Where Have All the Greek Grammarians Gone? And Why Should Anyone Care?[1]

Stanley E. Porter

McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON, Canada

Abstract: Academic and intellectual communities are known for various areas of subject expertise. When one thinks of Greek grammar, including that of the New Testament, one thinks of Germany, and possibly Great Britain, but rarely Canada. An examination of recent trends regarding the study of ancient languages, especially Greek, in various institutions within Canada serves in this paper as an analogy for the study of other, related subjects, indicating some possible reasons why our field of biblical studies is increasingly an embattled subject and what we can do to address some of the issues involved. (Article)

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1. *Introduction*

I am honored to have been President of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies and before that the Vice President over the course of the last two years. It has been a privilege to work alongside the dedicated members of the Executive Committee, who do most of the work of organizing the activities of our society, including the annual meeting.

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1.   I delivered this as the Presidential address at the annual meeting of the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies (CSBS) in Vancouver, BC, Canada, 1–3 June 2019. I appreciate the positive response that I received from my fellow CSBS members and the conversations afterward.

I must confess that, in some sense, I have been trying to deliver my presidential address for nearly twenty years. In August of 2001, I was scheduled to be the plenary speaker at a conference in Britain, with my title "Where Have All the Greek Grammarians Gone?" I, however, had moved in July from London, England, to Hamilton, Ontario, to take up my new position at McMaster Divinity College, and so regrettably had to cancel the talk.

The person who was to introduce me to give the lecture, I was told later, said on the occasion words to the effect that the paper topic was "Where Have All the Greek Grammarians Gone? Apparently, they have gone to Canada."

This was not only a clever way of addressing the immediate situation of my cancelled lecture, but it also pointed out the situation that, with the departure of a single individual, the field of New Testament Greek grammatical study could be significantly altered. In other words, the number of New Testament Greek grammarians is not large in the UK—or in Canada, for that matter. My move did not suddenly swell the ranks.

When I returned to Canada in 2001, I was under no illusion that the number of grammarians in Canada was any larger than it was in the UK. As I contemplated my topic for this paper, I looked at the list of past-Presidents of CSBS to see if there were any other recognizable New Testament Greek scholars. I could find only one or two. G.B. Caird, who taught at McGill University and was President from 1957–1958 before his return to the UK, wrote a book on the *Language and Imagery of the Bible*,[2] which arguably treats some linguistic issues, but he is not otherwise known for his Greek language study. One Greek scholar who arguably falls into the category is the second President of the society, the Reverend Canon George Abbott-Smith, who was President from 1934–1935. Abbott-Smith wrote *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*[3] while being sometime Principal of the Montreal Diocesan Theological

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2.   Caird, *Language and Imagery.*
3.   Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*.

College and Professor of Hellenistic Greek in McGill University. His lexicon, originally published in 1922, went through three editions, the last in 1937, just after his presidency. Abbott-Smith thanks a number of different scholars for their work, including especially James Hope Moulton, but also A.T. Robertson and Friedrich Blass, thus placing his lexicon within a distinct linguistic tradition that I will speak more about in a moment. The lexicon is known for its frequent reference to usage in the Septuagint. So far as I can determine, the lexicon was Abbott-Smith's only published book in Greek, although he authored a short book on Charles Bancroft and edited one on soul care. Nevertheless, he was recognized in 1939 by McGill with an award of the honorary LL.D. I realize that there have been some others interested in New Testament Greek, but most of these have written first-year Greek grammars, a topic I will also address in a moment. I do not attempt to mention individuals for fear that I will overlook someone.

I have dedicated a significant amount of my scholarly career over the last thirty years to the study of the ancient Greek language, in particular, the Greek of the New Testament. I was fortunate to approach this study from a strong foundation in linguistics, having had the opportunity to do my PhD in both biblical studies and linguistics, as the first interdisciplinary PhD in the faculty of arts at the University of Sheffield, along with having experience in the reading and later teaching of extra-biblical Greek texts from Homer to the fourth century AD. Besides being a biblical scholar, I consider myself a modern linguist who studies New Testament Greek—that is my definition of being a Greek grammarian, at least for this paper— and strongly believe that we should bring the latest thought on language to bear on our understanding even of an ancient language. Just because a language is ancient does not mean that its methods of study must also be. I will address this issue further below as well.

The situation regarding the study of Greek has changed significantly over the course of my career. It is very difficult to gather precise information regarding the study of ancient Greek in Canada or elsewhere, and so I must rely upon haphazard

evidence and my own intuitions. When I was teaching in the UK, less than a handful of the university theology programs required the study of Greek, roughly about five of nearly forty. Since then, the number has no doubt declined, if such a thing is possible, as has the number of theology departments. In 2013 in the UK, there were only 260 secondary schools in the entire nation that offered advanced Greek language study, including all types of Greek in the survey.[4] I could not find any relevant statistics solely for Canada, but according to the Modern Language Association in the United States, the number of students studying ancient Greek (including New Testament and other Biblical Greek) has fallen by an astronomical 42 percent in the decade from 2006 to 2016, the last year for which I could find statistics.[5] I imagine that these haphazard statistics are confirmed by all of our own experiences. The study of ancient languages, and in particular Greek and including New Testament Greek, is declining, whether one is teaching at the under-graduate, seminary, or graduate level. And we are all very much concerned about this—especially those of us who make our livings in this area. As a result, there is much handwringing in various circles about what to do. There are, of course, many proposals that have been made, including holding the line uncompromisingly (probably a way of losing further students), adjusting our curriculum in various ways to attempt to address the issue of student interest (whether we can address an entire cultural change to rampant pragmatism is a matter of debate), or simply accepting defeat and proceeding as if all is fine but without languages (the notion of an expert in a literature without knowledge of its language will always strike some as odd).

In this paper, I do not intend to try to solve all of the difficulties regarding the study of ancient Greek and especially of how we might revive interest in the study of Greek. I do not intend actually to determine where all the Greek grammarians

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4.   Quinn, "Tragedy," para. 1.

