* that Jesus’ works constitute (10:41). In the light of these connections across 10:22, what is the new point made in 10:22-42 as a whole?

The answer is not difficult to find since the new section is clearly focused on the question asked by ‘the Jews’ about Jesus’ identity and their rejection of the answer that he gives—and conversely on the radical character of that answer. When ‘the Jews’ have first asked whether Jesus is the Messiah (10:24), Jesus replies in a way (10:25-9) that leads to the radical claim that ‘I and the Father are one’ (10:30). To this ‘the Jews’ react by trying to stone him (10:31). When Jesus has then referred once more to his works (10:32-3), ‘the Jews’ explicitly declare that they are unconcerned about any works, be they ever so good: instead, they are trying to stone him for blasphemy since though he is a human being he makes himself (a) God (10:33). Here, incidentally, the text has ‘the Jews’ themselves declare what chapter 9 has already shown in practice: that they are entirely unconcerned with Jesus’ acts (or works); foolishly, they believe that Jesus’ acts are one thing and his relationship with God another. *That* is precisely where they go so terribly wrong (as the story of the development of the healed man has also shown). However, in reply to this new charge on the part of ‘the Jews’, Jesus engages in a teasing scriptural argument about who he is (10:34-6).²⁵ In all this the central question remains that of his identity: is he the Messiah (10:24)? Are he and the Father one (10:30)? Is he (a) God (10:33)? And now: is he (the) Son of God (10:36)? But Jesus’ concluding claim again reverts to the question of his works, as we know (10:37-8). Again ‘the Jews’ seek to catch him, but he left ‘from their hand’ (10:39)—just as they on their side were unable to grab any of Jesus’ sheep from his (10:28) and the Father’s (10:29) hand.

²⁵ Incidentally, note how Jesus here refers—very suggestively—to ‘your’ law (10:34), thereby explicitly distinguishing between the two separate groups of ‘the Jews’ on the one side and himself and his followers on the other.

What 10:22–39 brings into the open as part of chapters 9–10 as a whole is quite clearly the *conclusion* that ‘the Jews’ *should* have been able to draw from Jesus’ works: that he in fact is the Messiah in the various senses that Jesus then spells out to them. One might say that this conclusion was already sufficiently clearly articulated in Jesus’ conversation with the healed man concerning the Son of Man in 9:35–8. However, since chapter 10 (beginning at 9:39) has then gone on to present the full contrast between the Jesus people and ‘the Jews’, it is wholly natural that the conclusion to be drawn from Jesus’ works should also be insisted upon vis-à-vis those who did *not* arrive at the proper conclusion: ‘the Jews’. That is precisely what happens in 10:22–39, which focuses on the conclusion to be drawn from Jesus’ acts while also keeping in the picture the theme of chapter 9 of how to *arrive at* that conclusion.

We on our side should conclude that what Dodd called the ‘controversial dialogue’²⁶ of 10:22–39 constitutes nothing less than the logical end point of the whole development that began in 9:1. Here the starkest formulations of Jesus’ identity are given that ‘the Jews’ *should* have been able to reach. And here ‘the Jews’ are confronted most directly by Jesus himself with their inability to draw those conclusions from everything he has said and done. The confrontation is now total.

Intermediate Conclusions About Unity and Philosophy

The suggested reading of the two chapters has, I believe, vindicated the claim that they constitute a tight literary unity. Thus far, at least, it seems fair to say that there is no necessity that should force one to divide the text up at any of the traditional places. On the contrary, seen from a narrative philosophical point of view such a procedure would do quite a lot of violence to the text.

I also believe that the claim has been vindicated that one theme, at least, that holds the two chapters firmly together is that of concluding from Jesus’ works to his identity. In this connection I would also claim that John’s manner of spelling out this theme of a ‘sign’ takes a form that it is fair to call philosophical when it is also seen in the light of the Stoic theory of the sign.

Thus the two chapters are held together by the repeated use of a philosophical theme and the way this theme is intertwined with and gives meaning to the other themes that come up during the two chapters: the conflict between the healed man and ‘the Jews’; the contrast between a gradual movement of coming to faith in Jesus and an account of the fully established

²⁶ Dodd (1953) 356.

group of Christ believers that results from such a process; the final clash between ‘the Jews’ as a firmly established group and Jesus with regard to the ultimate question of Jesus’ identity.

