

Zeitschrift: Theologische Zeitschrift
Herausgeber: Theologische Fakultät der Universität Basel
Band: 36 (1980)
Heft: 6

Artikel: The Argument from Order and the Synoptic Problem
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-878468>

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The Argument from Order and the Synoptic Problem

The Synoptic Problem is once more an open question, and the traditional two-document hypothesis is under attack from many sides. Two recent studies of the history of research on this topic, by W. R. Farmer and H. H. Stoldt¹, have raised serious doubts about the validity of the arguments which led to the almost unanimous acceptance of the two-document hypothesis in the earlier part of this century. In particular, the logic of the so-called “argument from order” in support of Markan priority has been heavily criticized, and the argument is now widely believed to be logically fallacious. However, Farmer has sought to show that it was this argument which was fundamental in the establishment of the two-document hypothesis in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In summarizing his position, he writes:

“It was the phenomenon of the order of the narratives in the three synoptics that convincingly indicated to Wrede and his generation that Matthew and Luke were later than Mark.”²

“The virtual certainty of early twentieth-century scholarship that Mark came before Matthew and Luke rested very largely on the argument from order.”³

This claim, of the centrality of the argument from order, is supported in Farmer’s work by a detailed description of how, in the course of the debate, the terms of reference in the argument were changed, thereby rendering the argument invalid. Farmer refers to the work of Butler in claiming that the argument from order only proves the greater originality of the Markan order on the assumption that all three synoptists are copying an Ur-gospel. If, however, the three gospels are directly related to each other, the facts only show that Mark occupies a “medial” position, i.e. one which provides a connecting link between the other two in any diagram of relationships. Thus those who assume

¹ W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem*, London – New York, 1964; 2nd edn. Dillsboro, 1976; H. H. Stoldt, *Geschichte und Kritik der Markushypothese*, Göttingen, 1977.

² Farmer, *The Two-Document Hypothesis as a Methodological Criterion in Synoptic Research*, AThR 48 (1966), 380–396, on p. 387.

³ Farmer, *The Lachmann Fallacy*, NTS 14 (1968), 441–443, on p. 442.

direct literary dependence between the gospels, and who still appeal to the argument from order to prove Markan priority, are using a logically fallacious argument. Butler called this the “Lachmann fallacy”.⁴

Most of Farmer’s discussion about the use of the argument from order concerns the debate in England. Here, Farmer claims that the essay of Woods⁵ was fundamental: that Woods repeated Lachmann’s argument from order, but prepared the way for later developments by narrowing the gap between Mark and the alleged Ur-Marcus to practical insignificance.⁶ Woods’ essay convinced Sanday and Hawkins, and was assumed in the latter’s detailed linguistic studies in his *Horae Synopticae*.⁷ Streeter later misunderstood the logical value of Hawkins’ work in claiming that Hawkins’ studies contributed evidence for the priority of Mark, since Hawkins was only building on the work of Woods.⁸ Burkitt completed the progression (started by Woods) of reducing to nothing the difference between Mark and Ur-Marcus.⁹ Finally, Streeter advocated the identification of Ur-Marcus and Mark, and yet used the argument from order as if it were still valid.¹⁰ This very brief summary of Farmer’s detailed history of the debate shows that, if he is right in his analysis, the two-document hypothesis was built on a very insecure foundation. His historical study therefore deserves careful investigation.

The first point which must be clarified is precisely what one is talking about when one refers to “the argument from order”. When Farmer writes that it was the phenomenon of order which convinced Wrede and others of the priority of Mark, he clarifies the position as follows:

“It was the peculiar pattern of agreement and disagreement in the sequence of material among the three synoptics. Frequently all three agree. Often Matthew and Mark agree against Luke. Often Mark and Luke agree against Matthew. But Luke and Matthew

⁴ B. C. Butler, *The Originality of St. Matthew*, Cambridge, 1951, pp. 62–71; Farmer (n. 1), p. 50.

⁵ F. H. Woods, *The Origin and Mutual Relation of the Synoptic Gospels*, SBEc Vol. II (1890), pp. 59–104.

⁶ Farmer (n. 1), p. 65.

⁷ Farmer (n. 1), p. 63 f.; cf. W. Sanday, *A Survey of the Synoptic Question*, Exp. 4th Ser. Vol. III (1891), p. 181; also J. C. Hawkins, *Horae Synopticae*, Oxford 1899, p. 93 f.

⁸ Farmer (n. 1), p. 153 f.; cf. B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, London, 1924, p. 164.

⁹ Farmer (n. 1), pp. 90–93; cf. F. C. Burkitt, *The Gospel History and its Transmission*, Edinburgh, 1911, pp. 33–64.

¹⁰ Farmer (n. 1), p. 49 f.; Cf. Streeter (n. 8), p. 161 f.

almost never agree against Mark. According to Wrede and his generation, this peculiar state of affairs is convincing evidence that Matthew and Luke have independently copied Mark, because, looked at from this perspective, the order of material in Mark is almost always supported either by Matthew, or by Luke, and often by both.”¹¹

Thus, according to Farmer, the phenomenon in question is the lack of agreement in order between Matthew and Luke against Mark: Mark is supported by one or the other, but they never agree against him. It is the deduction of Markan priority from these facts which was shown by Butler to be fallacious and labelled the “Lachmann fallacy”.

