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Special Issue Reprint

Current Trends in Pauline Research

Philippians

Edited by
Isaac Blois and Gregory Lamb

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About the Editors

Isaac Blois

Dr. Isaac Blois is a New Testament scholar who received his training at St. Andrews University, where he studied the intersection of Jewish theology with the Greco-Roman milieu of Paul's early-Christian correspondents in the Roman colony of Philippi. Blois is passionate about reading and helping others read the Bible as a whole, a love that was fostered and developed during his undergraduate years as a student at the Torrey Honors College.

Gregory Lamb

Dr. Gregory E. Lamb completed his Ph.D. in Biblical Studies (NT) at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and is the recipient of the 2024 Society of Biblical Literature–De Gruyter Prize for Biblical Studies and Reception History. Lamb's dissertation on Philippians is currently being published by Mohr Siebeck (WUNT II) and explores what it means to live and die well in Christ in comparison to other ancient, competing Jewish and pagan forms of human flourishing. As a pastor-theologian, Lamb loves to apply his research in service to Christ, his congregation, and his community.

Preface

This anthology seeks to address what we, the co-editors, feel is a major issue in biblical/Pauline studies—namely, the neglect of Philippians from discussions of Paul and his theology. This is evinced within the seeming "canon within the canon" approach amongst Pauline scholars, who elevate the importance of certain epistles within the *Corpus Paulinum* while downplaying or, worse still, ignoring others—like Philippians. Luke Timothy Johnson laments that in their quest to find the "historical Paul," many scholars group the Paulines into five "constellations" or "clusters"—moving from inauthentic (least important) to authentic (most important): (1) the Pastorals; (2) Ephesians/Colossians; (3) the Thessalonian correspondence; (4) Galatians/Romans; and (5) the Corinthian correspondence (Johnson, *Constructing*, 9–10). Consequently, the two Prison Epistles—Philippians and Philemon—are left as "outliers" or "standalones" that typically receive much shorter shrift than Paul's longer letters in clusters four and five.

Moreover, even when Philippians is addressed in scholarly discussions, it is often flattened under the a priori assumption that there is nothing new to say regarding Paul's so-called "warmest" and "friendliest" letter of "joy". As the essays within this volume will show, Philippians is a complex and sophisticated piece of Pauline literary artistry that is representative of the imprisoned apostle's mature and seasoned thinking on a variety of important topics relevant not only to academic discussions within New Testament studies but, indeed, to the church and contemporary living.

Isaac Blois and Gregory Lamb
Guest Editors

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Editorial

The State of the Art in Philippians Scholarship: Past, Present, and Future

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1. Philippians: Paul's Succinct, Yet Significant, Epistle

This current volume reflects recent research from a wide spectrum of varying perspectives and approaches to Philippians from senior and early career Pauline scholars across the globe. It is organized into three main sections: Part I: General Aspects of Philippians (Chapters 1–3; hermeneutical considerations, approaches, and reading strategies); Part II: Philippians 1–4 (Chapters 4–16; essays focusing on Philippians' four chapters); and, lastly, Part III: Recent (2008–2024) and Forthcoming Scholarship on Philippians (Appendix A to Introduction; a comprehensive bibliography of Philippians scholarship spanning 2008 to forthcoming titles; and currently unpublished dissertations).

The unifying factor inherent in the essays comprising Chapters 1–16 is that they are written by Philippians specialists deeply interested and engaged in the topics at hand, as well as why these topics matter in the reception of Philippians by Christians, other religious communities, and the wider secular culture. The essays aim to foster inter-religious and scholarly discussions that will (hopefully) pave the way for future research and new pathways for exploration and human flourishing. Moreover, each of these essays—in a variety of ways—advances the discussion and plows new ground in biblical and Pauline studies regarding their respective methodologies and topics.

The scope and purpose of this Special Issue of *Religions* is to highlight the current trends and methods of approaching Paul's letter to the Philippian saints in attempting to better elucidate and understand the letter's aim(s), methods, recipients, and theological impact. Paul is an adept epistle writer, and his corpus reflects rhetorical sophistication, pastoral sensitivity, missional zeal, and theological power—all of which are on display in his short letter (four chapters and 104 verses) to the Philippians. As a shorter Pauline epistle—often assumed to be merely a "warm, friendly, joy-filled letter" in the commentary tradition—Philippians has historically been under-appreciated and misunderstood in biblical studies.[1] However, recent scholarship has corrected some of this neglect and misunderstanding, and this Special Issue seeks to present some of the latest insights emerging therefrom.

