Consensus is rare in New Testament interpretation, but not impossible. Much current Johannine study, for instance, reflects a common opinion regarding the origins and historical context of the Gospel of John. Gone are the days when Bultmann and Dodd could confidently claim a Mandaeian or a Hermetic framework for the Logos theology and the cosmic dualism that underlie the thought of the Gospel.¹ Current trends place the Gospel of John against the backdrop of the Dead Sea Scrolls and other contemporary Judaisms, rather than against the broader Greco-Roman world.² Interestingly, W.D. Davies traces the origins of this shift in emphasis to the very work of Dodd himself.³ Dodd’s *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* is at one and the same time the high water mark of Greek approaches to the Gospel of John as well as a harbinger of Semitic theories.⁴ The shift from Hellenism to Judaism has, of course, not been total. Studies still appear in which John’s Gospel is compared to contemporary Greek and Latin literature.⁵ Unlike the work of Bultmann

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² See, for just one example, John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 205, who counters Bultmann’s claim that John was a Gnostic with the argument that he is better understood as a former Essene.


⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵ For a broad sketch of arguments about the use of both “Jewish” and “Greek” literature in the study of John, see most recently, Harold W. Attridge, “Genre Bending in the Fourth Gospel,” *JBL* 121 (2002) 3–21. For a more elaborate study, with particular attention to the Farewell Discourses, see John T. Fitzgerald, *Jesus’
and Dodd, however, these recent studies focus more on literary, rhetorical and cultural matters and less on the theological and philosophical influences behind the Gospel. The present work will also address literary and narrative concerns in the Gospel of John with the help of classical literature. Such literary questions inevitably lead to theological matters, given the character and purpose of the Gospel of John, but the following arguments are not rooted in classical philosophy as much as they are in classical philology.

Even so, one ancient philosophical dilemma provides a helpful framework for the concerns of the present study. The pre-Socratics were the first to ponder the alternate poles of the One and the Many. Although the world appeared to them to be a collection of random, separate items (trees, humans, snakes), thinkers like Thales (ca. 585 BC) hoped to see an underlying unity to the world’s diversity. For Thales, everything in the universe was actually comprised of water, though in different forms. What appeared, therefore, to be Many (trees, humans, snakes) was actually One (water).

Last Will and Testament: Wills, Friendship and the Fourth Gospel (Atlanta: Scholars Press, forthcoming), which is a comparison of the discourses with Greek and Latin wills. For the application of classical rhetorical categories to the Farewell Discourses, see both George Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) 73–85, and C. Clifton Black, “The Words That You Have Given to Me I Have Given to Them: The Grandeur of Johannine Rhetoric,” in Exploring the Gospel of John, 220–39. It is misleading, of course, to suggest that the terms “Judaism” and “Greco-Roman” correspond to utterly distinct realities in the study of 1st century Christianity or Judaism. But previous work has not adequately brought classical literature to bear on the Gospel of John generally, and on the Farewell Discourses in particular, based on the assumption that the Gospel is more “Jewish” than “Greek.” It is to fill this lack that the present study will focus particularly on Greco-Roman literature. See also, Mark Stibbe, John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism and the Fourth Gospel (SNTSMS 73; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 129–30. For a recent discussion on the history of this problem, as well as efforts at a new way forward, see the essays in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed., Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001). Finally, a comment of Paul Holloway, “Left Behind: Jesus’ Consolation of His Disciples in John 13,31–17,26,” ÆNW (forthcoming: January, 2005) 35 n. 6, deserves repeating here. After insisting that the Gospel of John can be profitably read in light of classical literature Holloway writes,

The distinction here between “Jewish” and “Greco-Roman” is not altogether satisfactory, since first-century Judaism was by definition a Greco-Roman religion. Indeed, the Jewish testament derives its unique generic form not from the fact that it is “Jewish” versus “Greco-Roman,” but from the fact that it draws almost exclusively on earlier “biblical” models. I do not mean to imply that by following Greco-Roman models the author of John has consciously turned his back on Jewish traditions, or for that matter that he was even aware of employing one type of death scene versus another.