However, while an argument from order is usually dated back to Lachmann’s article of 1835,¹² there are really at least two quite separate arguments which have been used at various times. It is quite clear that Lachmann himself never committed the fallacy which now bears his name, since his own argument was quite different.¹³ Lachmann himself argued on the basis of the disagreements (not agreements) between the order of events in each gospel. He noted that the differences between Matthew and Mark, and between Luke and Mark, are less than those between Matthew and Luke. With this in mind, Lachmann claimed that reasons could be given for possible changes of Mark’s order by Matthew and Luke, but not *vice versa*. Lachmann’s argument thus depends on the relative plausibility of the redaction involved on different source hypotheses: Matthew’s and Luke’s changes were plausible, whereas the changes which Mark would have had to make to Matthew and/or Luke, if he were secondary to them, were not. There are thus two quite distinct arguments involved in the debate: (i) the argument appealing

¹¹ Farmer (n. 2), 387.

¹² K. Lachmann, *De ordine narrationum in evangeliis synopticis*, ThStKr 8 (1835), 570–590; for an English translation, see N. H. Palmer, Lachmann’s Argument, NTS 13 (1967), 368–378. Lachmann was not, however, the first to appeal to the phenomenon of order in the study of the Synoptic Problem. He may have been the first to use it to try to show the greater originality of the Markan order, but an appeal to order had already been made by J. J. Griesbach, arguing for the hypothesis which now bears his name, viz. that Mark is the latest gospel to be written and follows the order of Matthew and Luke alternately. See his *Commentatio qua Marci Evangelium totum e Matthaei et Lucae commentariis deceptum esse monstratur*, Jena 1825, pp. 370 ff.; for an English translation, see B. Orchard and T. R. W. Longstaff (eds.), J. J. Griesbach: Synoptic and Text-Critical Studies 1776–1976, Cambridge, 1978, pp. 108 ff.

¹³ Butler (n. 4), p. 63; Farmer (n. 1), p. 66; also F. Neirynck, The Argument from Order and St. Luke’s Transpositions, EThL 49 (1973), 784–815, on p. 792: “We all know about a Lachmann fallacy which was not Lachmann’s fallacy, but there is also the Lachmann argument which was not Lachmann’s”.

ling to the lack of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark, and (ii) the argument appealing to the plausibility of explanations of why Matthew and Luke might have changed Mark's order. Thus before one labels any "argument from order" as fallacious by referring to Butler's analysis of the "Lachmann fallacy", one must be clear about which argument is being used.¹⁴

Farmer claims that Wrede and others did use the argument based on the lack of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark. However, Wrede said simply:

"Ich stimme namentlich Holtzmann – und ich darf hinzufügen, auch Wernle – völlig bei, wenn er bemerkt, die Stärke der Markushypothese liege recht eigentlich darin, dass der Reihenfolge der Erzählungen bei Matthäus und Lukas die Reihenfolge bei Markus zu Grunde liege."¹⁵

He referred in a footnote to Holtzmann's *Einleitung*, and there it is clear that the argument is essentially Lachmann's own (i.e. [ii] above, not [i]). Holtzmann wrote:

"Nimmt man aber die Reihenfolge der einzelnen Erzählungen bei Markus und stellt die bei Matthäus zur einen, die bei Lukas zur andern, so kann man Schritt für Schritt nachweisen, dass jeder der beiden andern eben diese Reihenfolge als die ursprüngliche voraussetzt."¹⁶

It was thus the detailed comparison of Mark with each of the other two gospels (cf. "Schritt für Schritt") which was important, rather than any general observations about the lack of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark.¹⁷ Wernle's method of arguing about the phenomenon of order was similar: he compared Mark's order with that of Matthew and Luke in turn and suggested reasons why each of the latter might have

¹⁴ In his article: *Modern Developments of Griesbach's Hypothesis*, NTS 23 (1977), 275–295, on p. 293 f., Farmer has recognized the distinction between these two arguments. However, he does not say there that this has implications for many detailed points in his history of the study of the Synoptic Problem, where he appears to assume that there is only one argument from order. This article aims, in part, to draw out some of those implications.

¹⁵ W. Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*, Göttingen 1901, p. 148 f.

¹⁶ H. J. Holtzmann, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Freiburg 1885, p. 347.

