

A RESPONSE TO DAN WALLACE

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Abstract: Daniel Wallace, in a review of Ronald D. Peters' *The Greek Article: A Functional Grammar of ὁ -items in the Greek New Testament with Special Emphasis on the Greek Article*, published in the *Review of Biblical Literature*, not only challenges Peters' proposed grammar of the Greek article, but also the scholarship behind the theoretical model. The following is a response to Wallace's review in which the debate between Peters and Wallace is located in the context of the general characteristics of paradigm shifts in science and scholarship. The presentation relies primarily on Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. The thesis of the following response is that, using Kuhn's framework and terminology, the debate between Peters and Wallace is characteristic of the conflict that inevitably arises between the *novel theory* and *normal science*, respectively. (Response)

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The following is a response to Dan Wallace's review of my book *The Greek Article: A Functional Grammar of ὁ-items in the Greek New Testament with Special Emphasis on the Greek Article* in the *Review of Biblical Literature*. I would like to begin by thanking *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* for the opportunity to publish this response.

It was not long after the publication of Wallace's review that I began to work on my response. I have to admit, I was annoyed. From the moment I began my investigation into the function of the Greek article, I anticipated that there would be significant pushback from the guardians of the traditional approach. Indeed, I fully expected Dan to lead the charge. Such resistance is

certainly not unique to biblical scholarship, but is consistent with any attempt to introduce a new paradigm into any field of scholarship. So I wasn't surprised that he produced a negative review. However, I was quite surprised by the nature of his review. It doesn't bother me that Dan disagrees, but I am deeply disturbed by his handling of disagreement. As I began to prepare what follows, my concern was to ensure that my response did not perpetuate a conversation in the tone of a schoolyard spat, resulting in a form of "I know you are, but what am I," but with more sophisticated language. So, after writing my initial draft, I set aside my response for several months. Were this merely a matter of defending my work, I may have let it be. I've received enough positive responses to my book and my presentation in the New Testament Greek Language and Exegesis section of the 2013 ETS Annual Meeting in Baltimore to be confident that my work is being taken seriously, even if certain points are being debated. However, there is a broader issue regarding the work of scholarship and the emergence of new theories that I believe is worth addressing. Therefore, while I will address some of the specifics of Wallace's review, it will be for the purpose of engaging in a conversation about the nature of scholarship and how we as scholars should respond to new ideas.

I will begin by locating the current debate in the context of the general tendencies that characterize paradigmatic shifts in scholarship and scientific endeavors in general. In biblical scholarship, one may observe similar patterns as those found in scientific study, which have been outlined by Thomas Kuhn in his highly influential *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. When referring to established models or paradigms, Kuhn employs the term *normal science*, which he defines as, "research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice."¹ Textbooks produced using normal science "expound the body of accepted theory, illustrate many or all of its successful applications, and compare these applications with

1. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 10.

exemplary observations and experiments.”² Based on Kuhn’s definition, we can safely argue that Wallace’s work on the Greek article represents *normal science*. This provides me with the opportunity to respond to Wallace’s first criticism of my work, namely that my historical overview of the treatment of the Greek article is characterized by bibliographic deficiency:

The “Historical Overview” has several lacunae as well as odd features. In a work of this sort, which purports to overturn centuries of scholarship regarding the origins and function of the Greek article, it is incumbent on the author to have a good grasp of the scholarship that he is challenging. Yet Peters seems to overlook several authors whose writings make significant contributions to classical and biblical studies.³

It seems clear that Wallace’s assessment intends not merely to critique the thoroughness of my investigation, but also to raise doubts concerning the veracity of my argument. In fact, Wallace has failed to discern the purpose of my survey, which was not meant to furnish an exhaustive treatment of the history of work on the article, but to establish the existence of a demonstrable “normal science” regarding the article. My objective was to demonstrate an entrenched dogma perpetuated in the literature that has dominated the conversation for centuries. In response to Wallace’s criticism I ask, how many writings must a survey include to clearly demonstrate an entrenched dogma perpetuated in the literature? Yes, I could have included the works he identifies, but since they represent the normal science of the Greek article, what more would they add? What Wallace intends as a criticism reveals instead his own failure to discern my objective. Of course he would include these works. He and the authors he cites are working within the established paradigm. As I make clear, my objective is to propose an alternative to this paradigm, to the normal science of the article.

Next, Wallace faults my argument from morphology, associating it with something akin to the “root fallacy” or

2. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 10.
3. Wallace, Review of *The Greek Article*, par. 6.

