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# Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel

*A Response to Paul Foster with Further Comments for Future Discussion*

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## Abstract

This article examines and responds to the arguments made by Paul Foster in a recent article in *JSHJ* regarding social-memory theory, orality, and the Fourth Gospel, where he argues that recent research in these areas are dead-ends for historical Jesus research. We do not necessarily wish to defend the research he criticizes, but we respond to Foster by pointing out some of the limitations in his analysis and provide further comments to move discussion of these research areas forward. Our comments address his assumption that form- and redaction-criticism accomplish the purposes that he envisions for historical Jesus research and a number of other problematic arguments he raises regarding each of these areas.

## Keywords

form-criticism – Fourth Gospel – historical Jesus research – orality – redaction-criticism – social-memory theory

## Introduction

In a recent issue of *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, Paul Foster takes pains (and goes to great lengths) to characterize some recent work in social-memory theory, orality, and the Fourth Gospel as dead-ends in historical Jesus research.<sup>1</sup> He subjects each of these areas to sustained criticism and suggests

1 Paul Foster, 'Memory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel: Three Dead-Ends in Historical Jesus Research', *JSHJ* 10.3 (2012), pp. 191–227. We cite this article by page number within parentheses in the text.

several implications that go beyond their role in such research. Foster admits that his article essentially argues for negative conclusions by finding each a dead-end (225). He highlights and brings together three topics that are relevant to contemporary Jesus research that, to this point, have generally only been discussed independently in various places. In these venues, these three approaches are often heralded as promising new directions in historical Jesus studies and pointing the way for approaches that suggest new findings and conclusions for historical Jesus research that has, in the opinion of many, become a somewhat hidebound, if not relatively static, field of endeavour. Foster's critique is to be welcomed and his efforts are to be applauded, as he has marshalled a variety of useful evidence, attempted to assess each of the areas, and posited his own plain and straightforward conclusions regarding these ventures.

This being the case, one wonders why we still need this response to Foster's effort, especially as we find many of his analyses cogent and his conclusions legitimate. As we ponder over these issues ourselves, however, we think that, despite Foster's exhaustive efforts, there is more that can and should be said regarding these areas, and that this supplemental perspective must be taken into account before we can conclude with Foster that social-memory theory, orality, and the historicity of the Fourth Gospel are dead-ends for historical Jesus research. Moreover, even though he has made at least a *prima facie* case that social-memory theory, orality, and studies of the Fourth Gospel do not promise much for historical Jesus studies—at least in Foster's terms on the basis of those studies he brings into the discussion—Foster perhaps has failed to notice that his critique of these areas, taken in conjunction with his underdeveloped proposal regarding the continuing benefits of form- and redaction-criticism as legitimate (or even *the* legitimate) tools for historical Jesus studies, leaves his entire project vulnerable. For this reason, we wish to address this issue on two fronts by first identifying the fundamental flaw in Foster's argument, to the point that he undermines his argument beyond any easy task of repair, followed by our own critique of the three areas that he addresses.

### Form- and Redaction-Criticism in Foster's Programme

Before we engage Foster's particular responses to social-memory theory, orality, and use of the Fourth Gospel as a historical source, we wish to clarify one important issue that he raises. Foster indicates very strongly that none of these three approaches provides what he considers a clear or promising way forward in historical Jesus research. They are all dead-ends. However, he is not content

to leave the situation there. He states that 'one may critique this discussion [that is, his discussion] as an ossified defense of form- and redaction-criticism' (227). Even though he has not put forward anything more than an inferential case for form- or redaction-criticism, but instead only invoked them incidentally to his many points of criticism, he does not hesitate to say that the bolstered viability of form- or redaction-criticism 'may be the outcome, since by implication this discussion suggests that such methods, perhaps modified, are still the most appropriate tools for historical Jesus research' (227). This presents a major problem for Foster. The major shortcoming of each of the approaches he criticizes, as his abstract states, is that they do not offer 'any significant advance in accessing the "historical Jesus", as that term is usually understood' (191). Within the paper itself, he states from the outset his scepticism that any of the three approaches 'actually delivers reliable results in the field of historical Jesus research' (192), by which he seems to be referring to 'the ongoing task of producing a reliable, yet enlarged corpus of sayings and events that may be attributed to the historical Jesus' (192). It should be clear by now that Foster is holding the three approaches he is evaluating to a much higher standard than he does traditional form- and redaction-criticisms.

Whereas Foster criticizes social-memory theory, orality, and research into the Fourth Gospel for failing to provide access to the historical Jesus, the alternatives he proposes do not do so either—one by definition and the other by practice. Redaction-criticism, by definition, is a second-order enterprise (in that it depends upon form- and source-criticism) that examines the theologically motivated handling of the tradition by the Gospel author. Redaction-criticism obviously cannot provide access to the historical Jesus, since it was developed essentially as a methodological supplement to tradition-criticism (focused on Jesus) and form-criticism (focused on the early church) in order to determine the editorial alterations and theological tendencies of the redactor, as well as showing how the Gospel authors had envisioned their Gospels as literature (composition criticism).<sup>2</sup> Although some form critics, such as Vincent Taylor, early on held out promise that form-criticism would provide access possibly to Jesus himself through the Gospel traditions, the major works in form-criticism, especially by Martin Dibelius and Rudolf Bultmann, focused not upon the original words of Jesus, but upon the literary forms in which the traditions about Jesus were cast and transmitted, reflecting more upon the

2 See, for example, the summaries by Norman Perrin, *What is Redaction Criticism?* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1970), p. 2; and Grant R. Osborne, 'Redaction Criticism', in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* (ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery; Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), pp. 128–49.

developments of the early church than upon information about the historical Jesus<sup>3</sup> (Foster even refers to form-criticism as concerned with 'the reliability of remembered traditions' [202]). Such a perspective poses a major problem for Foster. Not only does he apparently judge the three recent approaches by a different set of criteria than the ones he uses for the methods he endorses (form- and redaction-criticisms), but he is, in effect, left with no apparent plausible or effective method for accessing authentic historical Jesus tradition itself.<sup>4</sup> Although critical comments are a necessary part of scholarly discussion, we believe that it is even more beneficial when we are able to present plausible and workable alternatives for comparative evaluation. Thus, in our opinion, with no method that actually accomplishes his stated goal of accessing the historical Jesus, Foster seriously undermines his criticisms of the three recent approaches, because ostensibly they are no better, but also no worse, than his proposed approaches. This does not mean, however, that we are content simply to accept social-memory theory, orality, or research into the Fourth Gospel as means of moving forward in historical Jesus research. To the contrary, we agree with Foster that they must be critically assessed where necessary, but we also think that, in his zeal to categorically dismiss them, Foster has overlooked some other important factors that must be considered for each.