¹⁷ This is even clearer in Holtzmann's earlier book, where he argued for the greater originality of the Markan order (and hence the impossibility of Matthean priority) "da... aus ihm (i.e. Mark) allein die Abweichungen der beiden anderen sich erklären". (*Die Synoptischen Evangelien*, Leipzig 1863, p. 56).

altered Mark.¹⁸ This is, in terms of its logic, precisely Lachmann's own argument. It is clear, therefore, that the argument referred to by Wrede was not the one shown by Butler to be fallacious.¹⁹ Lachmann's argument is not necessarily irreversible, nor even logically probative, since it depends in part on no reasons being found which might make Mark's changes of Matthew's and Luke's orders plausible. Such a judgement is necessarily subjective, and it may be that the changes were made in this way but the true reasons for the changes have not yet been discovered. Nevertheless, the argument is of value in that it seeks to go beyond purely formal considerations (at which level almost any solution to the Synoptic Problem is theoretically possible) to consider what is a plausible theory, by analysing the differences between the gospels and the redactional changes which a source hypothesis involves.²⁰ Further, the argument does not depend for its validity on the existence of an Ur-gospel. Since the argument is solely concerned with the differences between the gospels as they now stand, it is quite independent of whether the gospels themselves are directly, or only indirectly, related to each other. In any case, it is clear that the conviction of much German scholarship about the priority of Mark was not based on the so-called "Lachmann fallacy" but, at least in part, on a quite different argument from order.

What then can we say about the argument from order which does appeal to the lack of agreement against Mark, i.e. the "Lachmann fallacy", which did undoubtedly enter the debate at times? Before considering the use of the argument by scholars in the past, one should note a few features of the argument itself. Its logic is, in one sense, essentially unrelated to the phenomenon of order. The latter only enters the discussion because the lack of Matthew-Luke agreement against

¹⁸ P. Wernle, *Die Synoptische Frage*, Freiburg 1899, pp. 6–9 (Luke and Mark), pp. 127–130 (Matthew and Mark).

¹⁹ Thus when Farmer continues, after referring to Wrede, to speak of Butler's work as exposing the logical fallacy of the argument from order (n. 2, 388), he has confused two quite separate arguments.

²⁰ Cf. the similar remarks of G. D. Fee, *A Text-Critical Look at the Synoptic Problem*, NT 22 (1980), 12–28, on p. 14: "It must be insisted upon that although all things are theoretically possible, not all possible things are equally probable. The question is not, But is it possible that...? To which the answer usually must be, yes. The question is, Is it more probable? In the final analysis, text critics and Synoptic critics are historians and must ultimately come down on the side of what they think is most probable, given all the data now in possession."

Mark is virtually absolute in this respect. Basically, the argument proceeds by claiming that the observed lack of such agreements is too striking a phenomenon to be coincidental, and that the literary relationships must therefore preclude the possibility of such agreements.²¹ Now Butler's work has shown convincingly that a position of relative priority for Mark is not the only relationship which would exclude the possibility of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark. A "medial" position for Mark would do this just as well. Butler himself opts for a Matthew-Mark-Luke line of dependence, and Farmer has extended the list of possibilities to include the Griesbach hypothesis (i.e. Mark dependent on both Matthew and Luke). It is now well-known that, as a formal argument, the logic is faulty if it assumes that Markan priority is the only solution which will fit the facts. However, it should be noted that it is only the logic itself which is fallacious. Markan priority is certainly a possible hypothesis and consistent with the facts: it is just that there are other source hypotheses which also remain possible.²² So the argument could still have value if it were supported by other considerations, e.g. by separate arguments which might exclude the possibility of other "medial" positions for Mark. The argument is only fallacious when one assumes that it, and it alone, proves the priority of Mark. It remains to be seen how far the theory of Markan priority was based on this "fallacy".

One of the earliest appeals to the lack of agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark to support the theory of Markan priority was by Weisse:

"Auch in denjenigen Partien, welche alle drei Synoptiker gemeinschaftlich haben, ist die Einstimmung der beiden andern immer eine durch Markus vermittelte: das heisst, die beiden andern stimmen in diesen Partien, sowohl was die Anordnung im Ganzen, als was die Wortföigung im Einzelnen betrifft, immer in so weit unter sich zusammen, als sie auch mit Markus zusammenstimmen, so oft sie aber von Markus abweichen, weichen sie... jederzeit auch gegenseitig von einander ab."²³

²¹ See Palmer (n.12), 368.

²² Butler (n.4), p.66; also G.M. Styler, *The Priority of Mark*, Excursus IV in C.F.D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, London 1962, on p.225; Neirynck (n.13), 796.

²³ C.H. Weisse, *Die Evangelische Geschichte* Vol. I, Leipzig 1838, p. 72 f. See Stoldt (n.1), p.132 f., for Weisse as having committed the Lachmann fallacy; also Farmer (n.1), p.23: Weisse "appears to have been the first to slip unconsciously into the fallacy of thinking that Lachmann's argument from order had any validity on these terms" (i.e. if the three gospels are directly related to each other). Since Lachmann's own argument is in

However, this was by no means the only argument brought forward by Weisse. Elsewhere, he referred approvingly to Lachmann's original argument, and claimed that the differences between Matthew's and Mark's orders were explicable if Matthew was changing Mark, but not *vice versa*, the same being true for Luke and Mark.²⁴ He also appealed to Papias' testimony, which, he believed, showed that Mark was the earliest gospel, written under the influence of Peter.²⁵ He claimed that the presence of the birth stories implied a later date for Matthew and Luke, since these were not the concern of the apostolic age.²⁶ He believed that the small, incidental details in Mark's narrative could only be explained if Mark was filling out oral tradition.²⁷ He appealed to the primitive awkward nature of Mark's Greek which was also very Hebraic, but which was nevertheless characterized by "das Gepräge einer frischen Natürlichkeit und anspruchlosen Lebendigkeit", whereas Matthew and Luke were smoother and abbreviated Mark's longer account.²⁸ He appealed too to Mark's apparently more disconnected structure, which seemed to have grown out of scattered fragments.²⁹ It was only after all these considerations that Weisse gave his argument appealing to the lack of agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark. This argument must not therefore be seen in isolation. In Weisse's own presentation the argument has confirmatory value, without necessarily being seen as logically probative.

