The field of biblical interpretation was forged in some of the most intense controversies of modern academia. Conflicts over blasphemy, secularism, modernism, historical integrity, and ideology (to identify but a few) have not only shaped, but also scarred the institutional practices of biblical interpretation. The outworking of these intellectual battles has affected almost all participants in related discourses; so much energy has been invested in upholding or assailing the legitimacy of one position or another that the preponderance of research in biblical studies tends to adhere resolutely to disciplinary mandates—or flippantly to flout them, observing a sort of anti-disciplinary regimen. At the heart of these predictable gestures lies an anxiety about the legitimacy of the interpretive repertoires that constitute biblical studies as a reputable discipline in the eyes of the university, the church, the government, or the general public. Only under very peculiar circumstances do biblical interpreters step out of the confines of the ominous shadow of interpretive security.

The essays in this collection constitute an offering toward a vision of biblical interpretation untroubled by the stresses of disciplinary (in)security. We are not so rash as to assert that none of these essays is coloured by the green shades of disciplinary envy, the red of heated polemic, the purple of bruised self-assertion; indeed, the very concern to have escaped disciplinary anxiety would betray the persistent effect of that anxiety. The collection gathered here aims not to have overcome anxiety (any more than a perceptive analysand presumes to have recovered from obsession or depression), but to demonstrate the possibility of recognising a problem, moving toward addressing it, and venturing forward with a measure of relief and chastened confidence.

Whether we frame our recuperation as intellectual maturation or as the Aufhebung of disciplinary self-justification—or attach any other label to it—the recurrent exuberance with which biblical interpreters embrace new methods, new interdisciplines, testifies to a restlessness close to the heart of the practice. Each newly-adopted supplement surges, plateaus, engenders conflicts over the true or correct or legitimate details of the
approach, becomes tedious to onlookers who once thought it exotically illuminating, and gradually wanes to a core group of unwavering advocates. The new-then-old approaches do not, however, disarm the mechanism that produces securely unimaginative interpretations (on one hand) and fruitlessly fanciful interpretations (on the other); these conjoined twins of opposite disposition both owe their self-constitution to their reactive response to security.

Anxiety over interpretive security encourages practitioners to erect barriers to sequester proper, pure, legitimate textual behaviour from the disreputable conduct of outsiders. The higher the walls, the more extensive the concertina wire, the more saturated the minefield, the less room for growth and change within the citadel. To the extent that arbiters of interpretive legitimacy construct rigid criteria by which to recognise acceptable interpretation, they retard understanding. Anxiety over interpretive security tends to keep at bay just the sources of renewal and enrichment that might sustain the community of interpreters.

Such anxieties around secure modes of interpretive production are surely tied to larger contestations around what biblical studies is for; what the arts and humanities are for; and, in the broadest sense, what a university education is for. As Stefan Collini notes, asking what something is for is asking for trouble, a process of infinite regress in a hall of glassy mirrors.\(^1\) Of course, such a question smacks of utilitarian economic frameworks: how are you going to argue that your explorations in Akkadian verb forms “has a direct impact on economic growth by encouraging innovation and providing new and cost-effective ways of meeting the needs of business, industry and services”?\(^2\) The question is worth asking however, even if only as a starting point, pointing to broader questions around disciplinariness and its connotations. The recent debates between James Crossley and Larry Hurtado provide a very useful overview of the issues at stake, which

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2 Rick Rylance, “Innovation is about anticipating tomorrow’s challenges.” *The Independent* 10th May 2012. http://www.independent.co.uk/student/postgraduate/postgraduate-study/research-matters-innovation-is-about-anticipating-tomorrows-challenges-7733186.html. Accessed 29th May 2013. The worrying thing here is that this is not written by a government official; this is Prof. Rick Rylance, AHRC Chief Executive and Chair of RCUK Executive Group, who, one surmises, must be caught between a rock and a hard place in trying to balance the perceived statuses between STEM and AHSS subjects in the current economic climate. As an aside, and perhaps protesting too much, it is worth counting how many times he uses the word ‘innovation’ to define the university’s task, particularly striking in such a short article.