5.   Looney and Lusin, *Enrollments in Languages*, 13. The number of students in 2006 was 22,842 and in 2016 was 13,264. The total drop was 42 percent, but from 2013–2016 alone the drop was nearly 22 percent.

have actually gone, as I realize that there are a few here and there wherever the Greek New Testament is studied. I have a more modest goal. I wish to examine some of the possible reasons why we are where we are, on the basis of the history of the study of New Testament Greek, using this history of discussion as a possible analogue to the study of other sub-areas within our discipline of biblical studies. I will recount the narrative of the history of Greek grammatical discussion, and I will leave you to draw the strong correlations to other areas of our discipline.

2. *A History of the Discussion of Greek Grammar; or, How We Got Where We Are*

Many of us will no doubt know the contours of the development of the western intellectual tradition. I wish to recount some of this history since the Enlightenment in order to trace the development of Greek grammatical study. This should provide a framework for thinking about other dimensions of our discipline. In broad terms, there are three major periods in the study of language from the Enlightenment to the present.[6]

2.1 Rationalist Period

Rationalism, growing out of the Enlightenment, was characterized by a focus upon rational thought, a shift from dogmatic to empiricist epistemology, an emphasis upon naturalism (as opposed to supernaturalism), and dissolution of the divide between the secular and the sacred. This desacralization included the Bible. The movement is perhaps captured best in the work of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), a rationalist (though not empiricist) who believed in deduction from common knowledge to arrive at generalizations.

The rationalist period of language study went hand in hand with the Enlightenment. This period extends from roughly the middle of the seventeenth century to the turn of the nineteenth century (1650 to 1800), with the rise of Romanticism (more precisely, some would say in 1798, with the publication of the

6.   See Robins, *Short History*, passim, for the basic facts recounted here.

"Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* by Wordsworth and Coleridge). Language study during the rationalist period was dominated by philosophers and linguists who approached language rationalistically, along with its historical concerns. For example, Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714–1780) believed that "abstract vocabulary and grammatical complexity developed from an earlier individual concrete vocabulary," and Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) believed in the "inseparability of language and thought."[7] William Jones (1746–1794), the British judge in India, thought that Sanskrit was "more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either,"[8] and James Harris (1758–1835) thought one could derive "grammar from ontology, since the verb, to him, denotes nothing less than existence itself."[9] The rationalist period was characterized by a philosophical orientation that logically deduced the nature of language from prior understandings and beliefs, usually grounded in understandings of reality. Hence there was the notion of better- and worse-formed languages, thought and language were inseparable (and eventually led to German historicism), tense-forms indicated reality grounded in time, and more complex forms were developed from simpler ones.

Georg Benedikt Winer's (1789–1858) *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Sprachidioms* (published from 1822 to 1855 during his lifetime),[10] though not the first Greek grammar, fully represented the rationalist period. Winer was on the forefront of a new phase of Greek language study, even if he was not up to date with wider language study, as he wrote in the rationalist mode even though the period was coming to an end in the advent of comparative historicism. Prior to Winer, the study of Greek was dominated by the categories of Latin grammar with a basic descriptivism verging on prescriptivism. Winer was the first to

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7.   Robins, *Short History*, 165, 166.
8.   Robins, *Short History*, 149.
9.   Yoon, *Rhetoric of Tenses*, 47.
10. Winer, *Grammatik.* It was published in 1822, 1828, 1830, 1836, 1844, and 1855. ET *Grammar*.

apply systematically the rationalist framework to understanding New Testament Greek, in which Greek was seen as a logically-based set of categories.

Winer sees Greek as the "sure basis" for exegesis. He sees the Jewish writers of the Greek New Testament writing in a mixed Greek and Semitic language that represents a unified type of grammar, what he calls a "single syntax."[11] Winer specifically speaks of the "rational method" of Greek language study, equated with empiricism. He follows these rationalistic principles throughout, including consistency and regularity based upon empirical evidence (or at least his perception of empirical evidence). This approach is specifically seen in Winer's grammar when he confines the meanings of the Greek tense-forms to temporal categories (he spoke German after all). He states: "Strictly and properly speaking no one of these tenses [of Greek] can ever stand for another," with the present tense-form being "used for the future in appearance only," because the label indicates that it must only be a present tense-form.[12]

Winer's grammar would otherwise simply be a curiosity of linguistic history, were it not for the fact that the rationalistic approach is still widely found in New Testament Greek language teaching and study. The rationalistic approach is in evidence in most beginning New Testament Greek grammars, where tense-forms and temporality are equated as if there is an inherent logic in their meanings and names (one that usually matches our metalanguage), reference is made to the "definite" article (Greek has no definite article), and other similar highly questionable comments. I surveyed over thirty such elementary grammars, and the vast majority fall within this category, from that of J. Gresham Machen (1923) to Daniel Zacharias (2018) with William Mounce (1993; 4th ed. 2018) in between, and many others besides.

More disturbing, perhaps, is the fact that several intermediate-level Greek grammars continue to reflect the rationalistic period as well. The most obvious examples of the rationalistic approach

11. Winer, *Grammar*, 3.
12. Winer, *Grammar*, 331.

are Daniel Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* and, more recently, Andreas Köstenberger, Benjamin Merkle, and Robert Plummer's *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*.[13] These grammars may not at first appear to be rationalistic grammars, as they seem to be familiar with the latest developments in Greek language study. Wallace, for example, accepts such apparently linguistic notions as "semantics and semantic situation," "synchronic priority," and "structural priority." However, he also relies upon the notion of "undisputed examples," reintroduces diachrony, has a non-systemic view of structure, and maintains the strange belief in the "cryptic nature of language."[14] Köstenberger, Merkle, and Plummer do not even include as much linguistic information as does Wallace—and that is pretty minimal. They, too, define the meanings of the tense-forms in rationalistic terms, such as the "combinative aspect" of the perfect (as combining the aorist and present), utilize a traditional lexical-incremental morphology, and attempt to explain both the five- and eight-case systems.