If, however, the first person to use this argument was Weisse, the classic presentation of an argument from order, and the one that has exerted the most influence, is that of Woods. Farmer writes of Woods' essay as follows:

"The irresistible character of Woods' logic resolves itself into an elaborate presentation of the old argument from order first set forth by Lachmann."³⁰

This is, at least in part, quite true, as I shall try to show. However, Farmer continues:

fact quite independent of the existence of an Ur-gospel, one must assume that Farmer's reference is to Weisse's appeal to the lack of Matthew-Luke agreements against Mark, even though Weisse did refer to Lachmann's own argument as well. (See next note).

²⁴ Weisse (n. 23), p. 38 f.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 29 ff.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 56 f.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 64–66.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

³⁰ Farmer (n. 1), p. 65.

“The important point is that his entire case falls to the ground unless Matthew, Mark, and Luke all independently copied some Ur-gospel.”³¹

But this is now confusing the two arguments, Lachmann’s original one and the one analysed by Butler. For Lachmann’s original argument does not logically depend on the prior assumption of a common *Grundschrift*. It is simply concerned with the changes allegedly made by the secondary writer(s). Moreover, it should also be noted that Woods himself assumed from the outset the existence of a common *Grundschrift*, and excluded the possibility of direct use of one gospel by another.³² Hence, he was presupposing the conditions under which Butler claims that the “Lachmann argument” (i.e. the appeal to lack of agreement against Mark) is not fallacious. Indeed Woods never abolished the distinction between Mark and Ur-Marcus, for he believed that John the Baptist’s preaching was certainly in the Ur-gospel and had been omitted by Mark, and he thought that the same might be true of the Matthean account of the resurrection appearances.³³

In fact, Woods’ total argument was more complex than Farmer suggests, and it proceeded in a number of stages. He first argued that the order of the common source was probably to be seen in the points where at least two of the three gospels agreed. Since Mark’s is almost always supported by one or both of Matthew and Luke, and since Matthew and Luke never agree in order against Mark, the common order must have coincided with Mark’s.³⁴ This is, of course, essentially the argument based on the lack of agreement against Mark. But before one labels this “proof” as “fallacious”, one must note what else Woods said. For he immediately recognized that the originality of Mark’s order was not the only explanation of the facts. He saw clearly that the Griesbach hypothesis would also explain the facts and he therefore took care to offer quite different arguments to exclude that possibility as the next stage in his essay.³⁵ Thus Woods clearly appreciated the logical limitations of

³¹ Ibid.

³² Woods (n. 5), p. 60f.

³³ Ibid., p. 94. Farmer’s comment, that “the effect of Woods’ essay, therefore, was to narrow the gap between Ur-Marcus and Mark to practical insignificance” (n. 1, p. 65), is perhaps slightly misleading. Others may have read Woods in this way later, but Woods’ own views are clear.

³⁴ Woods (n. 5), pp. 61–66.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 66f. Woods claimed that the Griesbach hypothesis could not account for the widespread omissions which Mark must have made, nor for the way in which Mark

his argument appealing to the lack of agreement against Mark. Finally, he went one stage further and devoted a long section to showing that Matthew's and Luke's differences from Mark's order could easily be explained if Mark's order was original.³⁶ This is, in terms of its logic, essentially Lachmann's original argument. Moreover, as such, it is independent of the theory of a common *Grundschrift*.

Thus it was only after all three considerations – the lack of agreement against Mark, the exclusion of the Griesbach hypothesis, and an attempt to justify the claim that both Matthew and Luke individually presuppose Mark's order – that Woods claimed to have shown the greater originality of the Markan order. The logic is thus sound, and in the end his argument is independent of the theory of a common *Grundschrift*. The very close relationship between Mark and the Ur-gospel (later to be identified) is no fatal flaw, and it is wrong to say that Woods' "entire case falls to the ground unless Matthew, Mark, and