With these conclusions one might end the investigation. From the point of view of the text itself—the perspective that it applies (most often through the mouth of its protagonist, Jesus) on the stories and topics that it describes—there is little more to be said: as described in the two chapters, the healed man is vindicated in relation to ‘the Jews’, and so is Jesus himself. What both say and do is true, where the term ‘true’ applies to the implications of their doings. And with that observation the exegete might conclude his business.

Two Further Questions and a Conclusion about Ideology

Here, however, the student of religion might wish to step in. In fact, there are at least two further features of the text that invite the reader to go outside the perspective applied by the text itself and ask about the logical structure of what it says if one does not just adhere to that perspective.

The first feature is fairly obvious. We saw that the two chapters operate with what one might call a causal sequence of violence: violence *began* on the side of ‘the Jews’ and the corresponding violence on Jesus’ part, which was also extended into a fairly extensive, direct ascription by him of violence to ‘the Jews’, was a *reaction* to that initial case of violence. Now, such a construction should make one suspicious if it is also meant to reflect an actual, historical relationship between two separate social groups (in this case the Johannine ‘Christians’ and the historical referents of ‘the Jews’). Where in the history of humankind does one find a ‘pure’ case of complete innocence on the one side and wholly unjustified aggression on the other? Nowhere. So, what is going on in this text?

The second feature is more intricate. It concerns the relationship between the healed man’s (apparently) single-handed realisation, through the various events described in chapter 9, that Jesus is ‘from God’ and Jesus’ own implicit and explicit claims in the same regard from 9:35 onwards into and including the whole of chapter 10. As we have read the text, it aims to show that the healed man single-handedly arrived at (something like) faith in Jesus (and then he was helped a little bit by Jesus himself in 9:35–8 to take the last step towards faith, 9:38)—after which Jesus was, as it were, able to *summarise* the contrast that the healed man had (initially, at least) created on his own between the fully established group that he represents and the other, distinct group consisting of the non-Christ-believing ‘Jews’. Indeed, as I have argued, displaying that movement is precisely what the text’s handling

of the notion of a sign is all about: one *should* conclude, as the healed man did do, from Jesus' acts to his messianic or divine identity; *then* the group of believers would be created. However, if one applies a perspective that asks about how real human beings come to see this or the other thing, it seems highly unpersuasive that there should be this kind of unilateral causal sequence anywhere in the world, as if there ever was a case of an entirely innocent acquisition of a given piece of understanding (like that of the healed man) that had in no way been helped along by the shape and content of the understanding itself that results from the process.

In connection with both features it appears that we are faced with the same logical figure. The story tells of a unilateral causal sequence. In fact, however, were the story to reflect any real events among real human beings, we would have very good reason to expect there to be movements in *both* directions. Violence would not just be begun by 'the Jews', but would be going in both directions. And the healed man would not just draw the proper conclusion about Jesus on his own, but would also be helped along by others who had already drawn it.

Then we may take one more step. Not only does John's story construct a unilateral sequence: it also appears that the unilateral sequence has in fact been constructed *on the basis of* the side (that of the fully 'Christian' group and its perspective) that is not allowed in the text itself to have any influence upon the other side (the initial violence of 'the Jews' and the healed man's own realisation about Jesus); nay, even more, it appears that the text has been constructed in such a manner as to hide this fact since it precisely postulates both that it was 'the Jews' who began the violence *all* on their own and also that the healed man reached his conclusion *all* on his own.

This move is an ideological one if by 'ideology' one understands a type of understanding that as part of a power struggle and for the purpose of bringing its own view to victory denies an opposing view without acknowledging that it does this but rather by attempting to hide the manoeuvre even to itself.²⁷ By adopting this kind of perspective on John 9–10, one is forced to conclude that this text is a highly ideological one. It postulates that it was 'the Jews' who began the violence without acknowledging the likely 'dual' character of such an occurrence and it postulates that a person like the healed man might conclude that Jesus was 'from God' without acknowledging the likely 'dual' character of that kind of event. Moreover, by constructing a causal sequence *from* 'chapter 9' *into* 'chapter 10' (in either case), it even attempts to hide its actual denial of the

²⁷ This is my own paraphrase of the classic, Marxist understanding of 'ideology'. The three final words are meant to capture the element of 'false consciousness' that is part of that notion.

opposing view. It thereby displays the kind of ‘false consciousness’ that is a sign of a genuine ideology.

Is this conclusion a sad one, if one loves the text that it describes? Not necessarily. *If* that is what the loved text does, then why should one love it less once one understands it more fully than before? Love, surely, should not thrive on an illusion.²⁸

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²⁸ The last small paragraph brings to expression my view that a history-of-religion perspective does not necessarily cancel out a theological one.

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