I admit that the ability to write a beginning Greek grammar is not a suitable test of one being a Greek linguist, but that may well be the problem. Most of our elementary language teaching, as well as several textbooks used for intermediate or exegesis courses, clearly reflect the rationalist language perspective. This is analogous to the use of F.C. Baur's (1880–1960) *Tendenz* criticism as the basis of contemporary historical critical methodology (Baur and Winer were almost exact contemporaries), or his reconstruction of early Christianity as the basis of our studying Christian origins. We no doubt wish to appreciate the foundational earlier research that underlies our discipline, but we probably wish to think that we have progressed to new levels of analysis and understanding within the discipline. Why we do not think the same about language remains one of the great mysteries of contemporary biblical scholarship. We may well be

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13. Wallace, *Grammar*; Köstenberger et al., *Going Deeper*.

14. Wallace, *Grammar*, x–xvii. He also is concerned to create rationalist, inclusive frameworks, seen in his treatment of cases and his combining aspect and *Aktionsart*.

sealing our own fate by asking our students to learn by means of language models that are not just out of date, but completely outmoded.

2.2 Comparative Historicism

Comparative-historical language study emerged in the early nineteenth century as languages were discovered and then studied in relation to each other under the influence of the developmental hypothesis that came to dominate the period until Saussure, the Prague School of Linguistics, and the American descriptivists. The comparative-historical approach was also influenced by philosophy, but mostly the rise of Romanticism, with its emphasis upon the self, subjectivity, and experience. The German poet and philosopher Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) formulated the term "comparative philology" (1808) to describe the comparisons of both derivational and inflectional morphology.

The Danish linguist Rasmus Rask (1787–1832) and the German linguist Jacob Grimm (1785–1863) were major figures in the emergence of the comparative-historical school. Rask wrote grammars for Old Norse and Old English, and Grimm wrote the first Germanic grammar, developing terminology still used in linguistics (strong/weak verbs, ablaut, and umlaut). Grimm's law of consonantal change is considered one of the major breakthroughs of comparative philology. The highpoint in this period was the work of Franz Bopp (1791–1867), who wrote a major work on the conjugation system of Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, Persian, and German, and then an important comparative grammar in three volumes, thereby developing the principles and practices of comparative philology. Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835) defined the inner forms of languages as agglutinative, isolating, and flexional, and August Schleicher (1821–1868) developed the comparative philological tree diagram to describe the relations among the languages in a family. The comparative-historical period reached its culmination in the New Grammarians, including Karl Brugmann (1849–1919) and Berthold Delbrück (1842–1922). The New Grammarians were an informal group of younger German linguists who

took a scientistic approach to language and believed that all sound changes followed exceptionless rules, thereby creating dialectology and principles of language conservatism as means of explaining exceptions.[15]

Contemporary New Testament studies currently rely upon a small handful of reference grammars as the basis of advanced-level research. The three major reference grammars of New Testament Greek all reflect the comparative-historical perspective and were written during this time period. These grammars are by Friedrich Blass, James Hope Moulton, and A.T. Robertson. Friedrich Blass (1843–1907) was not a comparative philologian, but a classical philologian, as he acknowledges in the preface to the first edition of his Greek grammar, which appeared in 1896.[16] Nevertheless, he follows many of its principles as he describes New Testament Greek in relationship to Attic Greek and Latin. In the fourth edition of 1913, the Swiss comparative philologian Albert Debrunner (1884–1958) became the author. A number of further editions were made, and after Debrunner's passing, Friedrich Rehkopf took up the editorship in 1976 and continued to 2001. Robert Funk translated the ninth and tenth editions in 1961. The most important feature to note about the grammar, however, is that, no matter how many editions, the grammar is in its essentials the same, with its comparative-historical dimension gaining in explicitness, especially through the work of Debrunner.

James Hope Moulton (1863–1917) was educated as a comparative philologian at Cambridge and acknowledges that he writes from this standpoint in his "Preface" to the second edition of his *Prolegomena*, the first volume of his projected three-volume grammar.[17] Whereas Adolf Deissmann made the discovery of the common vocabulary of the Greek New Testament and the Greek documentary papyri, Moulton emphasized the common grammar. His *Prolegomena* of 1906 went through two editions in 1906 and 1908, and then he began

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15. Robins, *Short History*, 187–210.
16. Blass, *Grammatik*.
17. Moulton, *Prolegomena*.

work on accidence and word-formation. He wrote over two-thirds or more of his second volume before being killed crossing the Mediterranean in 1917. This work was completed by his student Wilbert Francis Howard (1880–1952), who finished the last section and the introduction, in addition to writing an appendix planned by Moulton on Semitisms in the New Testament.[18] The third and an additional fourth volume in the series, on *Syntax* and *Style*, were written by Nigel Turner, but he does not follow the same language theory and reverts to a style of thought that *precedes* the rationalistic period in his belief in a special, almost Holy Ghost, Greek. This fact is often overlooked by those who simply pick up the similarly presented blue volumes and use them without recognizing the major differences among them. It is not only graduate students who confuse their references to the various volumes in MHT.

The culmination of the comparative-historical method of study of the Greek New Testament occurred in the work of A.T. Robertson (1863–1934). Robertson's grammar, first published in 1914, began as an attempt to revise Winer's grammar. In insightful statements that bear further contemplation, Robertson realized that such a plan would not work, because (I note) "so much progress had been made in comparative philology and historical grammar since Winer wrote his great book."[19] Therefore, Robertson took the, for him, contemporary approach. He provides a 24-pages list of works most often cited, including two additional pages for the third edition, and the list is full of comparative philologians. Robertson places his grammar in relation to both his predecessors and the current thought on language. He notes the pre-Winer and then Winer periods, before referring to the, for him, "modern period," with its new tools such as comparative philology. Robertson clearly recognizes that his grammar is an example of comparative philology.