must have selected his material; further, the Matthew-Luke relationship was inexplicable. In his defence of the Griesbach hypothesis, Farmer attempts to answer these criticisms (n.1), p. 68 f. However, not all his arguments are convincing. He says that the omission of birth stories etc. could equally well be used as an argument to prove that John is prior to Matthew and Luke. (However, is John dependent on, and conflating, two sources which both contained birth stories? John and Griesbach's Mark are not necessarily in comparable positions with respect to their sources.) Further, Farmer claims that omissions are just as much of a problem for the two-document hypothesis: since, if Mark knew Q, he chose to omit most of Q; or, if Mark did not know Q, how to explain the omissions which Matthew and Luke made from Mark? (However, the dependence of Mark on Q is not easy to establish. And if Mark is not dependent on Q, the omissions from Mark by Matthew and Luke, assuming Markan priority, are not extensive and can be explained individually fairly easily, cf. W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, London 1975, p. 57. Certainly they are much less extensive than Mark's omissions according to the Griesbach hypothesis.) Mark's redactional procedure is said by Farmer to be no fatal flaw to the Griesbach hypothesis if one tries impartially to rethink what Mark must have done. (I have attempted to do this at a number of different levels in a study on the Contemporary Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis, forthcoming in the SNTS Monograph series. The results gave no support for the Griesbach hypothesis, since Mark often appeared to be totally inconsistent in his alleged redaction.) On the relationship between Matthew and Luke, Farmer simply says that adherents of the Griesbach hypothesis had failed to agree on this question. – Woods therefore did offer serious objections to the Griesbach hypothesis. Further, whatever one may make of these objections today, it is the case that they appear to have received no answer at the time. Thus, in view of the lack of such reply, the general acceptance of his arguments against the Griesbach hypothesis is quite intelligible.

³⁶ Woods (n. 5), pp. 68–79.

Luke all independently copied some Ur-gospel.”³⁷ Such a judgement applies only to the first part of Woods’ essay, and ignores the complexity of his later argument.

It is clear that Woods’ essay was very influential in convincing Sanday and Hawkins, and through them many others, of Markan priority. Both these writers were also apparently aware of the reasoning involved. Sanday summarized Woods’ argument in his article in Smith’s *Dictionary of the Bible* as follows:

“By assuming the order of the narratives observed by St. Mark it is not only possible but easy to explain the order of the other two Evangelists; while, on the other hand, by assuming the order of St. Matthew or St. Luke, we should be wholly unable to explain the order of the remaining gospels.”³⁸

This then is a clear, succinct statement of Lachmann’s original form of the argument from order and is not fallacious. Hawkins, too, does not appear to have been guilty of any fallacious reasoning. In the passage in *Oxford Studies*, referred to by Butler as evidence that Hawkins “perhaps” committed the Lachmann fallacy,³⁹ Hawkins simply pointed to the fact that Matthew and Luke agree with Mark in their general arrangement and order; he then noted some exceptions to this, and said that, in the case of Matthew and Mark, “as a rule it is the latter (i.e. Mark) which exhibits the chief signs of originality”.⁴⁰ In the case of Luke and Mark, the whole of Hawkins’ essay was devoted to showing that, where Luke had apparently diverged considerably from Mark’s order, he was not using Mark’s version at all. Thus Hawkins was again repeating essentially Lachmann’s argument, i.e. that Mark’s order is shown to be more original by intrinsic considerations. There is no appeal to the lack of agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark.

A significant development in the discussion came with the work of Abbott, who introduced his famous propositional argument into the debate:

³⁷ Farmer (n.1), p. 65.

³⁸ W. Sanday, art. “Gospels”, in Sir W. Smith and J. M. Fuller (eds.), *A Dictionary of the Bible*, London, 1893, p. 1224a.

³⁹ Hawkins, *Three Limitations to St. Luke’s Use of St. Mark’s Gospel*, in W. Sanday (ed.), *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, pp. 29–94, on p. 29 f.; cf. Butler (n.4), p. 63.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

“In the case of three narratives, A, B, and C (e.g. Mark, Matthew, and Luke), if A contains much that is common to A and B alone, and much that is common to A and C alone, and all that is common to B and C, it follows generally that A contains the whole of some narrative from which B and C have borrowed parts.”⁴¹

Here is the argument appealing to the lack of agreement against Mark, pruned down to its logical essentials and abstracted from its specific application to the phenomenon of order. Many have seen, therefore, in Abbott’s reasoning the origin of the Lachmann fallacy.⁴² However, as in the case of Weisse and Woods, it would be wrong to see this argument in isolation from the rest of Abbott’s work.

In passing, it should be noted that Abbott himself believed in the existence of an Ur-gospel,⁴³ and on this assumption, his own propositional argument does have some validity. More important is the fact that Abbott, like Woods, realized that his argument was not in itself logically conclusive, for he immediately went on to recognize that the Griesbach hypothesis would fit the facts just as well.⁴⁴ Thus he repeated his arguments against that hypothesis which he had used in his earlier article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* of 1879.⁴⁵ Abbott can justly be

⁴¹ E. A. Abbott and W. G. Rushbrooke, *The Common Tradition of the Synoptic Gospels*, London 1884, p. vii.

⁴² Palmer (n. 12), 377; R. Morgenthaler, *Statistische Synopse*, Zürich, 1972, p. 282.

⁴³ Abbott (n. 41), p. vi.

