

GRANVILLE SHARP'S RULE: A RESPONSE TO DAN WALLACE, OR WHY A CRITICAL BOOK REVIEW SHOULD BE LEFT ALONE

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My review of Dan Wallace's monograph, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin: Semantics and Significance*,¹ appeared in the December 2010 issue of *JETS*.² The published version was about 2,700 words. At the time, I agreed to the *Journal's* editors shortening the review from its original approximately 4,100 words. I could understand if Wallace were allowed to publish a similarly-lengthed response to my review, with the chance of my further (and final) response. However, that is not the case. The editor of *JETS*, in what I consider to be an unfortunate decision, has allowed Wallace to publish a (repetitious) response of 7,200 words. The editor has invited my further response, but, in what I consider to be a further violation of their own editorial policies, is allowing Wallace the final word. This makes no real difference, however, as Wallace's book is still, unfortunately, the same volume that it was when it was published, and his response does not improve either the book or his own position in relation to it.

Let me begin with four further objections to his work that I did not include (or rather were edited out with my consent by the editors, here presented in revised, adapted, and somewhat expanded form) in the initial review, before turning to Wallace's response.

As noted in my original review, Wallace endorses a revised and narrowed form of Sharp's rule not only as valid, but as an "absolute principle of NT grammar" (p. 233). I question whether it is absolute for the NT, and, by Wallace's own admission, note that it is not absolute outside the NT (I will return to these issues below). Nevertheless, Wallace also contends that even if the exceptions to Sharp's rule are granted (discussed by Wallace, my review, and again below), the Christological texts are not affected. Even regarding the Christological texts, however, we need to question Wallace's analysis. Wallace identifies the eight Christologically significant texts for Sharp: Acts 20:28; Eph 5:5; 2 Thess 1:12; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 4:1; Titus 2:13; 2 Pet 1:1; and Jude 4 (pp. 233–34). Wallace questions four of them (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 4:1; Jude 4) because Sharp relies on doubtful textual variants. Five Wallace dismisses for being grammatically problematic (1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 4:1; 2 Thess 1:12; Eph 5:5; Jude 4), because they use "Christ Jesus" or the like,

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¹ Daniel B. Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin: Semantics and Significance* (SBG 14; New York: Peter Lang, 2009). I cite this volume by page numbers within this response.

² Stanley E. Porter, "Review of *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin* by Daniel B. Wallace," *JETS* 53 (2010) 828–32.

a proper name. (Wallace actually only lists four of the problematic passages here, but Jude 4 uses the phrase that is problematic in the others.) Thus, only two passages remain: Titus 2:13 and 2 Pet 1:1. There are, however, two potential difficulties with Wallace's analysis here. The first is that "Christ," excluded above, may not be a proper name, even in Paul's letters (see p. 252 n. 52, where Wallace believes it is in Paul, but not in the Gospels). Wallace too easily assumes, with the vast majority of scholarship, that this is the case. However, this argument, apparently established in modern scholarship by Nils Dahl ("Die Messianität Jesu bei Paulus," in *Studia Paulina in honorem Johannis de Zwaan septuagenarii* [Haarlem: Bohn, 1953] 83–95, not cited by Wallace), has recently been questioned (see Matthew V. Novenson, "Can the Messiahship of Jesus Be Read off Paul's Grammar? Nils Dahl's Criteria 50 Years Later," *NTS* 56 [2010] 396–412; used in his *Christ among the Messiahs: Christ Language in Paul and Messiah Language in Ancient Judaism* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2012] 98–136).³ If "Christ" is not necessarily a proper name but simply a title or appellative, at least in some instances, several examples might reenter the discussion (e.g. Eph 5:5; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 4:1; and possibly others). In this case, Eph 5:5 may well be an exception even to Wallace's strict interpretation of Sharp's rule: "inheritance in the kingdom of the (τοῦ) messiah and God." The second difficulty is that Wallace does not thoroughly or convincingly discuss the notion that θεός (God) might be a proper name (pp. 251–55). His reasoning against it includes plurality and use of the article, rules arguably more pertinent to English than to Greek.⁴ If Wallace is incorrect, then even his two supposedly proven examples, as well as numerous others (because, as he points out, θεός is the most common noun in constructions related to Sharp's rule), do not fall within the purview of Sharp's rule, rendering the entire discussion moot (and making his grandiose statement on p. 250 regarding the "Christologically significant texts" remaining intact rather vapid). I am not making a determination of the above, only pointing out that Wallace has left several significant issues unresolved in his analysis—and he clearly has a vested interest in certain of the conclusions at which he arrives. In light of these findings, Wallace's discussions of various practical implications are also subject to reexamination, as I do not believe that he has defended sufficiently well his more limited rule so as to provide ground for all of the criticisms he brings against others (see below).