The comparative-historical perspective has continued in New Testament Greek grammatical study, in large part because of reliance—one might even say, over-reliance—upon these

18. Moulton and Howard, *Accidence*.
19. Robertson, *Grammar*, vii.

reference grammars. Chrys Caragounis's *The Development of Greek and the New Testament* (an admittedly odd title) is consciously diachronic in orientation and concerned with "the historical development of the language morphologically and especially syntactically."[20] Caragounis also dismisses many, if not most, of the categories of modern linguistics. David Hasselbrook, in his *Studies in New Testament Lexicography,* describes this as "Advancing toward a Full Diachronic Approach with the Greek Language" (again an admittedly odd title).[21]

The analogy for continued reliance upon the comparative-historical reference grammars—sometimes without any reference to anything more recent, including articles or monographs—is the use of the history of religion work of Wilhelm Bousset or Richard Reitzenstein. Bousset and Reitzenstein, like the comparative-historical grammarians, rely upon the developmental model (developed by Herbert Spencer) and are more concerned to diachronically compare data across boundaries—whether religious or language boundaries—than they are to synchronically examine the data as comprising their own system of thought. The advent of the New History of Religion movement is an admission that research has moved beyond the previous categories, yet for many, similar movement has not occurred in Greek language study.

The principles of language study found in the rationalist and comparative-historical frameworks are now often referred to as "traditional grammar." I use the term "traditional grammar" to refer to an approach to language that is what might be called pre-linguistic. David Crystal defines the major features of traditional grammar as these: the failure to recognize the difference between spoken and written language; emphasis upon restricted forms of written language; a failure to recognize various forms of language and how they are used; the tendency to describe language in terms of another language, often Latin; the appeal to logic as a means of describing and even assessing language; and the tendency to evaluate language as more or less logical or

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20. Caragounis, *Development of Greek.*
21. Hasselbrook, *Lexicography.*

complex or primitive or beautiful or the like.[22] These kinds of traditional criteria grew out of a long history of discussion of language that dates back to the ancients and continued until the advent of modern linguistics. They are found in the two major periods of language study just discussed, the rationalist and comparative historical.

We need to note two important concluding factors regarding both the rationalist and comparative-historical language schools. The first is that, no matter what developments may have occurred within linguistic thought (and some of those who persist in their rationalism and comparative historicism are aware of such developments), there continue to be those who model these traditional forms of grammar in their work. Most do so unknowingly because they are simply unaware of the history of the development of language thought, which is an argument for better knowledge of the history of language discussion and, more particularly, for knowledge of the current state of language discussion. One readily sees their citations of BDF in even their scholarly papers. But some of those who persist in their rationalism and comparative historicism are aware of such developments and continue nevertheless. Their persistence is less understandable, as they recognize that there are alternatives, ones that directly address the language issues that they are confronting. The second factor is that these models of language, which arguably have been superseded in subsequent linguistic thought (or the new models would not have persisted and replaced them in linguistics), remain, inexplicably, foundational within New Testament studies, providing most examples of beginning New Testament Greek grammars, several of the intermediate Greek grammars, virtually all of the advanced reference grammars, and even monographs that continue to be produced.

22. Crystal, *Linguistics,* 9–17.

2.3 Modern Linguistics

A romanticized story is often told of the beginnings of modern linguistics, but the story is, in fact, much more complex. In many ways, the paradigm shift from the comparative-historical period to the modern linguistic period resembles the kind of movement that Thomas Kuhn envisions in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[23] In that important book, he notes how normal science—in this case, comparative-historical linguistics—despite its ascendancy, must address anomalies observed by other scholars. The number of anomalies increases until the anomalies are too many to ignore and they can no longer be viewed simply as anomalies. At this point, a paradigm shift occurs, in which the governing paradigm is displaced by a new hypothesis that does not have the same readily apparent explanatory difficulties. The same is the case with the comparative-historical method. As it progressed, its categories of explanation became further hardened, especially in the thought of the New Grammarians. The New Grammarians not only observed sound changes but formulated ineluctable laws regarding such changes. However, there were always exceptions, to the point where the exceptions grew significantly in number. The environment was ripe for a new theory to displace the old.

This new theory emerged in several different ways at different places and, when the dust had settled—and it took some time for the dust to settle—we had entered the modern linguistic period. There are at least three foci of the emergence of this New Linguistics. These revolve around the research and writing of the Geneva language scholar Ferdinand de Saussure, the early and later developments of the Prague School of Linguistics, and the studies in Native American language in North America.

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) is by far the best known of these three strands lying behind the development of modern linguistics and is often cited as the founder of modern linguistics, even if I wish to question that assumption. More to the point is that Saussure was a member of the New Grammarians and so perfectly at home within the linguistics of his time. He wrote an

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23.   Kuhn, *Structure*.

important article entitled "Mémoire on the Primitive System of Vowels in the Indo-European Languages," published in 1878.[24] This article was concerned with the lengthening of internal vowels in Indo-European languages. However, by the early years of the twentieth century, Saussure was lecturing on the topic of general linguistics along far different lines. From 1906–1911 on three different occasions, Saussure offered his general linguistics course at the University of Geneva. Saussure himself never lived to read the published form, as he died in 1913. The work of publishing the volume fell to two of his students who had heard his lectures, Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, who together assembled a book from course notes. This volume appeared in 1916 in French, but not in English until 1959, and established the basis of what is sometimes referred to as general linguistics.[25]

At the same time as Saussure was doing his speaking, there were other linguists who were shifting their perspective on the fundamental ways in which language is viewed. Some of those linguists later began to congregate around a core group of scholars in Prague. In 1911, Vilém Mathesius (1882–1945), a young linguist from Prague, presented a paper in which he argued for the synchronic study of languages. In 1926, Mathesius and a small group of scholars, including Jan Mukarovsky (1891–1975) (who extended the school's work to the arts, especially literature), Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) (who had been a member of the Russian Formalists, and later would have a huge influence upon North American linguistics, literary criticism, and Claude Lévi-Strauss), and Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938) (the Russian phonetician, who developed markedness theory), among others, held the first meeting of what was to become the Prague Linguistics Circle, a group that would last at least until 1948, when the changed circumstances of the communist government of Czechoslovakia would lead to the group's oppression and disbandment.[26]