⁴⁴ Butler, in claiming that Abbott was guilty of committing the Lachmann fallacy (n. 4, p. 63), refers only to Abbott’s article in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. This is, however, a very compressed, and much abbreviated, exposition of Abbott’s argument, and it seems justified to look elsewhere, especially to his presentation in *Common Tradition*, for a better evaluation of his case. A similar full exposition is to be found in his later work, *The Corrections of Mark*, London 1901, pp. 47–50.

⁴⁵ Art. “Gospels”, p. 791. Abbott had appealed to the impossibility (as he saw it) of a secondary writer’s constructing “a narrative, graphic, abrupt, and in all respects the opposite of artificial, which shall contain every phrase and word that is common to both (i.e. his sources)”. Farmer, in his consideration of this, appears to have slightly misunderstood Abbott’s argument. He says that the latter’s plausibility depends on the alleged absurdity of a writer producing such a narrative from his sources. “But this would not seem absurd if the writer intended to do exactly that” (n. 1, p. 75). However, Abbott’s point was not that this was an absurd undertaking in itself; rather, the degree of success which Mark must have achieved seemed so improbably high as to be inconceivable. Farmer also claims that Abbott underestimated the number of Matthew-Luke agreements in the passage considered (Mk 12, 1–11 and pars.): there are agreements in omission, word-order and case, so that “the text of Mark is not exactly the same as Matthew and Luke when they agree” (*ibid.*, p. 76). However, this is not quite relevant: even allowing for minor changes by Mark in word-order and grammar, Mark’s success in including just the

accused of ignoring the Augustinian hypothesis,⁴⁶ but nevertheless, it is clear that he was aware of the limitations of his propositional argument.

Abbott's argument was taken over and used by Burkitt, who applied it in his lectures of 1906 to the phenomenon of order.⁴⁷ In an earlier work, however, Burkitt too had recognized that the propositional argument in itself was inconclusive, and that the Griesbach hypothesis would fit the facts just as well. Indeed, he repeated Abbott's argument against that hypothesis verbatim, thus admitting the logical importance of this to complete any "proof".⁴⁸ He omitted it in his later work, where, having stated the facts (essentially the lack of agreement against Mark), he concluded simply: "there is only one answer".⁴⁹ In this Burkitt does lay himself open to the charge of committing the Lachmann fallacy. However, the later lecture was in part an abbreviation of his earlier one, with no acknowledged or discernible development in his thought, and so it seems reasonable to exonerate Burkitt, and to include both lectures in any evaluation of his contribution to the study of the Synoptic Problem.

Burkitt disagreed with Abbott on one point in that he proceeded to argue for an identification of Ur-Marcus with Mark. Farmer suggests that this now completely nullifies the force of Abbott's argument as taken over by Burkitt and applied to the phenomenon of order.⁵⁰ However, such a criticism would suggest that Burkitt believed the

common vocabulary of both his sources seemed to Abbott too good to be true. Farmer is right to point to the inconclusive nature of the argument, since it does make some assumptions about what one might plausibly expect from a writer like Mark conflating his sources. See however the comments of Fee (n. 20 above) and my own comments in the final paragraph of this article.

⁴⁶ Palmer (n. 12), 377.

⁴⁷ Burkitt (n. 9), p. 36 f.

⁴⁸ See his *Two Lectures on the Gospels*, London, 1901, p. 47 f.

⁴⁹ Burkitt (n. 9), p. 37.

⁵⁰ Farmer (n. 1), p. 90 f.; also A "Skeleton in the Closet" of Gospel Research, BR 6 (1961), 18–41, on p. 25, though Farmer appears to attribute mistakenly the argument to Lachmann himself. Whether Burkitt himself attributed the argument to Lachmann is doubtful (*contra* Farmer). Burkitt referred to Lachmann as the "first to formulate it", and the "it" was not the argument itself but simply the conclusion that Mark is closest to the source used by Matthew and Luke (n. 9, p. 37). He does not appear to have thought that Lachmann was originally responsible for the logical argument which he had borrowed from Abbott, a debt explicitly acknowledged in his earlier lecture (n. 48, p. 47).

argument to be logically probative. In fact Burkitt, as his earlier use of Abbott's objections to the Griesbach hypothesis made clear, was well aware that the argument needed supplementation. Moreover, when such supplementation is added, i.e. by excluding other possibilities which are still consistent with the lack of agreement against Mark (though Burkitt, like Abbott, ignored the Augustinian hypothesis), the argument is not logically fallacious, even when Mark and Ur-Marcus are identified.