### Further Discussion of Social-Memory Theory, Orality, and the Fourth Gospel

We now attempt to respond to the more detailed critiques of social-memory theory, orality, and the Fourth Gospel that Foster offers. In what follows, we

3 See Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (2nd edn; London: Macmillan, 1957), pp. 11–21, where he summarizes the major form critics, including Dibelius, K.L. Schmidt, and Bultmann, as well as offering his own perspective. Foster says that Bultmann discusses whether a tradition originated 'either in the life of the early church, or in the ministry of the historical Jesus' (198), citing Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; Oxford: Blackwell, 1963 [1921; 5th edn 1931]), but without page number. When Bultmann explains his method (such as it is), he does not refer to the ministry of the historical Jesus, but to such things as 'primary tradition' (3) and *Sitz im Leben*, which he defines as not 'an individual historical event, but a typical situation or occupation in the life of a community' (4). For a similar critique, see Christopher Tuckett, 'Form Criticism', in *Jesus in Memory: Traditions in Oral and Scribal Perspectives* (ed. Werner H. Kelber and Samuel Byrskog; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), pp. 21–38, esp. 29–31.

4 Foster, however, seems to hold out hope that contemporary historical Jesus research can access genuine Jesus material, despite the fact that he admits that the Synoptic Gospels, like

find fault with a number of his claims as we simultaneously offer our own critical comments and suggestions regarding these three approaches.

### *Social-Memory Theory*

Foster brings into discussion some recent work of New Testament scholars who have drawn upon social-memory theory. These scholars include Markus Bockmuehl, Richard Bauckham and Dale Allison, among a few others, although he spends most of his time on Bauckham.<sup>5</sup> He notes that in recent social-memory studies of the New Testament, the presentist model<sup>6</sup> and cultural-system model<sup>7</sup> have been prominent (196). As a result, he articulates what he considers to be three telling problems, including the failure of New Testament scholars to apply social-memory theory in the way its originating psychologists do, the failure to test social-memory theory in analysis of individual Gospel episodes, and an undue negative critique of form-criticism, which appears to be doing something similar. However, a number of shortcomings are also apparent in Foster's comments, even though elements of his critique are apt for those who have too readily utilized and accepted social-memory theory.<sup>8</sup> We draw attention to eight problem areas.

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John's Gospel, reflect post-Easter purposes (212). But it cannot do so by means of the criticisms he proposes.

- 5 See, for example, Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010); and others.
- 6 Many scholars using a presentist approach follow Maurice Halbwachs (see *On Collective Memory* [ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser; Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992]), although it is important to note that his theory has often been criticized for lack of clarity (see Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* [Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2003], p. 54). See also Eric Eve, *Behind the Gospels: Understanding the Oral Tradition* (London: SPCK, 2013), p. 94; and Chris Keith, *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (LNTS, 413; London: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2011), p. 57.
- 7 He cites Barry Schwartz, 'Collective Memory and Social Change: The Democratization of George Washington', *American Sociology Review* 56 (1992), pp. 221–36; and Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget, and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).
- 8 Here we wish to acknowledge Zeba A. Crook, 'Collective Memory Distortion and the Quest for the Historical Jesus', *JSHJ* 11 (2013), pp. 53–76 and 'Gratitude and Comments to Le Donne', *JSHJ* 11 (2013), pp. 98–105; and Anthony Le Donne, 'The Problem of Selectivity in Memory Research: A Response to Zeba Crook', *JSHJ* 11 (2013), pp. 77–97, as three recent articles that have debated the issue concerning the applicability of social-memory theories to the study of the historical Jesus.

The first is that social-memory theory is far more complex than Foster recognizes, and probably more complex than most New Testament scholars, even those who use it, realize. Foster summarizes social-memory theory in terms of two major types. However, the field of social-memory theory is far more variegated than these two approaches. Theories of social remembering take various forms that correspondingly serve multiply complex functions. As Jeffrey Olick and Joyce Robbins show in a study published in 1998, 'social memory studies is a nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise'.<sup>9</sup> They trace its development in a multitude of directions from the initial work of Maurice Halbwachs on collective memory through various other proposals, such as by Frederic Bartlett, Herbert Mead, and Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, among many others, up to (for them) the present. They further define social-memory theory in relation to such other disciplines as sociology (in which it is usually placed as a subcategory), anthropology, psychology (against which it is often opposed), and historiography, including the role of nationalism.<sup>10</sup> The result is that, whereas there is an emphasis upon the collective element in social-memory theory, there is also a variety of ways of conceptualizing it in relation to culture, history, society, the past, memorization, and technology, among others.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, it is important to note that the pioneering social-memory theory of Halbwachs in 1925 was based upon sociological categories, such as family, class, and religion,<sup>12</sup> but not upon psychological categories (e.g. recollection, repression, and psychoanalysis of the subconscious) or upon

9 Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998), pp. 105–40, here p. 105 abstract.

10 See Jacob J. Climao and Maria G. Cattell, *Social Memory and History* (Anthropological Perspectives; Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2002).

11 Jeffrey K. Olick, 'Products, Processes, and Practices: A Non-Reificatory Approach to Collective Memory', *BTB* 36 (2006), pp. 5–14, esp. 12–13, underscores the abstract nature of social-memory theory and consequently provides three principles for the analysis of collective memory, one of which deserves mention here: 'collective memory is far from monolithic. Collective remembering is a highly complex process, involving numerous people, practices, materials, and themes. One must be careful, therefore, not to presume at the outset that every society has one collective memory or that it is obvious and unproblematic how (and which) public memories will be produced' (12).