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24. Saussure, "Mémoire," 417–24.
25. Saussure, *Linguistics*. The Geneva School of linguistics formed around Saussure and his students.
26. See Vachek, *Linguistic School*; and Galen, *Structures*. For their

The third group focused upon the study of American Indian languages in North America. Wilhelm von Humboldt's (1767–1835) study of the Kawi language from Java,[27] a major study of a non-Indo-European language, was a significant factor in the development of his thoughts regarding philosophy of mind, his views of language and culture, and the importance of comparative linguistics. Von Humboldt's theories encouraged a number of linguists to come to North America to study Native American languages. Franz Boas (1858–1942), a German refugee, came to North America because of its immense promise for the recording and classifying of a wide range of phenomena.[28] He noted that there were varieties of classification systems of language that could be used to describe its structures—including American Indian languages being analyzed along different lines than those traditionally used for European languages—and that there was a relationship between language and thought patterns, an idea extended to the notion that speakers might be forced to think according to the strictures of linguistic categories. Some of his ideas were taken much further by Boas's student, Edward Sapir (1884–1939), who worked in both Canada and the USA, and whose student Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897–1941) was outspoken in his differentiation of language and behavior.[29] Out of this work arose the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of language determinism. A strong form of this hypothesis—which has been rightly criticized by other linguists—was one of the major problems with the Biblical Theology Movement so roundly criticized by James Barr, although this and similar abuses persist in biblical scholarship.

In distinction from the rationalist or comparative-historical study of language, the principles of modern linguistics were noteworthy: (1) the arbitrary nature of the sign, and the relationship between the signified and the signifier; (2) langue

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manifesto, see Johnson, ed., *Linguistic Circle*, 1–31, the manifesto apparently having been drafted by Jakobson.

27. See von Humboldt, *On Language*.
28. Boas, *Race*.
29. Sapir, *Language*; Whorf, *Language*.

versus parole, or the language sign system versus a user's personal use of that language (treated differently by various linguistic theories); (3) synchrony versus diachrony, with synchrony taking priority over diachrony; (4) language as difference; (5) language as system; (6) syntagmatic versus paradigmatic relations; (7) language as social entity, with language as conventional among various semiotic systems; (8) marked versus unmarked members, a distinct contribution of Trubetzkoy and the Prague linguists; (9) form versus function, encouraged by the distinction by Karl Bühler (1879–1963) the psychologist and linguist among the representative, expressive, and appellative functions of language; and (10) syntax versus semantics, and later semantics versus pragmatics, along with information structure at the level of the sentence (especially in the Prague Functional Sentence Perspective).

Modern linguistics was instrumental in the development of structuralism, which came to dominate western intellectual discourse in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Linguistic structuralism spread far and wide, with various forms coming to be represented in various places. These include the Copenhagen school of Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965), the American structuralism of Leonard Bloomfield (1887–1949) whose book *Language* had a dominating influence upon American linguistics,[30] French structuralism that was dependent upon both literary and philosophical influences from the Russian Formalists and resulted in French narratology as found in A.J. Greimas (1917–1992), and British structuralism mediated through the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) to John R. Firth (1890–1960), the first professor of general linguistics in the UK, and then to Michael Halliday, from whence it spread to Australia and beyond.[31]

In most ways, linguistics, as defined above, survived the poststructural rebellion, often identified with the conference entitled "The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man"

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30. Bloomfield, *Language.*
31. See Robey, ed., *Structuralism,* with essays on linguistics, anthropology, semiology, literature, philosophy, and mathematics.

held in October 1966 in Baltimore, Maryland, where Jacques Derrida presented his paper, entitled "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences."[32] He questioned the notion of structure, attempted to sever the relationship of sign and signified or at least to destabilize it, endorsed notions of play and freedom in sign systems, and deconstructed the structuralism of one of its major figures, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009). This is not to say that there were no effects of poststructuralism. They are seen in the traditional notion of language as product becoming language as process (as in Julia Kristeva), the recognition of language as intertextual, the move from univocal to dialogical and heteroglossic meaning (based upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin [1895–1975]),[33] the move from linguistic systemic stability to fluidity and unboundedness (with Roland Barthes [1915–1980]), and recognition of structures of power being exercised through language (as in Michel Foucault [1926–1984]).

Most linguistics, however, has retained its fundamental structuralist agenda, even if it has been forced to recognize that language, rather than simply being a mirror or reflector of the world, is a partial maker of its own world, a part of the social or individual construction or at least interpretation of reality. This destabilization may well be one of the reasons that linguistic study has not become more robust within biblical studies, an academic discipline that, despite its protestations otherwise, actively seeks definitive meanings, even if they are negative ones.

There are various ways of categorizing linguistics after World War II. One way is to distinguish between two major approaches to linguistic theory, the approach of Noam Chomsky and the others who do not follow Chomsky. This is developed by Robert Van Valin and Randy LaPolla as the difference between the "syntactocentric" and the "communication-and-cognition" perspectives.[34] The syntactocentric perspective attributed to

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32. Derrida, "Structure," 247–65.
33. E.g., Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*.
34. The following is dependent upon Van Valin and LaPolla, *Syntax*, 8–

Chomsky[35] and his many followers is characterized by language being an "autonomous cognitive faculty"[36] (Universal Grammar) that results in human internal grammar that follows linguistic universals. Such linguistics investigates not language use (performance) but the speaker's competence, and especially the psychological dimensions of language such as its acquisition. Such an approach to language has spawned a number of further theories.[37] One of the characteristics of such language study, however, based in part upon the work of Bloomfield, is the minimization of meaning and an emphasis upon form, hence often being called formal grammars.