“etymologizing.”⁴ I am forced to ask, would he level the same argument against M.A.K. Halliday? I devote considerable space to summarizing Halliday’s categories of WH- and TH- items, which serve as a model for my approach to the Greek article and relative pronouns. According to Halliday’s usage, in English the category of TH- items includes both demonstrative pronouns and the article. This categorization is based, in large part, on shared morphological features. As this morphological approach is well documented in the literature of Systemic Functional Linguistics, I would appear to be on solid theoretical ground. Additionally, I in no way argue that the co-categorization of the Greek article and relative pronoun be accepted solely on morphological grounds. I consider it only one piece of evidence in favor of such a categorization. Wallace’s problem is not with me, but with a well-established and widely employed linguistic theoretical model.

As Wallace continues his criticism, he reveals his deep entrenchment in the normal science of Greek studies. Regarding my analysis of relative clauses and articular participial clauses, he accuses me of not explaining why it must be that the article parallels the relative pronoun, falling back upon the standard understanding that the article turns the participle into an adjective.⁵ In this criticism, Wallace reveals several failings on his part, which can only be explained by willful ignorance or simple lack of comprehension. First, his assertion that I don’t explain myself is patently false. I examine hundreds of instances (which may be confirmed by simply looking at the Scripture index), each with an explanation attached. Second, Wallace criticizes my analysis using the categories of traditional grammar, not SFL. Rather than evaluate the quality of my analysis using the principles of the model I employ to determine its validity and internal consistency, he attempts to undermine my analysis using a model foreign to its system. This, to me, is the most egregious of his errors. At no point does he actually engage my theory on its own merits in order to assess its internal

4. Wallace, Review of *The Greek Article*, par. 10.

5. Wallace, Review of *The Greek Article*, par. 12.

consistency and its ability to explain the data. Third, all of this seems to reveal an inability to think outside the box, to assess an argument on its own merits using its own terms, and most importantly, to entertain the possibility that the previous approach may be inadequate, if not simply wrong. As Alasdair MacIntyre correctly asserts, “The weakest form of argument . . . will be the appeal to the authority of established belief, merely as established.”⁶ Wallace asserts that the article has converted the participle into an adjective as established fact. He finds fault with me for not providing supporting data, but where is his data to support that the participle is now an adjective? Not to mention that his assertions reflect either an inability or unwillingness to recognize how a functional analysis fundamentally differs from his traditional grammatical model.

Whether the cause is willful ignorance or lack of comprehension, Wallace’s critique at times results in complete misrepresentation. Regarding my analysis of Rom 9:5, Wallace writes, “Peters’s argument that the readers would not know *which* Christ was in view . . . is rather forced.”⁷ I never say, nor even suggest, that the readers would not know which Christ was in view, let alone argue such a point. In what becomes a lamentable pattern, Wallace criticizes me for something I didn’t say. While misunderstanding is frustrating, this type of wholesale misrepresentation is beneath contempt. Regretfully, it pervades the entire review. In this we should not be surprised, as Kuhn once again helpfully observes,

To the extent, as significant as it is incomplete, that two scientific schools disagree about what is a problem and what a solution, they will inevitably talk through each other when debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms. In the partially circular arguments that regularly result, each paradigm will be shown to satisfy more or less the criteria that it dictates for itself and to fall short of a few of those dictated by its opponents.⁸

6. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 359.
7. Wallace, Review of *The Greek Article*, par. 14.
8. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 109–10.

One might say Kuhn has spoken prophetically into this very debate.

Just as Kuhn helps us understand the normal science of Wallace, he also helps clarify my contribution. While the guardians of normal science may be satisfied with existing paradigms, for others the same paradigm will result in a crisis arising from dissatisfaction with the prevailing paradigm's inability to solve certain problems. This is affirmed by MacIntyre:

It may indeed happen that the use of the methods of enquiry and of the forms of argument, by means of which rational progress has been achieved so far, begins to have the effect of increasingly disclosing new inadequacies, hitherto unrecognized incoherences, and new problems for the solution of which there seem to be insufficient or no resources within the established fabric of belief.⁹

The guardians of the normal science do not note that anomalies exist. For others, as Kuhn observes, "Though they may begin to lose faith and then to consider alternatives, they do not renounce the paradigm that has led them into crisis."¹⁰ However, there is a third group that experiences a state of frustration, which MacIntyre labels an *epistemological crisis*.¹¹ The product of this crisis is what Kuhn calls the *novel theory*. The importance of the novel theory for scientific change cannot be overstated. As Kuhn asserts, "a scientific theory is declared invalid only if an alternate candidate is available to take its place."¹² This is why my work on the Greek article is so important for the larger scholarly community. There must be more than one option so that testing may occur and choices may be made. As Kuhn writes, "The decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgment leading to that decision involves comparison of both paradigms with nature and each other."¹³ For far too long, the conversation about the Greek

9. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 362.

10. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 77.

11. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 361–62.

12. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 77.

13. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 77.

article has not been characterized by such options. Scholars such as Wallace may bristle at the novelty of the theory I propose, but as Kuhn rightly asserts, novelty is essential to change. During the period of transition, “there will be a decisive difference in the modes of solution.”¹⁴ In the end,

The transition from a paradigm in crisis to a new one from which a new tradition of normal science can emerge is far from a cumulative process, one achieved by an articulation or extension of the old paradigm. Rather it is a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field’s most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications.¹⁵

MacIntyre agrees:

The theses central to the new theoretical and conceptual structure, just because they are significantly richer than and escape the limitations of those theses which were central to the tradition before and as it entered its period of epistemological crisis, will in no way be derivable from those earlier positions. Imaginative conceptual innovation will have to occur. The justification of the new theses will lie precisely in their ability to achieve what could not have been achieved prior to that innovation.¹⁶

Wallace’s own work represents the cumulative process. It is an extension of the old paradigm. My goal was to introduce a novel theory that is the product of “imaginative conceptual innovation” and “reconstructs the field from new fundamentals.” Such a theory could enter into conversation with the normal science, offering an alternative for the broader scholarly community to evaluate. It is my assertion, at least, that what I have done fulfills MacIntyre’s final statement, “to achieve what could not have been achieved prior to that innovation.” Now, it is up to the community of scholars to test my thesis. The value of my contribution is that it provides biblical Greek scholars a necessary second option that has up to this point been lacking.

14. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 85.

15. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 84–85.

16. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 362.

Now, they may test and evaluate both the normal science and the novel theory of the Greek article.

Kuhn's description of the spontaneous emergence of a new paradigm certainly resonates with my own experience: "The new paradigm, or a sufficient hint to permit later articulation, emerges all at once, sometimes in the middle of the night, in the mind of the man deeply immersed in crisis."¹⁷ Wallace may sense no crisis regarding the Greek article, but I have. This, of course, does not of itself invalidate the previous paradigm or validate the one I propose. It does, however, speak to the heart of Wallace's review. Rather than evaluate my theory on its own merits, Wallace has engaged in an attack on the quality of my work in order to circumvent the scholarly process by means of a nakedly transparent attempt to silence the conversation before it begins. His review masquerades as scholarship, but fails at key points as I have observed above. It is also characterized by the tension that inevitably accompanies the confrontation of normal science by the novel theory and the resistance of the former to the latter. Again, as Kuhn rightly observes, "The transfer of allegiance from paradigm to paradigm is a conversion experience that cannot be forced."¹⁸ In fact,

A generation is sometimes required to effect change . . . Though some scientists, particularly the older and more experienced ones, may resist indefinitely, most of them can be reached one way or another. Conversions will occur a few at a time until, after the last holdouts have died, the whole profession will again be practicing under a single, but now a different, paradigm.¹⁹

During the period of transition, the lack of agreement may evoke feelings of despair on the part of the proponents of the novel theory, who desperately search for a means by which to convince the members of the opposing camp. As MacIntyre observes, "Modern academic philosophy turns out by and large to provide means for a more accurate and informed definition of

17. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 89–90.

18. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 151.

19. Kuhn, *Scientific Revolutions*, 152.

disagreement rather than for progress toward its resolution.²⁰ My response to Wallace certainly seems to affirm this somewhat bleak assessment. I've done much to explain his disagreement but little to propose a way forward.

As is the case with any scholar, I am hopeful that my theory will eventually find widespread acceptance. Nevertheless, I am not so bold as to suggest that this absolutely will happen. As a way forward, I am content to allow the scholarly conversation to progress organically, so long as the conversation takes place. If my theory stands up under this period of testing, conversion will take place. I get the sense that Wallace is less enthusiastic at the thought of such a conversion process, and who can blame him. However, this does not excuse him for the inexcusably poor scholarship that characterizes the criticisms found in his review, which I am inclined to believe are an attempt to shut down the conversation before it begins. I don't ask the scholarly community to accept my proposal uncritically, but rather to give it a fair hearing and assess it on its own terms and merits, something that Wallace apparently feels no compulsion to do.

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20. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 3.