12 Maurice Halbwachs, *Les travaux de l'année sociologique* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1925); ET in Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, based on Maurice Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952). Halbwachs, following Émile Durkheim, and increasingly rejecting Henri Bergson's individualism, states, 'It is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories' (Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 38).

neurological science research that studies the human brain (e.g. photographic memory, traumatic memory, amnesia, dementia, false memory, etc.).<sup>13</sup> In sum, there is no such thing as social-memory theory as a unified intellectual conception—one of the goals of Olick and Robbins's article is to attempt to create such a unity. Therefore, it is impossible to characterize simply what is meant by social-memory theory and respond to it as a singular thing, as Foster does.

This situation is made even more difficult by the fact that those biblical scholars who claim to use social-memory theory in fact do not seem to be clear on all of the issues or the type of social-memory theory they are adopting. Bockmuehl is only cited once by Foster (194), but Bockmuehl can hardly be seen as basing his theory of memory and history primarily on social-memory theory. It plays a part (note his citation of a number of social-memory scholars), but only in relation to individual memory. Bockmuehl endorses a form of personalized *Wirkungsgeschichte*, in which the individual and the collective moderate each other. Allison more explicitly uses social-memory theory—although less systematically and more in support of his own set of what he calls 'generalizations'.<sup>14</sup> These generalizations contain a list of all of the possible things that 'may', 'can', and 'might' happen with memory—a rather discouraging list of the worst case in virtually each one. Moreover, without providing a firm basis for pulling away from the precipice, Allison suddenly backtracks and apparently endorses the view that memory in fact is more right than wrong, is far more accurate than in error, retains the meaning even if not the wording, and preserves the 'substance' or 'gist' of an event.<sup>15</sup> Bauckham focuses upon one particular type of social memory, what is variably called recollective or autobiographical or episodic or personal memory, especially as explicated by William F. Brewer.<sup>16</sup> On the basis of this theory, Bauckham identifies nine characteristics of reliable recollective memory that Foster responds to, which includes the 'gist' of an event, defined as 'the sequence or structure that makes

13 See Dennis C. Duling, 'Social Memory and Biblical Studies: Theory, Method, and Application', *BTB* 36 (2006), pp. 2–4, here p. 2.

14 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, p. 9 n. 47.

15 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, pp. 8–9 and n. 46, 11, but see also pp. 442–43, where Allison suggests that 'light fiction' seems to be an appropriate genre in which we can categorize the Gospels. On the basis of the work of several social-memory theorists, Allison concludes that 'Even for those not thus gifted, memory can be especially reliable when handling atypical events that one personally participated in, found mentally engaging, experienced as emotionally intense, and then later rehearsed' (p. 9 n. 46).

16 Esp. William F. Brewer, 'What is Recollective Memory?', in *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory* (ed. D.C. Rubin; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 19–66.

the event meaningful to the person who initially perceives and then recalls'.<sup>17</sup> As we can see from the three examples that Foster relies upon as examples of New Testament scholars using social-memory theory, a 'lumping-together' response cannot do justice to the diversity involved (to say nothing of the question of whether any of them actually provides a clear and coherent exposition of social memory as a part of their theory). As a result, and for the most part, Foster's critique of Bauckham as well as Allison ends up being a general and sweeping critique of their adoption of the reliability of memory, rather than a specific critique of their treatments (especially as they differ in their approaches and the goals of their investigation).<sup>18</sup>

Second, Foster creates what amounts to a false disjunction between social memory and knowledge of the historical Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of his alternatives (already noted above), because he seems to view social memory as a unified thing, as opposed to a supposed method that guarantees sound historical results, Foster pits social memory against whatever else there is, and social memory comes up lacking. He labels Bauckham's social-memory approach as following the cultural-system model (198, 200) and spends most of his time attempting to refute him, and in doing so (and he is wrong in this classification in any case, we believe) he attempts to sweep aside social-memory theory as a unified approach. We are not necessarily arguing for the reliability of social memory as a means of accessing the historical Jesus, because we do not wish to be pigeonholed into accepting a singular view of social memory. We nevertheless recognize that social-memory theory and its resulting proposals are many and variegated, comprising a wide variety of factors—most of which have not been taken into account by many, if not most, New Testament scholars who are using social-memory theory and certainly not by Foster. Foster is obviously painting the supposed findings of social-memory theory with a

17 Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 334.

18 Note, however, that Foster cites Judith C.S. Redman, 'How Accurate are Eyewitnesses? Bauckham and the Eyewitnesses in the Light of Psychological Research', *JBL* 129.1 (2010), pp. 177–97, a work dedicated to criticizing Bauckham. She too summarizes much research on social memory.

19 Foster also relies upon generalization and even exaggeration, when, noting Robert K. McIver's estimations of the survival rate of eyewitnesses, he claims that McIver demolishes Bauckham's unsubstantiated arguments. However, Foster never mentions any figure, including the 277 from Capernaum projected to be still alive after thirty years, or the 2,874 from large crowds, or the 14,782 from Jerusalem (a total of 17,933 from an original of approximately 63,000), which is hardly scarce or indicates an unsubstantiated argument. McIver estimates over 600 still alive after 60 years! See Robert K. McIver, *Memory, Jesus, and the Synoptic Gospels* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature), pp. 206–207.

broad brush, one that encompasses all of its various dimensions and in which it is always found wanting.<sup>20</sup>

Third, Foster fails to note changes in the use of memory over time, and how social memory is mostly concerned with the modern literate world. One of the areas of recent work in social-memory theory is discussion of the historical development of memory over time, especially in relation to the rise of literacy. Most social-memory discussion is focused upon contemporary social memory, or at least social memory within literate cultures. However, we note that memory functions differently in an oral culture than it does in a written culture, as even social-memory theorists argue that memory functioned differently in such ancient cultures as Greece and Judaism than it does today. Cultures that preserved the 'living word', even with the rise of literacy, continued to develop 'new mnemonic practices—commemoration and documentary recording—associated with emerging city structures'.<sup>21</sup> Foster nowhere acknowledges this perspective, which is utilized by both Bauckham and Allison.