The communication-and-cognition perspective, according to Van Valin and LaPolla, essentially includes everything else, unified around the view that linguistics focuses upon use of language either for communicative purposes or as a reflection of cognitive processing in relation to other cognitive systems, with grammar or syntax as relatively less significant to these greater concerns and meaning or function being more important. The linguistic theories that this perspective subsumes are numerous and diverse.[38] Whereas Chomsky dominates the first group, there

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15, but with reference to other works interposed as appropriate. I do not include speech-act theory, for which there are works in both Greek and Hebrew, because here I am concentrating on syntactical/semantic theories as per Van Valin and LaPolla, rather than pragmatic theories that are more philosophies of language (apart from mentioning Relevance Theory below).

35. Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*; *Theory of Syntax*; *Lectures*; *Minimalist Program*, among many other works.

36. Croft and Cruse, *Linguistics*, 1.

37. Such as Generalized Phrase Structure Grammar, Relational Grammar, and Categorial Grammar.

38. They include Functional Grammar or grammars in their various types (including Continental, St. Petersburg, and West Coast or Oregon forms), Role and Reference Grammar, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), Tagmemics, Lexical-Functional Grammar, Head-Driven Phrase Structure Grammar, Construction Grammar, Autolexical Syntax, Word Grammar, Meaning-text theory, Cognitive Grammar, Prague School Dependency Grammar, and French functionalism, to supply only what must be an incomplete list (and it is, as one can also think of Stratificational Grammar or Columbia School Linguistics, both functionalist models), along with a number of what they call independent

is no single dominant figure in the second group, only a relatively unified yet widespread rejection of the syntactocentric perspective.

The broadness of this communication-and-cognition category has led others to differentiate between formalist, cognitive, and functionalist perspectives on language. This is especially pertinent since cognitive theories grew out of formalist theories, rather than sharing origins with the functionalists.[39]

The linguistic world that I have just depicted may sound very strange, especially to New Testament scholars—and indeed it is. This is a world in which the study of language has departed significantly from the kinds of common sense or Latin-based categories typically used in other disciplines that are textually based. Even if we might say that structural linguistics is foundationalist in orientation, as opposed to the anti-foundationalism of poststructuralism, the categories used to express these foundations are not those of previous schools of thought. They include complex relationships between signifier and signified, an emphasis upon signs, the importance of systems, clear preference for synchrony over diachrony even if diachrony is recognized, and the individual and, arguably more important, social dimension of language for its use and function.

The pronounced recognition of the importance of general, and in particular Saussurean, linguistics for biblical studies occurred in James Barr's (1924–2006) *The Semantics of Biblical Language* published as far back as 1961.[40] In this justly well-known yet still widely-neglected work, Barr states that he is going to use linguistic semantics, and he applies it to a number of well-known elements of the Biblical Theology Movement.

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linguists. Van Valin and LaPolla, *Syntax*, 12, list as independent linguists Michael Silverstein, Ray Jackendoff, Ellen Prince, Talmy Givón, Susumu Kuno, Leonard Talmy, Sandra Thompson, and Anna Wierzbicka. Not all might fit as conveniently as others, and one might also think of others to place in this category. I would have thought that most of these were classifiable, some of them even in the syntactocentric and others in the communication-and-cognition perspective. However, see below on these categories.

39. Banks, *Grammar*, 1.
40. Barr, *Semantics*.

That it took over forty years for modern linguistics to penetrate biblical studies is not surprising. The same kind of delay is found in the field of linguistics itself.[41] Despite the work of Saussure (and others) in the early days of the century, it was not until the post-World War II period that linguistics practitioners caught up with their own discipline's history. In that sense, Barr's entering the affray in 1961 was at the outset of the discipline of biblical linguistics. He has been followed by a few who have attempted to continue and enhance the course of his work.[42]

Despite this early adoption of the strong Saussurean perspective, it is nevertheless nearly sixty years since Barr published his book, and I would have thought that such an arguably convincing case cannot be long ignored. However, the history of New Testament Greek language study adopting a modern linguistic framework is disappointingly meager, even if it occurred relatively soon after Barr's pronouncements. In the area of beginning New Testament grammars, there are arguably only a very small number that reflect the principles of modern linguistics. These include (this is not a complete list, but a complete list would not be much larger): Eugene Van Ness Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament*,[43] indebted to the American structuralist Bloomfieldian approach of scholars such as Charles Hockett (a fierce opponent of Chomsky), Henry Gleason, Eugene Nida, and Charles Fries;[44] Robert Funk, who drew on the American structuralists;[45] B. Ward Powers, *Learn to Read the Greek New Testament*,[46] also dependent upon American structuralism, as well as more recent modern language teaching methods that emphasize meaning over translation; Stanley Porter, Jeffrey T. Reed, and Matthew Brook O'Donnell, *Fundamentals of New Testament Greek*, which takes a Systemic-

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41. Sampson, *Linguistics Delusion*, 1–3.
42. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*; Black, *Linguistics*; Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics*; and Silva, *God*.
43. Goetchius, *Language*.
44. See Robins, *Short History*, 232–36.
45. Funk, *Beginning-Intermediate Grammar*.
46. Powers, *Learn to Read*, esp. Appendix B (pp. 192–212) and notes.

Functional Linguistic approach to Greek;[47] Rodney J. Decker's *Reading Koine Greek: An Introduction and Integrated Workbook*, which acknowledges being influenced by Silva, Carson, Goetchius, and Porter, among others;[48] and Frederick Long's *Koine Greek Grammar: A Beginning-Intermediate Exegetical and Pragmatic Handbook*, which incorporates matters related to tense/aspect, prominence, and discourse analysis.[49]

Intermediate grammars do not prove much more productive than do beginning grammars (again, the list is not complete, but my point is made well enough). The first intermediate book to note is the volume already mentioned by Powers, whose beginning book also contained an intermediate section as well. The second work is by Stanley Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*.[50] This volume was one of the first to make an explicit attempt to create an intermediate-level grammar that was based upon modern linguistic principles, in this case functional linguistics, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics, as well as some elements from other functionalists, such as the slot and filler notion from Tagmemics. Porter was followed fairly quickly by Richard Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach*, who takes what he calls a "descriptive" approach with an emphasis upon "usage in context" as determining meaning,[51] while also offering thanks to John Callow of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. Decker also includes some intermediate level material in his *Reading Koine Greek*. Finally, the most recent intermediate grammar that reflects principles of modern linguistics is David Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax*

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47. Porter et al., *Fundamentals*.