The second major problem is Wallace's understanding and use of linguistics. He seems to acknowledge that he should use linguistics, but he also shuns it. As a result, he makes some odd statements that call into question his interpretive framework. These include (but are not confined to) a fairly generous set of unlin-

³ Novenson unfortunately (and incorrectly) refers to the Greek "definite article" rather than simply "article" throughout his journal article.

⁴ One of Wallace's arguments against θεός as a proper noun is that instances are usually anarthrous as they do not need an article to be definite (most instances appear with the article). He assumes that the use of the article is to indicate definiteness, a view that is highly questionable. Further, by Wallace's own reckoning over 10% of instances of θεός occur without the article in Paul, a fact that cannot be easily dismissed (as he does; p. 252, n. 54).

guistic terminology (e.g. reference to “alien” elements being “wedged” between other elements; p. 5). He uses other terms that seem plausible, but are not sufficiently well defined, such as “semantic range” (p. 5) and “semantic situation” (pp. 8, 251; on p. 8 he invokes a linguistics volume that he cites a number of times, illustrating a too narrow exposure to the literature; see pp. 8, 16, 17, 18). Sometimes he mixes his own “alien” categories into the discussion, such as “phenomenological” patterns (p. 5) and “unaffected or ontological meaning of the construction” (p. 11; which should serve as a caution to readers that the author is engaged in much more than analysis of Greek). He also invents the so-called “phenomenological fallacy” (p. 90), which probably, on the basis of his own definition, should instead be called the “ontological fallacy.” I think that the author’s use of “ontological meaning” is highly problematic on two fronts. The first is that he qualifies the term by saying that he does “not mean that this meaning is always present in full force.” What is ontology if not being itself? The second is that he claims it can be “overridden” by various “intrusions,” all of which are “vying for control” (p. 11, n. 33). This is not an adequate characterization of how language works (to say nothing of understanding of ontology). At times Wallace uses unnecessary hyperbole, when he refers (dependent on Pierre Chantraine) to the Greek article as emerging “from its pronominal cocoon and sprout[ing] arthrous wings, but European intellectual life was profoundly ennobled by this gift of clarity bequeathed by Hellas” (p. 89). Wallace by his own admission is not a linguist or using a particular linguistic method in his study. However, more troubling is that he has an inadequate understanding of linguistics itself. He refers to the “imperfect state of linguistics—a discipline that is still in a state of flux” (p. 18). In purported support of this decree is a work published in 1982. He then goes on to note that in fact “even the various competing schools of linguistics find a significant amount of common ground” (p. 18), referring for support to an article published in 1989 (by this reviewer).⁵ Nevertheless, Wallace still limits his use of linguistics—even though he wants to make linguistic judgments, that is, systematic judgments about how language works.

The third major problem is the volume’s presentation as a scholarly work. This book suffers from a number of deficiencies in this regard. One is its being bibliographically somewhat out of date. There are exceptions, but most of the scholarly work peters out after the mid to late 1990s, even though there has been much important research published since that time. This is important to note, because Wallace attempts to frame his work within the wider field of recent linguistic and related discussion. Sometimes Wallace’s lack of attention to recent research leads to misleading statements about the state of such research (e.g. his statement on syntax on p. 3, n. 11). Wallace also frequently engages in unnecessary tangential discussions. The only reasons that I can see for their inclusion are either to show his knowledge of the subjects or to treat favorite topics—neither a justifiable rationale. These discussions are often, though not always, contained in unnecessarily

⁵ Stanley E. Porter, “Studying Ancient Languages from a Modern Linguistic Perspective: Essential Terms and Terminology,” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 2 (1989) 147–72.

long footnotes (e.g. p. 1, n. 6; p. 2, n. 7; p. 7, n. 24; p. 9, n. 29; p. 10, n. 31; p. 11 twice; p. 11, n. 34; p. 15; p. 16, n. 55; p. 20, n. 70; p. 98; and possibly others). There is also an unnecessary tendency throughout to engage in polemical discussion of topics and authors—including a rather cavalier dismissal of a number of scholars who, he claims, have misunderstood Sharp’s work. Perhaps the most egregious is his discussion of the work of Wayne Grudem on Eph 2:20 and 3:5. Grudem may well be wrong, but Wallace does not need to engage in such disproportionately long point-by-point refutation and analysis to make his own point (pp. 215–27).