The fourth difficulty is that there is a serious question about how social-memory theory is relevant to the question of the transmission of tradition—which question is what is actually relevant to historical Jesus research. In other words, whereas social-memory theory can explain (even correctly) how private and corporate memories are subject to various factors in their formulation, this synchronic view is concerned primarily with the preservation of a memory. This, in social-memory theorists' terms, involves at least two factors—framing and keying, both of which are used to explain, respectively, how we encode information to be remembered through a presupposed conceptual framework (framing) and how this information is interpreted and deployed each time we recall it through, for instance, narrative-telling (keying).<sup>22</sup>

20 As a result, Foster concludes that social-memory theory does not have a clear relationship between the past and the present, and must reformulate history itself by eroding the distinction between the time of the event and the time of recollection. With reference to social memory's capacity to reconstruct, we follow Jan Assmann's position that, even though social memory always relates knowledge of the actual event to the contemporary situation, 'every contemporary context relates to [the knowledge of the actual event] differently, sometimes by appropriation, sometimes by criticism, sometimes by preservation or by transformation'. Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125–33, here p. 130.

21 Olick and Robbins, 'Social Memory Studies', p. 114. Cf. Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

22 On these matters, see Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, pp. 15–16, 82–83, 95–97; and James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 32–36, 41–75.

By contrast, transmission of the Jesus and Gospel traditions is necessarily concerned with a diachronic account, that is, with reference to social-memory theory, how the theory can address the question not primarily of memory (as important as it is) or social remembering but of transmission from one to another down a historical chain of receipt and delivery. As we are now trying to point out in this article, these are two very different processes that we think social-memory theorists do not and perhaps cannot adequately distinguish unless they can demonstrate how social memory *is* actually (not just related to) a communicative process (i.e., the verbal transmission of linguistic forms or the non-verbal transmission of various semiotic forms) and not merely a cognitive process (i.e., a theorized understanding of how communal commemoration of the past through rituals, traditions, texts, etc. could be perceived). The latter one is only circumstantially addressed by social-memory theory and not at all by Foster with regard to Bauckham and others.

The fifth problem is that Foster fails to deal with views regarding the 'gist' of events. Both Bauckham and Allison use this concept. Allison frames the 'substance or "gist" of an event' as what remains after the passage of time.<sup>23</sup> Bauckham, noting the work of several social-memory theorists, claims that these theorists argue that 'the "gist" of the memory is likely to be accurate', even if other factors are inaccurate.<sup>24</sup> According to Alan Baddeley, this memory includes 'a very high level of recall of autobiographical events, and a low level of distortion, given adequate cueing', with autobiographical memory 'reasonably free of error, provided that we stick to remembering the broad outline of events'.<sup>25</sup> It is no wonder that Foster does not raise this issue in his overly negative summary, as it would undermine the disjunctive claim he is making regarding social-memory theory. Not all social-memory theorists are as negative as Foster is regarding the accuracy of human memory. The gist ideas have been variously defined. For some it is a minimal concept, but for others it includes a framework (through the 'framing' process) in which various details or contents (esp. the gist of an event) of the memory are successfully archived. To be sure, Barbara Misztal points out that the 'dynamics of memory' approach, which sees social memory as a process of negotiation, argues that 'history cannot be freely invented and reinvented and that suppression of alternative interpretations and coercion are sufficient to ensure that particular interpretations will

23 Allison, *Constructing Jesus*, p. 11.

24 Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 333.

25 Alan Baddeley, *Human Memory: Theory and Practice* (rev. edn; Hove: Psychology, 1997), pp. 221, 222, cited in Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, p. 333.

be accepted,'<sup>26</sup> and it allows for the contents of collective memory of a particular social group to be contested and verified.<sup>27</sup>

The sixth to eighth criticisms respond directly to Foster's third to fifth criticisms of social memory. Thus, sixth, whereas it may be true, as Foster states, that New Testament scholars do use social-memory theory in ways different from experimental psychologists, this is not necessarily a damaging criticism of their use—this critique must be demonstrated rather than simply asserted. Besides, we find it interesting that Foster wishes to emphasize the psychological element of social memory, instead of the sociology under which it is usually discussed. Admittedly, there is overlap between them and the way that they treat social-memory theory, but they also have important differences that have a bearing on the applicability of the disciplines to New Testament studies. There are numerous considerations that would indicate that a difference in approach is warranted. These include many of the issues raised above, but especially the fact that, in an ancient context, memory played a different role in community consciousness than it does in contemporary society, and the fact that there were probably various types of memories at play in at least three stages of development from individual memory to communicative memory to cultural/social/collective memory.<sup>28</sup> Modern experimental psychology has arrived at its conclusions on the basis of memory tests of contemporary subjects, without regard for the different ways that memory functions today as opposed to how it functioned in the ancient world. In the ancient world, the 'living word', that is, the memorized and repeated word, was given priority over the written word, because of its central role in information retention and transmission.

Seventh, Foster's criticism of the failure to demonstrate application of social-memory theory in analysis of actual Gospel passages is not an obvious failure of social-memory theory but simply a failure to apply the method.<sup>29</sup> It

26 Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*, p. 71.

27 Cf. Eve, *Behind the Gospels*, pp. 94–95.

28 Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992), esp. p. 56, and Assmann and Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', pp. 126–29, acknowledge a transitional stage from communicative memory to cultural memory; ET in Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). See also Aleida Assmann, *Zeit und Tradition: Kulturelle Strategien der Dauer* (Beiträge zur Geschichtskultur, 15; Cologne: Böhlau, 1999); Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1984); idem, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de mémoire', *Representation* 26 (1989), pp. 7–25; and idem, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

29 But see Werner H. Kelber, 'The Generative Force of Memory: Early Christian Traditions as Processes of Remembering'; Philip F. Esler, 'Paul's Contestation of Israel's (Ethnic) Memory

does not mean that social-memory theory does not explain passages, but only that some practitioners have perhaps failed to do so. The one exception that Foster mentions is Tom Thatcher, who examines 1 Jn 2.20–27, where Foster draws upon him in a way that is favourable to Foster's own position. This, however, can hardly count for Foster's case—only as a poorly argued instance by Thatcher (if indeed it is). Foster's position certainly does not prove that alternatives, such as form-criticism, are in any way valid by default. They too must be tested and demonstrated just as any theory, something Foster does not do but only assumes has been done elsewhere (we cannot help but comment that, if form-criticism had been as successful as Foster thinks, and designed for the task he wishes to use it for, why have so many Gospel and historical Jesus scholars taken up social memory?).