48. Decker, *Koine Greek*. See also Rico, *Ancient Greek*, for a linguistic approach to ancient Greek of the Hellenistic period, especially the first century, but one that uses immersion.

49. Long, *Greek Grammar*.

50. Porter, *Idioms*.

51. Young, *Greek*, viii. Cf. "Introduction," where he makes further linguistic distinctions (e.g., communication act, implicit and explicit information, form and meaning, surface structure and deep structure, and semantics and pragmatics) very much in the binary structuralist mode.

for Students of the New Testament, which follows, as it states, most closely the intermediate grammar by Porter.[52] Most of these works may well be unknown to the majority of biblical scholars, even those engaged in the teaching of New Testament Greek.

When we are required to make a choice regarding elementary or intermediate Greek books, it is not enough to judge the book simply by its cover or online resources or cute pictures or clever sidebars—not when there are substantive issues that distinguish these books from the others.

One of the greatest disappointments is that there have been no major reference grammars of New Testament Greek produced from any modern linguistic perspective—certainly in English. There have definitely been a number of monographs that approach various questions of Greek from linguistic perspectives—especially some of those in the series Studies in Biblical Greek by Peter Lang and Linguistic Biblical Studies by Brill, and the now-defunct Studies in New Testament Greek series by Sheffield Academic Press (now Bloomsbury)—but these are the kinds of technical monographs one might expect in a discipline and are generally not used apart from specialists, even if we might wish otherwise. Both series continue to thrive, and other volumes are being published. Nevertheless, they are not Greek grammars as we are discussing here. Scholars should make use of these monographs, although they are admittedly technical and often far too complex even for biblical scholars to fully understand.

Thus, even though there are a few beginning and intermediate level Greek grammatical volumes available, there has not yet been a sustained, advanced-level modern linguistic grammar of the entire system of the Greek found in the New Testament corpus. This is a major lacuna in New Testament studies, and probably has a direct correlation with the state of affairs in New Testament Greek teaching and learning, and quite possibly the wider field of biblical studies. Modern linguistics by any reckoning is now around one-hundred years old, or at least sixty if we allow for some understandable slippage. Even if we

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52. Mathewson and Emig, *Grammar*, xv.

recognize that the major progress in development of modern linguistics occurred in the post-World War II era, this means that modern linguistics in its many and varied forms has been the dominant intellectual paradigm for discussion of language for over fifty years, and for over fifty years such thought has been explicitly known to biblical scholars, including New Testament scholars. Yet in that time, only eight distinct grammatical volumes, by my estimate, have been published in English that explicitly acknowledge and reflect such a modern linguistic perspective, interpreting the term broadly. I, of course, am not talking about monographs in general, but even there, the two viable series that I mention above have only published about 35 volumes in total over the last thirty years (other volumes in other series are relevant as well, of course, but not as many as might be expected).

3. *So Where Do We Go from Here?*

If one were to listen to some of the more vociferous debates regarding the study of New Testament Greek, one might form the impression that the major issue revolves around whether one uses modern or Erasmian pronunciation. There are advocates on both sides, and arguments for each. However, this is not the central issue in the study of the Greek of the New Testament, and it is not the major issue that contributes to the state of the discipline at this juncture. It grows out of a more fundamental discussion regarding how we teach our first-year languages. There are, at least so far as I know, five approaches to the teaching of elementary Greek. I doubt that most who are involved in teaching New Testament Greek are aware of these different approaches and have weighed their strengths and weaknesses in evaluating textbooks or determining the goals of language instruction. These approaches also do not necessarily indicate that the description of the language is linguistically sound, as some of these pedagogical approaches pre-date developments in modern linguistics. Nor do these approaches have any inherent relationship to the number of students who may study Greek, as there are both micro- and macro-patterns

involved in why students study Greek. The micro-patterns are often whether the individual teacher sufficiently arouses the attention of students so that they want to take the language. The macro-patterns are related to the general cultural shift away from cultural knowledge and toward scientism, so that students become more and more concerned with instrumentalism rather than understanding.

The five pedagogical approaches are the immersion method, the inductive method, the linguistic analysis method, the morphological method, and the usage-based method. The morphological method, also known as the grammar-translation approach, is the one most often reflected in traditional beginning Greek grammars, although it need not be the case. There are a variety of approaches to the study of morphology, with the lexical-incremental approach being found in most New Testament Greek studies and the closest to traditional grammatical study.[53] This morphological model posits that each morpheme is roughly equivalent to a lexeme in that each is a unit of meaning, and the meaning of a word is the composite of its morphemes. By contrast, one might better argue for the inferential-realizational approach, in which the properties of any morpheme are determined by its paradigmatic function.[54] In the current climate, where there is a discussion of approaches to teaching Greek, the immersion method has probably garnered more discussion than most others. There are a number of strong advocates of a "living language" approach to the study of Greek. The major problem with such an approach is that one cannot produce the kind of full immersion environment necessary with an epigraphic language, which will never be and never can be a living language. Further, the goal of living language instruction is significantly different from the kind of exegetical analysis desired in biblical studies. Although immersion approaches are to be commended for arousing interest in pedagogical approaches to Greek study, their ability to achieve the necessary goals of language instruction for New Testament Greek purposes

53. Mounce, *Morphology*; Stump, *Morphology*.
54. Stump, *Paradigms*.

has failed. The inductive method has been used by various elementary grammars in the past, from William Rainey Harper in the late nineteenth century to William Sanford Lasor to the present.[55] In many ways, the inductive approach is the predecessor of the immersion approach, as they both rely upon direct confrontation with the language. The fact that such volumes have been around for so long and produced so little indicates that the inductive approach has limitations. The linguistic analysis method is less concerned with learning a language than learning how to analyze and describe a language so that one might productively analyze and describe its texts. Finally, the usage-based method introduces the elements of the language on the basis of their frequency of usage. This approach follows some cognitive linguistic findings that show that reinforcing the most commonly occurring elements enhances learning and retention. One thing that is certain is that beginning Greek instruction should not be left to the low person on the departmental totem pole or consigned to a graduate student. The stakes are far too high. The teaching of Greek, especially if one is interested in linguistic understanding, should be handled by those with specialist knowledge or expertise, or at least by those interested in Greek from a linguistic standpoint and willing to learn and do more than simply read from the assigned textbook. Providing a sufficient linguistic foundation in the language, so that we have educated students, some of whom may even go on for further study, demands this at the least.