Many of the older arguments in favour of the two-document hypothesis may be said to have reached their culmination in the work of Streeter.⁵¹ As is the case with all those mentioned so far, his work must be considered in its totality. Streeter gave his arguments for Markan priority under five heads: (i) the agreement in content, (ii) and (iii) the lack of agreement against Mark in wording and order, (iv) the tendency of Matthew and Luke to improve and refine Mark's language, and (v) the way in which Markan and non-Markan material are distributed in Matthew and Luke. It is difficult to say what relative importance Streeter attached to any one of these arguments, and precisely what he thought each argument indicated. The situation is complicated by a different arrangement of the arguments in Streeter's two expositions. In his earlier article of 1920, Streeter set down his five considerations one after the other, and then said at the end that these showed that "Matthew and Luke must have made use of a source which both in content, in order, and in actual wording was extremely like Mark."⁵² However, in *The Four Gospels* (written four years later) Streeter inserted a short paragraph after only the first three arguments saying that, since Matthew and Luke practically never agree against Mark in content, wording and order, "this is only explicable if they followed an authority which in content, in wording and in arrangement was all but identical with Mark."⁵³ This is, of course, essentially the "Lachmann fallacy" and has given rise to the various criticisms of Streeter. If he thought that these three considerations alone proved Markan priority to the exclusion of every other source hypothesis, then he can be justly criticized. However, there is the problem of whether he thought that his other

⁵¹ Streeter (n. 8); also his earlier article on "The Synoptic Problem", in Peake's Commentary on the Bible, London 1920, pp. 672–680.

⁵² Peake's Commentary (n. 51), p. 674.

⁵³ Streeter (n. 8), p. 162.

arguments were merely subsidiary (and the arrangement in his earlier article suggests otherwise). There is too the problem of what precise role he thought each argument played in the discussion as a whole, and this becomes relevant when Streeter's discussion of the Augustinian hypothesis is considered. At the time Streeter wrote, this was the only alternative to the theory of Markan priority (apart from Ur-Marcus theories) which was seriously considered. Lukan priority was never entertained, and the Griesbach hypothesis was believed to have been adequately answered by the arguments of Woods and Abbott. The Augustinian hypothesis, on the other hand, had been revived in 1922 by Jameson.⁵⁴

Streeter's manner of dealing with Jameson's work, and the way in which he apparently ignored Jameson's criticisms of his earlier arguments, earn some of Farmer's harshest rebukes.⁵⁵ Yet before this judgement is accepted too hastily, Streeter's writings deserve closer examination. Streeter did in fact acknowledge a recent attempt to revive the Augustinian hypothesis (though he did not mention Jameson's name). However, he dismissed the hypothesis on the grounds that Mark's procedure in using Matthew would have been apparently totally incoherent. For Mark would have abbreviated Matthew's total contents by omitting several sections, including the Sermon on the Mount, but only, apparently, to amplify the wording in the pericopes which he did retain. Such a redactional procedure seemed so incomprehensible to Streeter that he said that only a "lunatic" would have proceeded in the way Mark is alleged by the hypothesis to have done. On the other hand, Matthean dependence on Mark was much easier to envisage: Matthew abbreviated Mark's wording in order to make space for the extra material which he had at his disposal.⁵⁶ It is also very important to note that Streeter included this paragraph in his book *before* giving his five main arguments for Markan priority. Thus his conclusions about the priority of Mark were only deduced after the exclusion of the possibility of Matthean priority. When this is observed, Streeter's logic becomes rather less fallacious than might appear at first sight.

⁵⁴ H. G. Jameson, *The Origin of the Synoptic Gospels*, Oxford, 1922.

⁵⁵ See especially (n. 1), p. 152: "Streeter's refusal to acknowledge the serious and responsible work of Jameson, in which the logical fallacy of Streeter's arguments had been exposed, constitutes in the history of the Synoptic Problem the single most unparalleled act of academic bravado on record."

⁵⁶ Streeter (n. 8), p. 158.

In fact, Streeter may never have thought that the appeal to the lack of agreement against Mark proved Markan priority as such. This is suggested by the conclusion which he drew from the lack of such agreement in wording. He not only claimed that this was evidence of the greater originality of Mark's version, but also that it "is exactly what we should expect to find if Matthew and Luke were *independently* reproducing Mark".⁵⁷ It may be, therefore, that Streeter thought that Markan priority had been shown to be the most probable solution by what had already been said in the argument about common content and the paragraph about the Augustinian hypothesis; the lack of Matthew-Luke agreements then gave some confirmation of this, but also showed that, given Markan priority, Matthew and Luke had used Mark independently of each other. Thus, in Streeter's view, the phenomenon of the lack of agreement against Mark may have shown something about the relationship, or lack of it, between Matthew and Luke, rather than anything directly about their relationship to Mark.⁵⁸

The question of Jameson's criticisms of Streeter's logic also deserves consideration. Jameson had pointed out that the argument from common content was quite inconclusive: the existence of common content implies nothing about which way dependence lies, and considerations of what Luke did with Mark (Jameson agreed with Streeter that Luke was secondary to Mark) are irrelevant to the question of the relationship between Matthew and Mark.⁵⁹ This is in itself quite true, but Streeter's answer is clearly there in his paragraph about the Augustinian hypothesis. In this, however, he was casting the net much wider than Jameson, for the latter had referred only to the points where Matthew and Mark agreed. Streeter also referred to the wider context, i.e. to the parts of Matthew which were not in Mark. And on the basis of judging relative plausibilities, Streeter argued that these *disagreements* were better explained by Matthew's expanding Mark than by Mark's abbreviating Matthew. The fact of common content implied that some liter-

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.161. Streeter's italics.