The fourth major problem is the generally poorly written English of the volume. This volume clearly could have used the work of an editor. Wallace, for example, loves to use the word “tome” for works ranging from his own monograph (pp. xii, 82, and 132) to James Barr’s *Semantics of Biblical Language* (pp. 13, n. 40 and 136; see also pp. 55 [with reference to Sharp’s 80-page pamphlet excluding appendixes], 81). One sees the folly of such literary pomposity in Wallace’s stylistically mixed statement that “the sampling of Greek writing examined for this tome was but a small drop in the bucket” (p. 132). There are also plain old misuses of the language, as in “Middleton’s research was almost solely shut up to classical Greek” (p. 117), when he apparently means “confined to” (a misuse he repeats on p. 130), and the use of “feel” when he means “think” (e.g. pp. 23, 52 twice, 58, 59, 61, 67, 69, 72, 115, 124, 127, 166, 242, 243), besides other oddities. Wallace also has a frustrating habit of unnecessarily repeating material (e.g. pp. 1 and 17, but the quotations differ; pp. 66 and 102; pp. 73 and 93 with three examples; pp. 75 and 94; pp. 92 and 145; pp. 94 and 116; pp. 103–4 and 159; pp. 222 and 223), including some major discussions and summaries.

Let me now turn to Wallace’s response to my review. It is understandable that Wallace thinks my review should have included and addressed other things than I do (especially in light of the conclusions at which I arrive). Even after having reviewed over 200 “tomes” (to use a Wallace favorite), I am always willing to learn new things. However, I do not believe it is the author’s prerogative to chastise the reviewer for not reviewing one’s book the way one would like it to be—especially a book that is as lacking as this one. Further, I think Wallace is being disingenuous when he complains that I did not treat the other constructions he mentions (many of which he had already published on). The title of the book focuses upon Granville Sharp, and the first three numbered chapters (pp. 31–83, roughly one-sixth of the book) are about Sharp and his rule—not about those other constructions. I think I am clearly justified in spending my limited space (further abbreviated by the editors) on the major focus of the volume.

There are four objections that Wallace raises to my review, and I will treat them in order. The first concerns Sharp’s rule itself and the issue of plurality. Wallace thinks that Sharp does not include them, but I think that Sharp in effect does, whether it is because of his lack of precision, inadvertently, or otherwise. However, I still think that there are matters that need clarification. First, I do take i.e. not disjunctively but explanatorily, but the explanation does nothing to solve the issue of plurality or referentiality. Sharp states that the second element in the construction “*always relates to the same person,*” which he clarifies as “denot[ing] a farther den-

scription of the first-named person.”⁶ Wallace takes this as indicating that “Sharp must mean that the two substantives refer to the same person,” by which he seems to think of referential identity. I beg to differ. Sharp’s statement does not necessarily mean this at all. They “relate” to the same person, which could indicate any number of different types of relationship, including sense relations such as meronymy, synecdoche, hyponymy, etc., and not necessarily identical referentiality. Sharp also states that the second is a “farther description.” This may include any number of different additive relationships, and not the kind of referential identity that Wallace seeks and that apparently Sharp was trying to prove in the examples he cites for theological reasons. (Sharp is at least willing to admit from the outset that he has a theological agenda in the work that he is doing, which probably accounts for the twenty-five examples that he lists after his rule.)⁷

Second, Sharp does admit these are exceptions to his rule (Wallace admits that Sharp is a “bit ambiguous” when he speaks of exceptions). Sharp states: “there is no exception or instance of the like mode of expression, that I know of, which necessarily requires a construction different from what is here laid down, EXCEPT the nouns be *proper names*, or *in the plural number*; in which cases there are many exceptions; though there are not wanting examples, even of plural nouns, which are expressed exactly agreeable [*sic*] to this rule.”⁸ Wallace contends that Sharp means by this “*grammatical features that are outside the scope of the rule.*” That is what Wallace wants it to mean, but unfortunately that does not appear to be what Sharp means. Sharp indicates that the exceptions are grammatically in conformity with the rule, and in many instances semantically as well, but that the exceptions he knows are of these types. They are expressed (grammatically) according to the rule, but are sometimes exceptions in meaning. In other words, these are included within the scope of his rule, but form a subcategory that does not conform; that is, they are indeed exceptions to the rule being absolute. I repeat what I said in my review, that “Wallace seems to have [and, I would add, requires] a narrower view of the rule” than does Sharp.⁹

Third, there may be a need to separate structure and semantics, but it does not appear that Sharp makes it. I do not believe that it is up to me to argue for and defend another version of Sharp’s or Wallace’s rule. I do believe that Sharp’s rule appears—even if the examples introduced by me above prove correct—to hold for singulars in the overwhelming number of instances but has numerous exceptions

⁶ Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Uses of the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament* (3d ed.; London: Rivington, 1803) 3 (emphasis original).