Philippians, far from being a minor member of the *Corpus Paulinum*, serves as a powerful monument to Paul's overall seasoned and carefully considered theological, Christological, pastoral, and missional vision. Philippians presents Paul's mature and artfully argued thinking on a variety of topics important for first-century Philippian believers and contemporary Christians.[2] Yet, many theological topics remain under-/unexplored as scholarly trends largely focus on Paul's larger letters in the *Hauptbriefe* or focus on Philippians' specific sections, themes, rhetorical and epistolary structure, and genre without taking into consideration how these questions relate to and impact one another, how they relate to the rest of the letter or wider *Corpus Paulinum* as a whole, and how they have affected and will continue to affect the reception of Paul, Philippians, and his corpus throughout the past, present, and future.

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2. Philippians Studies—Past, Present, and Future

Nearly a decade ago, in 2015, N. T. Wright wrote that three main developments had taken precedence in Pauline studies: the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP), the renewal of apocalyptic readings of Paul, and studies highlighting Paul in his social world (social-scientific studies) (Wright 2015). The further development of some of these trajectories—especially social-scientific readings of Philippians—can be evinced in this present volume. Moreover, the progression of the NPP into what is now often called the "Paul within Judaism" (PWJ) movement is also readily evident in Pauline and Philippian studies.

In a more recent (2022) consideration regarding the *status quæstionis* of Pauline studies, Matthew Novenson advocates for the continued relevance of historical-critical readings of Paul and Philippians amidst the pervasive popularity of purely theological and political approaches (Novenson 2022). Novensen eschews readings of Paul and Philippians that promote the false dichotomy of "either-or" in arguing for the proverbial and simultaneously erroneous "one right way" to read Paul and his letters.[3] Rather than painting a Paul in anachronistic hues that more closely resemble contemporary Pauline scholars than the *imago Pauli*,[4] Paul should be situated and studied, according to Novenson, squarely in his first-century Mediterranean context. In other words, Paul's *Sitz im Leben* should appear "*weird*" to twenty-first-century readers and scholars.[5]

Even more recently, in the forthcoming (2024) edited anthology titled *The State of Pauline Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, the editors note three major prongs of Pauline research that have stood the test of time and garner continued interest amongst current scholars (Gupta et al. 2024b). Namely, those prongs are (1) *"which 'Paul' are we studying?"* (reinvestigating and reevaluating Paul's disputed letters); (2) *"Paul in his own complex world"* (social-scientific and historical studies); and (3) *"Paul and salvation"* (Pauline soteriology).[6] Additionally, the anthology notes (contra Novenson) the waning interest in traditional historical-critical approaches to Paul and the increase in global, feminist, womanist, and post-colonial readings of Paul, among others (Gupta et al. 2024a).

To claim that there is a "state" of Pauline and Philippians research does not suggest that these fields are somehow "static". Rather, they are observably living and fluid—ever in flux—as a part of a "symphony" of scholars past, present, and future, whose voices sound various "notes and harmonies" across this "concert" of Pauline studies. It is within this vibrant scholarly community that this present volume resides as a lively, energetic note and a reminder of the importance Philippians plays not only in the "ivory towers" of academia but also in the church and world.

3. Section Summaries

In Part I: General Aspects of Philippians, three essays examine various hermeneutical approaches to Philippians from socio-historic, missional, and neurocognitive trajectories. First, in Chapter 1, Gregory Lamb adopts what he coins a "kaleidoscopic" view of Paul, which transcends the traditional Greco-Roman and Jewish ways of reading Paul and Philippians by employing an "eclectic and pragmatic" approach that considers the complex cultural milieu in which Paul traveled and ministered. For Lamb, these twin, traditional lenses do not adequately account for the amalgam of often competing cultural influences Paul may have encountered along his missionary travels—especially the pervasive Egyptian religio-cultural presence throughout the first-century Mediterranean world as directly evinced in the extant evidence in Philippi. Lamb argues against the pervasive "monocular" readings of Paul and Philippians that promote either a Greco-Roman or Jewish lens, as well as "binocular" readings that emphasize a priori one "lens"—be it Jewish or Greco-Roman—over the other and, as a result, flatten the complex thought world and *Sitze im Leben* of Paul and the ancient Philippian peoples. Lamb offers a helpful rubric for reading Paul "kaleidoscopically" and gives examples of how a kaleidoscopic reading informs some of the most debated passages in Philippians.