⁵⁸ Cf. E. P. Sanders, *The Argument from Order and the Relationship between Matthew and Luke*, NTS 15 (1969), 249–261, on p.249, who separates these two issues. Sanders questions whether there is lack of agreement in order between Matthew and Luke against Mark, but draws the conclusion that there may be some relationship between Matthew and Luke (p.261); he does not use this to question the priority of Mark. For a critique of Sanders' article, see Neirynck (n.13), 784–790.

⁵⁹ Jameson (n. 54), p. 9 f.

ary relationship was involved, and if the relative priority of Matthew could be excluded in this way, then the relative priority of Mark could be legitimately deduced. Thus Jameson's similar objections on the order argument were effectively answered already.⁶⁰ Jameson observed that the simple fact of a common order between Matthew and Mark cannot distinguish as to which of the two is secondary, and this is quite true; but Streeter had already excluded Matthean priority by his argument about the allegedly irrational behaviour which the Augustinian hypothesis had to postulate for Mark. Thus, however one may judge the worth of this argument against the Augustinian hypothesis, Streeter's logic is rather tighter than some have allowed.

The results of this survey are that the "Lachmann fallacy" was by no means as prevalent as has been claimed. In many cases, the argument from order used was not the argument usually known as the "Lachmann fallacy", but was the quite different argument, used by Lachmann himself, and based on the plausibility of the redactional changes made on any particular source hypothesis. Further, those scholars who did appeal to the lack of agreement between Matthew and Luke against Mark only used this as one argument amongst others. Many were also clearly aware that, if the argument was used, then it was not logically probative: other source hypotheses, consistent with the evidence, had to be considered, and, if necessary, rejected on other grounds first. It is only when this argument becomes the sole consideration, or the only "proof" of any one hypothesis, that it deserves the name "fallacy". There are thus no historical grounds for thinking that the two-document hypothesis was built fundamentally on a logically fallacious argument.

All this is not to say that we can today accept all the arguments and results of the earlier source critics without question. As I have tried to show, many of their arguments were in fact based on an assessment of the relative plausibilities of the redaction which different source hypotheses involved. Certainly this is the case in the original argument from order as given by Lachmann, and following him, Holtzmann, Wernle, Wrede, Woods and Sanday. It was the same basic argument which was used by Woods against the Griesbach hypothesis, and by Streeter against the Augustinian hypothesis, but applied at the level of the overall choice of material rather than order: to both men, Mark's

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10 f.

omissions from his sources seemed inexplicable. Any such form of argument is subjective and hence can never be final. For there is always the possibility that what appears absurd to one person may be made into part of a plausible scheme by another. "Plausibility" is really impossible to quantify. It may be the case, therefore, that the Synoptic Problem will never be finally solved with the degree of certainty which can be attained in a mathematical proof. If the suggestions put forward in this article are justified, then it would appear that the earlier source-critics were also aware of the logical limitations of their arguments. Many of their arguments are still important, especially their detailed linguistic studies,⁶¹ and they are certainly not all vitiated by pointing out the inconclusive nature of one particular argument when isolated.⁶² Certainly too the original argument from order (i.e. Lachmann's own) is still of value: Matthew's and Luke's changes of Mark's order can be seen to be intelligible and coherent.⁶³ Those who posit Matthean priority must explain in detail how and why the opposite changes were made either by Mark (on the Augustinian hypothesis) or by Luke (on the Griesbach hypothesis).⁶⁴ Until this is done convincingly, this argument from order will continue to have some validity, along with many other considerations, in contributing to the continuing widespread belief in the priority of Mark.

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⁶¹ For example, Hawkins' work on the stylistic peculiarities of the evangelists does have value, and Streeter was partially justified in appealing to this part of Hawkins' work as giving some support for the theory of Markan priority (despite Farmer's claim to the contrary: cf. n. 8 above). Hawkins listed various features peculiar to Mark (grammatical constructions, whole phrases etc.) in categories with headings which implied reasons why Matthew and Luke might have altered Mark at this point (e.g. "Passages seeming to limit the power of Jesus Christ" etc.). Again, a criterion of relative plausibility was being implicitly applied: if Mark were prior, a change by Matthew and Luke was quite intelligible, whereas the opposite change was harder to understand. The argument is, of course, not conclusive, but it does contribute to making the theory of Markan priority more coherent and intelligible.

⁶² It is perhaps one of the weaknesses of Stoldt's book that he seems to think that, by isolating each argument for Markan priority, and showing it to be inconclusive on its own, the whole theory is thereby discredited. With the degree of certainty which Stoldt demands of any proof of a particular source hypothesis, it is not clear how any solution to the Synoptic Problem will ever be reached.

⁶³ For a typical modern explanation, see Kümmel (n. 35), pp. 58–60.

⁶⁴ The only recent attempt to do this is that of B. Orchard, *Matthew, Luke & Mark*, Manchester, 1976, who tries to show how Luke derived his order of events from Matthew. I believe Orchard's case to be unsatisfactory at a number of points, and have tried to justify this in my forthcoming book on the Griesbach hypothesis (cf. n. 35 above).