⁷ Note that the subtitle of Sharp’s work is this: *Containing many New Proofs of the Divinity of Christ, From Passages which are wrongly translated in the Common English Version*. He also states on pp. 2–3: “The reason of my recommending the first rule [the rule Wallace and I are disputing] more particularly to your attention, is, because it is of much more consequence than any of the rest, as it will enable us (if the truth of it be admitted) to correct the translation of several important texts in the present English version of the New Testament, in favour of a fundamental article of our church, which has, of late, been much opposed and traduced; I mean the belief that our Lord Jesus Christ is truly God.”

⁸ Sharp, *Remarks* 6.

⁹ Porter, “Review” 829.

such as plurals, and of course proper nouns. Though Wallace makes it seem as if Sharp conceived of identity of person from the first formulation of his position, this is not true. Sharp only refers to “identity of person(s)” in his exposition of Christological passages.¹⁰ Sharp’s rule seems to indicate that some type of common sense relation is indicated by elements placed within the scope of the common article. I am not sure what all of this relationship entails, but he uses the term “relates” or provides “farther description.” However, it is more than simply saying, as Wallace does, that all plurals have such unity. That clearly is not the case. The article is used to distinguish these elements as having a kind of relationship or unity not found otherwise, on the basis of the author choosing to describe them in this way. In some instances, there is no doubt a stronger degree of relationship than in others, but Sharp appears to include plurals within his group as conforming to both structure and semantics, at least on occasion.¹¹ As Wallace admits in his response to me, I believe that on the basis of Sharp’s own work, and the responses he got to it, Sharp was indeed on a “trajectory,” but one that has, in Wallace’s work, resulted in an over-narrowly construal of what Sharp initially intended.

Wallace’s second objection concerns my criticizing his modifying Sharp’s rule, and along with it my raising the objections of Winstanley to Sharp’s rule. Wallace believes that his “modifications” or whatever he wishes to call them to Sharp’s rule are legitimate. It is fine if Wallace wishes to modify or change or restrict Sharp’s rule, but he probably should then not make claims for the new rule as if it were Sharp’s rule, as indicated above. Wallace’s restricted form of Sharp’s rule *may*, as we have seen above, have very limited application in Christologically significant passages. The ignoring of these objections also limits the potential usefulness of Sharp’s rule to the Greek of the NT only. This is not necessarily objectionable, although it does curtail the rule’s applicability and does confirm, as Wallace seems to admit, that Sharp’s motivation was primarily theological (p. 122, n. 62). Nevertheless, I still believe that the grounds for Wallace’s rejecting the objections of Winstanley and wishing to restrict the rule are not always well founded.

The first Winstanley objection concerns generics. Wallace admits that Sharp did not specifically exclude generic singulars (and admits to finding others in extrabiblical Greek), but Wallace wants to exclude them by redefining what is excluded to include nouns that are “plural syntactically and those which are plural *semanti-*

¹⁰ Sharp, *Remarks* 28, 3; cf. 20: “the nouns are to be referred to one and the same person”; 22.

¹¹ Sharp engaged in controversy with Blunt over 1 Tim 6:13. Blunt pointed out that this example conformed to the structure of Sharp’s argument, with one article covering both God and Christ, but that the use of articular subsequent participles with both indicated dissimilarity. Blunt also pointed out that the use of the personal noun Jesus following Christ could be taken as simply an epithet and did not change the structure (Gregory Blunt, *Six More Letters to Granville Sharp, Esq. on His Remarks* [London: Johnson, 1803] 47–48). Sharp’s response is interesting. He agrees that the form of expression indicates that the two entities are distinct; however, he does not mention the use of the proper noun Jesus at all. This example is different from those that Wallace excludes, because the participle follows the use of Jesus. Sharp does not appear to exclude the example on the basis of the use of Jesus (Sharp, *Remarks* 142). Is it because he does not consider the use of a personal noun a definitive grounds for exclusion? Wallace does not appear to treat this example at all.

cally (i.e., generic nouns)" (p. 123).¹² Wallace is contending that singular generics are semantically plural, and hence should not be included and do not contradict Sharp's rule.¹³ There are three issues here (besides those I have raised previously). The first is that these examples are apparently structurally included within Sharp's rule, and thus seem to be exceptions to it on semantic grounds. The second is whether generic singulars are to be considered plurals. Sharp did not think so (as he included, for example, Rev 16:15). Winstanley does not say. Neither does John Anderson in his recent treatment of genericness.¹⁴ A generic singular is used, not because there may not be many examples of it, but so that one can be used to stand for or serve as an example of more than one. These generic singular examples simply do not fit the restricted definition of personal and singular elements required by the narrow definition of Sharp's rule. The third issue is that there are a number of examples in the NT that use generic singulars that should probably be included as falling within the scope of Sharp's rule, but that do not conform to the specificity that Wallace desires (Wallace cites them).