Eighth and finally, Foster's defence of form-criticism as in some ways similar to social-memory theory emphasizes their points of agreement. This does not prove his case, however, as any criticisms that he has made of social-memory theory are now applicable to form-criticism, which itself agrees 'that the remembered event functions within communities to promote group values and that the connection between past events and the social remembrance is often quite slight' (202). This can hardly be seen as a robust defence of form-criticism as providing access to the historical Jesus.

With Foster's highly negative view of social memory, which in some ways is an accurate, although also a pessimistic, interpretation of a limited amount of social-memory theory, one must wonder whether there can be such thing as any accurate memory of the past, even for the ancients.<sup>30</sup> If so, then it makes the entire notion of history unrecoverable! Regardless of the view that social-memory theorists take in the abstract, their practical belief must entail getting more right in memory than not—or widespread ignorance.

### Orality

In his discussion of orality, Foster selects for discussion James D.G. Dunn and Terence Mournet (a student of Dunn extending his mentor's work),<sup>31</sup> as well

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of Abraham in Galatians 3'; and Ritva H. Williams, 'Social Memory and the DIDACHĒ', *BTB* 36 (2006), pp. 15–39.

30 In fairness to Foster, it is perhaps impossible for him not to cherry-pick from practitioners of social-memory theory in writing this section in an article of this length. But the approach he takes to build his argument, unfortunately, would seem to require him to do so. For lists of those who use social-memory theory in New Testament studies, see Keith, *Jesus' Literacy*, pp. 50–68; and Le Donne, 'The Problem of Selectivity in Memory Research', pp. 85–87.

31 James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*. I. *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) and 'Altering the Default Setting: Re-envisioning the Early Transmission

as mentioning studies by the Grimm Brothers, Axel Olrik, Vladimir Propp, Milman Parry and Albert Lord on folklore and oral transmission.<sup>32</sup> He argues against the oral tradition paradigm suggested by Parry and Lord and used in New Testament studies on the basis of four reasons: lack of direct access to the 'oral layer of the Jesus tradition' (206), the insufficient time for committing oral tradition to written form, the Gospels not being written in their 'original language' (206), and lack of means of verification of the tradition. From this critique, Foster returns to discussion of orality in the New Testament and subsequently offers two concluding (and repetitious) points of dispute. These include, first, the observation that there is no direct access to the oral tradition concerning Jesus except through the Gospels, and second, the claim that oral transmission theories developed by Parry and Lord do not apply to the New Testament, such that theories of orality remain as mere hypotheses.

With reference to Foster's first point of dispute, we wish to make a quick comment. His line of thinking perhaps is based upon the notion of orality as a synchronic- and emic-type theory, which is concerned with data retrieval gleaned from live participants; hence, because our access to the Jesus tradition is only through the Gospels, it is difficult to postulate an orality theory. However, without setting aside the Gospels, an oral community can always reasonably be assumed to have existed based upon many social and economic considerations during Jesus' time. As such, a diachronic- and etic-type theory of orality, which deals with the formulation of principles based upon various sources of available historical, social, and cultural data, may always be utilized to understand how oral tradition works and how it is being transmitted from one stage or generation to another. We now turn to dispute Foster's limited selection of authors for representative discussion, before engaging his several direct criticisms.

Foster treats a very limited number of proponents of an oral approach to Jesus tradition. In fact, he actually treats only Mournet. Even though he mentions Dunn, he instead addresses his comments to Mournet's use of the Parry-Lord hypothesis. For the sake of discussion, Foster either neglects or minimizes

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of the Jesus Tradition', *NTS* 49 (2003), pp. 139–75; and Terence C. Mournet, *Oral Tradition and Literary Dependency: Variability and Stability in the Synoptic Tradition and Q* (WUNT, 2.195; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

32 Axel Olrik, 'Epic Laws of Folk Narrative', in *The Study of Folklore* (ed. Alan Dundas; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), pp. 129–41; Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1968); M. Parry, 'Whole Formulaic Verses in Greek and Southslavic Heroic Song', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 64 (1933), pp. 179–97; Albert Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

other approaches to orality. Apart from a single dismissive reference to Birger Gerhardsson (211), Foster disregards the Lund school of Gerhardsson, Harald Riesenfeld, and now Samuel Byrskog and his view of interpretive oral history.<sup>33</sup> Others that are also neglected include B.F. Westcott (neglected by most others who engage in this discussion), Bo Reicke, Werner Kelber, Rainer Riesner, Kenneth Bailey, Eta Linnemann, and Armin Baum, among possibly others.<sup>34</sup> In fact, Foster does not address Dunn in any significant way, and fails to note that Dunn does not rely upon the Parry–Lord hypothesis, but follows Kenneth Bailey in his theory of oral tradition. Before eliminating orality, one might first wish to offer a fuller view of the various theories.

In response to his specific criticisms, first, Foster is of course correct that we do not have direct access to the oral tradition except through the written Gospels. It does not follow from this, however, that the Gospel traditions originated as written traditions. By Foster's own admission in his discussion of Jesus and his teaching, as well as for events purportedly recorded in the Gospels, the Jesus tradition must have begun with oral transmission from Jesus to his

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- 33 Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity, with Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998 [1961, 1964]); Harald Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970); Samuel Byrskog, *Story as History—History as Story: The Gospel Tradition in the Context of Ancient Oral History* (WUNT, 123; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).
- 34 Brooke Foss Westcott, *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (6th edn; Cambridge: Macmillan, 1881), pp. 163–212 (an exception to his neglect is Bruce Chilton, *Profiles of a Rabbi: Synoptic Opportunities in Reading about Jesus* [BJS, 177; Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1989], pp. 33, 43); Bo Reicke, *The Roots of the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986); Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997 [1983]); Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer: Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Jesus-Überlieferung* (3rd and exp. edn; WUNT, 2.7; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988); idem, 'From the Messianic Teacher to the Gospels of Jesus Christ', in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (4 vols.; ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2011), I, pp. 405–46; Kenneth E. Bailey, 'Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (1991), pp. 34–54 (repr. in *Themelios* 20.2 [1995], pp. 4–11); idem, 'Middle Eastern Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *ExpTim* 106 (1995), pp. 363–67; Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels* (trans. Robert W. Yarbrough; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1992); and Armin D. Baum, *Der mündliche Faktor und seine Bedeutung für die synoptische Frage: Analogien aus der antiken Literatur, der Experimentalpsychologie, der Oral Poetry-Forschung und dem rabbinischen Traditionswesen* (Tübingen: Franke Verlag, 2008).

earliest followers who heard his words and from those who witnessed the events to those who transmitted them. Just because we do not have the kind of direct access to the oral tradition that Foster seeks does not mean that it did not exist. Nor does it mean that, if it did exist, it is not by some means accessible—that is what investigation of orality is about. Foster's criticism is thus unfounded: it does not mean that the task is impossible, only that it may be hard. That is why it is worth exploring more than a limited number of oral theories.