Next, in Chapter 2, Mark Keown continues the discussion via the *Carmen Christi* ("Christ hymn") of Phil 2:6–11—the most discussed and debated passage by scholars in Philippians. Keown critiques flattened monolithic readings of the Christ hymn that focus on either the kerygmatic or ethical dimensions of the text. Rather, Keown argues that the passage should be understood "kerygmatically, ethically, socially, and missionally/evangelistically". In doing so, Keown builds upon the gospel-centric focus of his doctoral thesis (Keown 2008) and previous commentary work (Keown 2017), highlighting what Keown sees as a fivefold missional movement that serves as a hermeneutical lens through which to read the entirety of the epistle. While Keown argues against the false dichotomy of a reductionistic "either-or" reading—that is, Phil 2:6–11 must be read either kerygmatically or ethically—he does not throw out the proverbial "baby with the bathwater" regarding the ethical dimension of the Christ hymn. Keown counters that Christ is, indeed, the ethical Exemplar *par excellence*, but this truth "is reductionistic unless explained in the direction of social relationships (socioethically) and mission (missioethically)". Thus, such a kerygmatically ethical perspective does not merely focus on personal, hyper-individualized ethics, as is often the case in Western evangelicalism, but is a priori missional, relational, and communal in nature.

Chapter 3 by Julia Fogg is the last essay in Part I and approaches Paul's display of emotions throughout the letter from a unique angle, drawing on insights from the field of neurocognition. Fogg builds here on her previous doctoral research into the cognitive aspects of the way of life, which Paul seeks to support across the letter, adding to it a new interaction with recent scientific discoveries of how cognition works within embodied experience. In conversation with Lembke, Menakem, and van der Kolk, among others, Fogg posits a way of thinking about human existence that points to habitual emotional practices that shape that experience. Thus, when Paul invites his auditors to "choose joy", he is not merely engaging in rhetoric but instead is employing strategies in which he seeks to embody such Christ-produced joy as a habitual practice.

Moving into Part II: Philippians 1–4, Dolly Chaaya's essay (Chapter 4) focuses on Philippians 1 and features lexical and rhetorical analyses of Phil 1:12–26, highlighting how the repeated, rhetorically alliterative lexemes (namely, χριστός, κυρίος, καταγγέλλω, καύχημα, προσκοπή, and παρρησία) prepare Philippian readers/hearers as a "persuasive tool" for the exemplum of Christ in the *Carmen Christi* of 2:6–11. Chaaya argues that 1:12–26 is seminally important in establishing Paul's "self-presentation" via *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos* (cf. Aristotle, Rhet. 1356a3–6) with his Philippian audience through his intentional choice of terminology that aims to persuade the Philippians to adopt hope-filled, Christocentric mindsets that model the supremacy of Christ and "Christ sufficiency" in all matters of living—including inward thoughts and outward deeds—and at all times, whether experiencing exuberant abundance or suffering hardship and lack. Chaaya concludes that Paul's rhetorical strategy in 1:12–16 serves as a "reframing" device, which bolsters his over-arching motif of "joy in adversity" that, for Chaaya, permeates Philippians.

Philippians 2 is the focus in Chapters 5–8. In Chapter 5, Melissa Tan highlights the intrinsic correlations derived from a recognition of one's positionality—that is, how one's worldview, gender, class, ethnicity, and other contextual factors influence their reading of texts—especially in regard to the discipline of biblical studies. Tan tests her theories employing a social-scientific methodology comprising a "nuanced understanding of honor–shame" from a "collectivist" cultural perspective birthed from her understanding of Confucianism, which she applies to Phil 1:27–2:4 as a case study. Tan argues that ancient texts and realia derive from a social context, and as social beings/actors, researchers should be aware of their own positionality and the presuppositional baggage and biases they hold—for better or worse—when analyzing and researching such texts, cultures, and artifacts. Tan highlights the criticism of earlier studies that were plagued by generalizations, stereotypes, anachronisms, and flattened, surface-level (rather than thick) descriptions of the data, which could have likely been avoided—in whole or at least in part—if said researchers were aware of their own positionality and etic perspective as outsiders to the cultures they were trying to

describe. Tan concludes that the collectivist Philippians were attuned to Paul's intentional use of "honor–shame" vernacular as he exhorted the Philippians to heed his advice in seeing suffering as a gift rather than a curse in 1:27–2:4 and throughout the rest of the epistle.

Similar to Tan's focus on positionality, Chapter 6 features Teresa Bartolomei's comparative analysis of Paul's "puzzling" usage of σχήμα in Phil 2:7d in comparison with the articular τὸ σχῆμα of 1 Cor 7:31 and his usage of the verbal "semanteme" μετασχηματίσει in Phil 3:21. Bartolomei suggests that it is only through the comparative analysis of the Pauline usage of σχήμα that the correct interpretation of this slippery "rare and 'cultured' term" can be determined in Philippians' Christ Hymn. Thus, these passages, when read together, serve, for Bartolomei, as a synergistic, hermeneutical cipher providing windows of illumination into Paul's intent for inclusion and respective meanings. Bartolomei notes the risk of mistranslating σχήμα, which results in a "camouflaged Christ" who merely appeared or seemed (in the docetic, outward sense) to become like a human while remaining ontologically alien and divine—like the pagan gods, who temporarily donned an outward human visage but were altogether distinct from mortals. Bartolomei concludes that in Phil 2:7d, σχήμα denotes not only the incarnation of Christ as extrinsic and unchanging but also necessarily intrinsic and mutable—indeed, the "pre-messianic existence" and "essence" of humanity and the cosmos. This corrupted cosmos is transformed and transfigured, according to Bartolomei, via the redemptive power of Christ's incarnation and resurrection.