The second Winstanley objection concerns Prov 24:21, which Wallace claims he excluded on the basis of the second element (king) being generic, on which see immediately above.

The third Winstanley objection concerns Herodotus 4.71 and a list of five items. Wallace reiterates his point regarding a third item being superfluous, although he wishes still to hang onto the rule by indicating that it may or may not apply (p. 128). Besides Wallace's not following Sharp, there is a strangeness to his logic. Some rhetoricians and linguists have suggested that groups of two leave open the similarity of the elements, whereas lists of three constitute the minimal number to identify similar elements.¹⁵ A list of three or more would appear then to be something worthy of treatment by a rule such as Sharp's.

The fourth objection treats patristic writers who violate Sharp's rule. Wallace's response seems to me to be of the character of "I win if I do and I win if I don't." After arguing stringently for a restricted view of Sharp's rule, he now wishes to see evidence that the rule is not followed by patristic writers also as support of the rule.

¹² At this point, Wallace appeals to "deep structure" as justifying generic singulars as being treated as semantically plural. I think this is a gratuitous comment designed to gain accession to his point, but one made without any tangible support.

¹³ Wallace in his response (n. 29) cites Winstanley in support of his position, but I believe misunderstands the importance of the quotation. Winstanley does not state that generic singulars are semantically plural, but that they are "used in a general or universal sense," and one that is not similar to the examples that Sharp is using to correct the Authorized Version—this is not the same thing as saying they are plural!

¹⁴ Wallace says my "appeal to Anderson is overdone." Those reading the review will see that I only made one reference to Anderson (*The Grammar of Names* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007] 228–37), who treats genericness, but does not equate it with plurality, but describes it in terms of a variety of relations, including singularity, partitivity, etc.

¹⁵ See Max Atkinson, *Our Masters' Voices: Language and Body Language of Politics* (London: Routledge, 1984).

Wallace does not appear to respond to the fifth and sixth of Winstanley's objections.

In response to his third objection to my review, Wallace raises the question of whether he had a theological agenda that "disfigured" Sharp's rule. Let me make clear that I have huge respect for Sharp and his Christian work, especially his anti-slavery advocacy, and that I agree with Wallace's conclusions regarding theology—I too have a high Christology. Nevertheless, Wallace in his response does hit on what I have noted above, and that is that Sharp also had a theological agenda. Despite his disclaimers, I think it would be better if Wallace simply came clean regarding his own—as in fact he does when he admits that he did have Christological motivations.

Finally, Wallace objects to my overlooking elements of his book. I did not completely overlook all of them. For example, I commented on what I thought was his inappropriate tone regarding Wayne Grudem, excised in the first edition of my review and offered above (on Eph 2:20 and 3:5). Concerning the others Wallace cites, I find his apparent assumption of modern categories for pastors, elders, and teachers and their relationships to be highly problematic in his treatment of Eph 4:11, where he claims that "elders were to be teachers" (p. 229). I think that Wallace is confused on the notions of sense and reference regarding Matt 24:3, where he makes the odd claim that commentators have been more concerned with the sense of the passage than its referents, when I would have thought that preoccupation with the referents has been the major problem. Acts 2:23 probably reveals a further motivation for Wallace's restriction of Sharp's rule, so that he can distinguish between God's "predetermined plan" and his "foreknowledge" (p. 201), even though they are both covered by a single article. Concerning 2 Thess 2:1 and mention of "the coming of our Lord" and "our gathering," Wallace again seems motivated to argue for a restricted view of Sharp's rule, so that he can turn it on its head and use it as a means of arguing for these being two distinct entities, not a singular event. Even if Sharp's rule were the absolute rule that Wallace posits, I am doubtful that this necessarily entails that two impersonal elements covered by the same noun must of necessity not refer to the same entity. So, to answer Wallace's objection, I generally find his expositions of the examples he chooses unconvincing, and no aid to his overall program regarding Sharp's rule.

I remain unpersuaded that Wallace, though I agree with his theological conclusions, has done Sharp's rule great service in this monograph. Instead, I think that he has made the issues more problematic, especially in light of his overall unconvincing explanations of a range of texts and issues.