Second, Foster believes that the short amount of time between the event or saying and its recording in literary form was 'extremely short'; hence, this calls into question the oral paradigm. This may be so with reference to the Parry–Lord oral paradigm, but it does not necessarily call into question every oral paradigm. In her study of literacy and orality, the linguistic anthropologist Ruth Finnegan has shown that there are other viable models of oral transmission than that of Parry–Lord that can account for the creation, transmission, and recital of oral literature. She uses examples from Oceania (the South Pacific) that illustrate various types of what she calls 'composition-in-performance'.<sup>35</sup> Some of these models indicate that the short period between event/saying and literary record may not even call Parry–Lord's hypothesis into question. Finnegan's research has shown that in the act of improvisation (composition-in-performance) there is a personal involvement of the storyteller through selection of 'words, phrases and dramatic expression', often in response to the audience.

The general picture that emerges certainly throws doubt on earlier assumptions about long communal transmission through the ages, with no part left to the individual but memorization, and fits reasonably well with the currently accepted view: the individual narrators are in fact responsible for the final composition of the story (at least in large part) when they are actually performing it for their audience.<sup>36</sup>

In fact, several of the proposals that Finnegan makes on the basis of some of her own field research indicate that various other models of oral transmission may well give insight into the earliest stages of oral composition and transmission, other than the one Parry–Lord developed for Yugoslavian epic poetry.

Third, Foster raises the question that the 'written Gospels do not preserve the Jesus tradition in its original language' (206). He claims that 'the translational

35 Ruth Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality: Studies in the Technology of Communication* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), pp. 91–101.

36 Finnegan, *Literacy and Orality*, p. 92.

leap from original Aramaic speech events to a Greek written form negates any significant access to the oral stage of the transmission of Jesus traditions' (206). The translational issue of course only applies to questions regarding the sayings of Jesus, not the actions of Jesus. Foster probably does not mean to indicate that an event in and of itself is language-bound and can only be discussed in one language. The fact of the matter, however, is that the sociolinguistic situation of Palestine and Galilee was more complex than Foster recognizes, with the environment being multilingual. There may well have been those who witnessed actions of Jesus whose primary or first language was Greek, and these witnessed events would then have been transmitted in Greek from the very start. More than that, however, is the question of the language of Jesus and his disciples.<sup>37</sup> Foster speaks as if Jesus were an Aramaic monolingual, which is almost assuredly not true, as has been recognized by increasing numbers of recent scholars. This has two implications for Foster's position. The first is that, on at least some occasions, Jesus' words were spoken in Greek and would have been transmitted and preserved in Greek with no translation from Aramaic required. This remains a distinct possibility, even if the numbers of words remains small. More likely is that Jesus spoke Aramaic in a multilingual context that included Greek users, so that many sayings were recorded in Greek from the outset. These observations entail that several of Foster's major objections must be reassessed, including the one regarding access through language and possibly through written Gospels. The second implication follows from the first. A number of scholars, such as Hans Dieter Betz,<sup>38</sup> have recognized that the Jesus tradition, so far as we

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- 37 See Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (JSNTSup, 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), updated in Porter, 'The Language(s) Jesus Spoke', in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, III, pp. 2455–71; and Hughson T. Ong, 'Language Choice in Ancient Palestine: A Sociolinguistic Study of Jesus' Language Use Based on Four "I Have Come" Sayings', *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* 1 (2012), pp. 63–101; idem, 'An Evaluation of the Aramaic and Greek Language Criteria in Historical Jesus Research: A Sociolinguistics Study of Mark 14, 32–65', *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 22 (2012), pp. 37–55; idem, 'Can Linguistic Analysis in Historical Jesus Research Stand on its Own? A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Matthew 26:36–27:26', *Biblical and Ancient Greek Linguistics* 2 (2013), pp. 109–38; and idem, 'Ancient Palestine is Multilingual and Diglossic—Introducing Multilingualism Theories to New Testament Studies', *Currents in Biblical Research* (forthcoming). For a more recent study on the use of Hebrew in first-century Palestine, see Guido Baltes, *Hebräisches Evangelium und synoptische Überlieferung: Untersuchungen zum hebräischen Hintergrund der Evangelien* (WUNT, 312; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).
- 38 Hans Dieter Betz, 'Wellhausen's Dictum "Jesus was not a Christian, but a Jew" in Light of Present Scholarship', *Studia Theologica* 45 (1991), pp. 83–110; repr. in his *Antike und Christentum: Gesammelte Aufsätze IV* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), pp. 1–31, esp. 12–16.

know it, has always and, so far as appearances go, only been in Greek. Foster expresses concern over control of the language tradition, claiming that Synoptic similarities in the Greek text require 'close control over oral translation of Aramaic traditions into an oral Greek form' (206). But when we take into account that Jesus may have spoken Greek, at least on occasion, or that Jesus may have spoken Aramaic in a multilingual context where his hearers were Greek users (as well as Aramaic), this raises the possibility that the Jesus tradition, if not all delivered in Greek, was translated and rendered into Greek almost from the outset and transmitted in that form also virtually from the outset. This linguistic situation alleviates the need to posit, as does Foster, that the tradition about Jesus must have been transmitted in written form. This would only be necessitated if translation were required, or, if it were required, that it be done relatively late in the transmission process, neither of which is a necessity. This scenario that we have outlined would provide both the control and transmissional fidelity that Foster so eagerly seeks.