These approaches to pedagogy, as I mentioned above, are not necessarily directly tied to the linguistic orientation of the individual presentation. These may be important for the introduction of the language, but they do not address the much more important issue, which is not whether students are studying Greek but what we are understanding when we refer to Greek.

I realize that not all those who study and utilize Greek in their scholarship can be linguists, meaning scholars educated in the principles of linguistic thought. The field of linguistics is an intellectual discipline of its own and it requires the same kind of

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55. Harper and Weidner, *Greek Method*; Lasor, *Greek*; and others.

dedication and study as any other. However, the discipline of biblical studies is, by definition, a synthetic and eclectic field that has been more than willing to incorporate models of thought from a variety of disciplines, including the social sciences and literary studies, among many others. As a result, biblical studies are full of literary studies, social-scientific studies, various types of ideological studies, and the like. I suspect, however, that linguistics, especially as I understand linguistics, demands much more of its practitioners than do some of these other fields, where their language and methods are more readily amendable to traditional ways of doing biblical studies. This may be why certain relatively non-technical and easily graspable linguistic treatments of Greek have become more popular than some more rigorous ones, such as cognitive-discourse analysis becoming more popular than Construction Grammar.

This makes it all the more important that we are aware of and actively seeking to utilize works that utilize modern linguistics. I would argue that we should rethink this from the ground up. That means that we should re-orient our teaching of Greek so that the foundation of linguistic understanding is laid in the initial treatment of the language, and then that the intermediate grammars that are used in exegesis courses are linguistically-oriented treatments of the language, including introductions to such things as discourse analysis. There is already a limited number, and even at that an entirely sufficient number, of these works available. To this point, as I have indicated, we lack reference grammars of New Testament Greek from a linguistic perspective of any sort. This is a difficult task to accomplish, as is witnessed by the recent publication of *The Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek*.[56] On the one hand, I am very glad to see this work in print as it makes a strong case for a linguistic description of the Greek language. On the other hand, the linguistic model displayed is underdeveloped and under-theorized—there is no discussion of its linguistic approach, and hence no reference to the linguistic theoreticians on which it relies. The result is a work that is uneven and piecemeal in many

56. van Emde Boas et al., *Grammar*.

respects, leaving it sometimes unclear what forms the basis of the judgments being made (notorious instances are the treatment of the article, where there is contradictory information, and a general lack of rigor in describing the Greek verbal system). This illustrates the need not to abandon the task but to engage in the task all the more, with more people involved and more research being undertaken.

I am not optimistic that the field of biblical studies is willing or even able to realize that it is unnecessarily limited in its linguistic perspective. If a change were to be effected, there would no doubt need to be major developments made in such areas as graduate education, faculty hiring, selection of textbooks, and publications where the resources of Greek linguistics are brought to our interpretive task. This would require a major investment of time and energy in becoming at least minimally knowledgeable in the linguistics of ancient Greek. There are no shortcuts to such knowledge. One of the responses to such a challenge that I have occasionally heard is what I call the damned if you do and damned if you don't syndrome. Those who advocate a linguistic approach to the Greek language are often challenged to present new findings from their approach, but if they do propose such findings, they are often questioned because traditional grammatical study had not previously uncovered such interpretations. I am not saying that, if a thoroughly rigorous linguistic approach is adopted, we will need to rethink all of our previous exegetical conclusions, especially as modern linguistics is itself the latest in a stage of continued thought regarding language and has profitably built upon its predecessors even if it has chosen to emphasize different orientations to language. However, I do not think that we are in a position to describe the limits of what can be discovered by rigorous linguistic study of Greek unless such study is undertaken on a more widespread basis and such studies are utilized across the range of our interpretive work. We must not only study Greek in our language courses, we must also utilize the best in linguistic research in our research articles and monographs. It is only then that we will be able to judge whether the effort has been worth it. Until then, it will be an untried

experiment, with conclusions drawn on the basis of insufficient evidence.

4. *Conclusion*

I have had the privilege of being able to offer some comments on the topic of the question of where all the Greek grammarians have gone. In one sense, many of them have passed on with their predecessors as either rationalist or comparative-historical grammarians—even if we continue to resurrect them by using them even though there are better approaches available. In this lecture, I hope to have opened up some areas of knowledge that perhaps have not been previously understood regarding the history of Greek language discussion, some developments in Greek linguistic study, and some of the potential areas where such study might proceed in the future. There are, thankfully, a few pockets of serious linguistic study of the Greek of the New Testament, and I am honored to be able to work with three other colleagues in New Testament who are all experts in various areas of Greek linguistic study. They provide a constant challenge and stimulus to further work.

I apologize if you were perhaps thinking that I would provide the solution to the problem of the loss of students in the study of Greek in our institutions. I do not have a solution to that problem, except to say that the only way that we will be able to address such a situation is from one of greater knowledge of where we have come from, where we are, and where we should be going in the study of Greek. I think that all of us, in whatever area of biblical studies we may find ourselves, should be made aware of the history and development of this particular area of our discipline. The lines of interconnection and coincidence are too great to ignore. It is only through gaining such knowledge that we will be able to address the challenges of our discipline in the future.

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