The fourth and final objection Foster raises concerns there being 'no verifiable way for traversing the gap between such post-Easter oral forms and the forms of teaching given by Jesus of Nazareth' (207). Besides this same concern ostensibly applying to form-criticism as well, Foster's presuppositions are obvious—that any oral tradition must be post-Easter, and that such post-Easter traditions must be discontinuous with the teachings of Jesus. Neither holds up to close scrutiny, especially in light of what has already been said above. As we have already noted, there may well be continuity between the sayings and the events and their transmission, because there are forms of oral composition and transmission that rely upon creation in the moment of the act itself. Whether language is an issue or not, the transmitter and witness—according to some forms of orality—may be able to compose and transmit from the time of recounting, and thus bridge the gap between event and utterance, saying and transmission.

### *The Fourth Gospel*

In the final major section of his paper, Foster first, unfortunately, skews the debate from the outset by indicating his take on three of the 'many complexities' (212) regarding historicity of the Fourth Gospel: the length of Jesus' ministry (John is probably more accurate than the Synoptics with a ministry of three years), the fact that the Jesus Seminar concluded that there were no certain (red) or probable (pink) sayings of Jesus in the Gospel (is this finding of the Jesus Seminar important to the subject at hand?), and the Fourth Gospel has the purpose of providing a post-Easter perspective on Jesus (no different than the other Gospels, according to Foster). Foster's primary opponents in this

section are those associated with the John, Jesus, and History group at SBL, more particularly its guiding force, Paul Anderson, and the contributors to the project selected for special mention, along with Craig Blomberg.<sup>39</sup> Foster concludes that most such discussion (excluding Blomberg's) redefines historicity in epistemological terms and thereby precludes debate and, reminiscent of his complaint against social-memory theory, does not engage in exegesis of actual passages. There are eight areas of response to Foster's critique of this area of research.

The first is that, because of his sweeping conclusion based on a restrictive sampling of Johannine scholarship, Foster offers a misleading portrait of recent research on the historicity of John. Even if we set aside such older scholars as William Sanday, Arthur C. Headlam, and J.A.T. Robinson,<sup>40</sup> other scholars to consider are Leon Morris, D.A. Carson, and James Charlesworth, among others,<sup>41</sup> authors who do not appear in the two collected SBL volumes. Among other things, if one examines the work of some of these scholars, one cannot accuse them of using an epistemologically abstruse or strained notion of history, of failing to engage in exegesis of examples, or of similar shortcomings—the ones that Foster addresses to the few he does engage. For example, the interlocking tradition hypothesis first proposed by Morris, and further refined by Carson (as well as Blomberg), addresses instances where there appears to be a bi-directional relationship between the Synoptics and John's Gospel,

39 Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (LNTS, 321; London: T&T Clark, 2006) and 'The Origin and Development of the Johannine *Ego Eimi* Sayings in Cognitive-Critical Perspective', *JSHJ* 9.2 (2011), pp. 139–206; Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher (eds.), *John, Jesus and History. II. Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009); and Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

40 William Sanday, *The Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Macmillan, 1872) and *The Criticism of the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1905); Arthur C. Headlam, *The Fourth Gospel as History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948); and John A.T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (ed. J.F. Coakley; London: SCM, 1985), reflecting some of his earlier findings.

41 Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969) and *The Gospel According to John* (2nd edn; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995); D.A. Carson, 'Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?', in *Gospel Perspectives*, II (ed. R.T. France and David Wenham; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), pp. 83–145 and *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); and James H. Charlesworth, 'The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Gospel According to John', in *Exploring the Gospel of John* (ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), pp. 65–97.

in which in some instances the Fourth Gospel assumes knowledge of the Synoptics and, more importantly, in others where the Synoptics assume knowledge of John.

A second response is that Foster's major complaint against Anderson and his compatriots concerns Anderson's method, not his evidence *per se*. As a result, Foster criticizes Anderson for not providing evidence for his hypotheses (214), accuses him of laying unsubstantiated charges against his opponents (214), implicitly charges him with stating the nonsensical (213, 214, 215), questions the plausibility of his reconstructions (214), accuses him of avoiding the standard questions of historicity (215), posits that he is substituting philosophy for historiography (215), and wishes for the handling of particular textual passages (216). Foster similarly accuses Thatcher of failing to understand historiography and the purpose of the Fourth Gospel (217–18). The problem with Foster's attack is that it amounts to what appears to be question begging. Should Anderson and Thatcher provide evidence for their hypothesis, who would judge the validity of such evidence, who would determine what is plausible or not (surely Anderson did not set out to provide an implausible case but himself found it plausible), and what would the standard historiographical questions look like? And why cannot Anderson treat the issue philosophically rather than having to treat it on Foster's terms? Foster's criticisms do not necessarily mean that the questions posed and answers provided by Anderson and the others are wrong. Rather, they only show that they are the ones that do not suit his taste.

The third response is that Foster, though he criticizes the view of history (or lack of it) used by the Johannine advocates and accuses them of giving implausible explanations, does not himself define his criteria for determining historicity or what constitutes a plausible argument. As a result, he not only simply assumes the three conclusions at the outset of his discussion, but he judges the work of others as if historicity is self-evident. It may be self-evident to him, but he too can be accused of failing to define what constitutes history and what is required to formulate a plausible historiographical argument. Foster states that Anderson's belief lacks plausibility that the Synoptic writers made selections from a body of tradition that included Johannine materials. We note that Foster's response to Anderson is simply to ask whether this or his reconstruction is more plausible, the same response he gives to a similar proposal by John Dominic Crossan (214 n. 68). He may be right in this regard, but if he wishes to accuse others of failing to provide historically based arguments, then his appeals to plausibility need to be more firmly grounded.

This leads to a fourth response, already hinted at above, and that is that Foster seems to admit to relying upon dubious conclusions of the Jesus Seminar as the basis for his arguments. The fact that the Jesus Seminar found no red or

pink statements in the Fourth Gospel, so far as we are concerned, is merely a matter of historical interest and perhaps aesthetics, but hardly determinative as a basis for making any kind of statement regarding the historicity of the Fourth Gospel. Like the Jesus Seminar, fashions come and go and so has colour-coding what Jesus may or may not have said. However, it appears that this, or at least similar kinds of beliefs, has formed the underpinnings of Foster's argument regarding the Fourth Gospel. Although he admits that they are presuppositions to his approach, we can see no difference in such a statement than some of the statements to which he accuses Anderson and others of holding.

A fifth response is that Foster has apparently already arrived at his conclusion regarding the historical nature of the Fourth Gospel when he assumes that it reflects a 'post-Easter revelatory understanding of [Jesus'] significance' (212; note that he says something similar is also true of the Synoptic Gospels—and hence further clouds his previous discussion). This assumption would naturally frame his perspective on the Fourth Gospel and its relationship to historicity. By framing the author of the Fourth Gospel as reflecting a post-Easter revelatory perspective, Foster seems to be saying that this Gospel by definition cannot be historical, at least in the same way as the Synoptic Gospels are, because of several factors. One is that it is post-Easter, and, by implication, it is not directly accessible to the activities and sayings of the historical Jesus but is only reflective of the spiritual significance of the resurrection. By means of this formulation, the Fourth Gospel's post-Easter perspective indicates a spiritual event that is of a different type than the historical events of Jesus' life—and hence, unhistorical. Another is that the Fourth Gospel participates not in a historical but in a revelatory framework. That is, the post-Easter stance indicates that the author is a participant in the revelatory significance of the resurrection, and, from this spiritual rather than historical stance, writes his Gospel. If this understanding is anywhere close to Foster's perspective on the Fourth Gospel, then it is difficult for us to know what sort of historical evidence, level of plausibility, or any other standard would satisfy him to be convinced that the Fourth Gospel is historical in a similar way to the Synoptics.

A sixth response is that, when examples are cited, Foster accuses those who do so of either asserting or assuming the historical reliability of the Johannine account on the basis of purported parallels, rather than linking the account specifically to Jesus. Foster does this with the examples of Bethsaida and Capernaum treated by Mark Appold and the example of the Pool of Siloam by Urban von Wahlde.<sup>42</sup> With little doubt, Appold's is admittedly a weak

42 Mark Appold, 'Jesus' Bethsaida Disciples: A Study in Johannine Origins', in Anderson, Just, and Thatcher (eds.), *John, Jesus and History*, II, pp. 27–34; Urban von Wahlde, 'The Pool of

argument, as Appold fails to support his assertion regarding the Johannine tradition of the Bethsaida origin as more historically reliable than that of the Synoptics, but he instead simply states that 'To unpack this issue further would go beyond the parameters of this essay',<sup>43</sup> as Foster also notes (218–19). However, on the basis of what we have said above, it is difficult for us to see what would convince Foster in any case, as he presupposes the post-Easter perspective of the Fourth Gospel. Concerning the Pool of Siloam, Foster is sceptical that any of the findings of von Wahlde actually contribute to the historical study of Jesus. However, von Wahlde has established the plausibility on legitimate historical grounds that John's account is possible, purposeful, and understandable within its context—thus going far to establishing that the Fourth Gospel includes a reliable reporting of the incident. If Foster is not willing to accept this, then we question whether he is willing to accept any account as historical, and hence he need not have spent so long on an article that had already pre-decided that there is no such thing as historicity in the Fourth Gospel, or perhaps any Gospel for that matter.

A seventh response concerns the Johannine ἐγώ εἰμι statements, where Foster accuses Anderson of shifting the terms of discussion to unrecognizable and unhistorically based language so that there is what he calls 'category confusion' (221; there appear to be some problems with the citations, so that checking Foster's footnotes is difficult). What Foster means by this is that Anderson does not follow the categories used in the Synoptic Gospels' discussion of the ἐγώ εἰμι statements, but instead has tried to find categories that are appropriate to both the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel. We are agnostic whether Anderson has succeeded in his task, but there is at least some merit in his endeavour. There is nothing that says—apart from Foster—that discussion of the ἐγώ εἰμι statements in the four Gospels must use the categories developed for Synoptic study, where these categories themselves have been criticized and disputed as to their form and validity. If one were trying to establish common ground between the Synoptics and John, as Anderson appears to be trying to do, it makes sense to at least begin with language that would invite discovery of common ground, rather than utilizing categories fit for a more narrow purpose.

An eighth and final response is that Foster accuses Blomberg of appealing to the 'criteria [*sic*] of multiple attestation' (223), when he redefines teachings, events, or literary forms or the like that recur across sources. Foster appears to

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Siloam: The Importance of the New Discoveries for Our Understanding of Ritual Immersion in Late Second Temple Judaism and the Gospel of John', in *John, Jesus and History*, II, pp. 155–73.

43 Appold, 'Jesus' Bethsaida Disciples', p. 31.

have a narrower definition of the criterion of multiple attestation than does Blomberg, and in fact even than do others. Within the criterion of multiple attestation there is often found the cross-section method in which comparison is made across independently attested traditions (such as Mark, Q, etc.), but there is also a second form of this criterion in which multiple literary forms, such as sayings, etc., are found in two or more instances within the tradition. The first type was pioneered by F.C. Burkitt, and the second, which Blomberg appears to include within his definition of the criterion (though not accepted by Foster), by C.H. Dodd.<sup>44</sup> This may appear to be a small point, but we believe that it is indicative of Foster's approach in his article. At numerous times, he utilizes and even attempts to impose a narrower definition of critical terms, and holds others to different standards, than are found within the larger field of New Testament scholarship.

### Conclusion

Although Foster has undertaken a large task to analyse and critique three recent areas of historical Jesus research, we remain unconvinced of his critique in several ways. Foster has been highly selective in the scholars that he has chosen for discussion, and even those he has chosen have not been given balanced treatment. The result is that much of his criticism is levelled against only a few examples. At the least, he should have indicated the reasons for his selections. Another problem is that Foster has drawn a number of strong disjunctions between the approach he is criticizing and his underdeveloped alternatives of form- and redaction-criticism. We do not believe that he has shown, and perhaps he cannot show, that these alternatives provide the way forward as he desires. We also disagree on numerous points with the arguments that he has marshalled against the respective positions, not necessarily because we are convinced by the proponents' arguments and approaches, but because we do not believe that Foster has either fully or fairly considered all of the arguments, evidence, or implications. Finally, we believe that each of these areas has critical limitations and weaknesses that must be explored but that, despite Foster's claims, each of these areas has a contribution to offer Jesus research. We hope that our comments on Foster's article have helped to bring some of these areas of further exploration to more light.

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44 Porter, *Criteria for Authenticity*, pp. 82–89.

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