In Chapter 7, Alex Muir builds upon Paul Holloway's pioneering work in Philippians—specifically, Holloway's consolation thesis. Muir succinctly suggests Phil 2:6–11 relates to the larger discourse of the epistle (cf. Phil 1:27–2:16) by illustrating and exemplifying how the flourishing aspects of "comfort (παράκλησις), consolation (παραμύθιον), and joy (χαρά)" can even be experienced by Paul and those Philippians facing the pains of persecution and poverty. By comparing the ταπειν- terminology and exaltation elements in LXX-Isaiah and Philippians, Muir concludes that Christ is a "consolatory example", rendering it possible for those in Christ to progressively become like God via the right ethical imitation of Christ in this present life as reflected in their inner thought life (Phil 2:5) and deeds, as well as a "total transformation" in the afterlife, which transforms the bodies of humiliated saints into "the glory of Christ (Phil 3:21)".

Simon Dürr (Chapter 8) addresses the scriptural language that Paul deploys throughout Phil 2:12–18. Building on others working within the field of the New Testament's Use of the Hebrew Bible, Dürr builds the case for an important and influential strain of themes that emerges from the convergence of multiple scriptural sources (Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Daniel) as Paul develops his communal exhortation in this passage of the letter. Most importantly, Dürr highlights the way that Paul's depiction of the "word of life", which he portrays his auditors as "holding fast to/holding out" (Dürr remains open to both options), is able to draw on key aspects of the divine and life-giving "word" that emerges from all three of these scriptural texts. By developing how the specific language that Paul uses taps into elements of the broader flow of each of these scriptural backgrounds (e.g., the idea of God's "word" being sure in Isa 45:23; 40:8; Isa 55:10), Dürr demonstrates the type of "obedience" that Paul can then commend within this community (cf. Phil 2:12), which he admonishes them to maintain on into the future.

Chapters 9–13 mark the transition to Philippians 3, the most discussed portion of this present volume, with five essays. Three of these essays (Chapters 9–11) discuss in sundry ways Paul's boasting and the topic of periautology ("self-praise"). In Chapter 9, Jean-Noël Aletti focuses on the rhetorical function of Paul's periautology in Philippians, which, according to Aletti, is a much-neglected theme in Pauline studies. Specifically, Aletti examines Phil 3:2–16 and argues that these verses form a cohesive "rhetorical unit" representing Paul's most forceful and original use of periautology within the *Corpus Paulinum*. Structurally speaking, rather than highlighting an awkward editorial insertion and multiplicity of letters, Phil 3:2ff mark Paul's intentional periautological development. In comparing Paul's self-praise in Philippians with Plutarch's scathing remarks against those employing periautology to vainly honor themselves (*Mor*. 539a), Aletti concludes that Paul employs pe-

riautology in Philippians in a "permissible way". For Aletti, Paul effectively reverses self-praise to point not to his own righteousness from the law—contra the "Judaizers'" fleshly self-righteousness—but to the superiority of Christ and being "in Christ". Thus, according to Aletti, Paul rhetorically mimics in his own journey of self-description the self-abasing, yet eschatologically triumphant, journey of Christ in the *Carmen Christi*.

Trevor Clark continues the discussion of Pauline periautology and joy in Philippians in his essay (Chapter 10). Clark provides a counter-reading to Schellenberg's recent (2021) treatment of the letter in terms of Paul's human—and therefore non-rhetorical—self-presentation in the letter. Clark directs us to the concept of "framing" as a way to understand how Paul uses the theme of boasting in this letter. In order to define this concept, Clark cites Gamson, "facts have no intrinsic meaning. They take on their meaning by being embedded in a frame…" Thus, it is the frame that the apostle gives in the letter that helps us to understand why he is boasting and what meaning such boasting might hold. Clark argues that the frame of boasting undergirds every chapter of this short epistle, not as the central topic but as an important "affixed complement". Ultimately, Clark shows how attending to the language and strategy of boasting, which Paul draws from scriptural antecedents, builds a richer portrait of the apostle's aims throughout the letter.

In Chapter 11, Francesco Bianchini focuses on Paul's self-presentation in Philippians 3, where readers gain access uniquely to "the profound and mysterious relationship which binds [the apostle] to his Lord". Building on his 2006 Italian monograph on the subject, Bianchini argues that Paul engages in this section of his letter to the Philippians with the well-known literary form of *periautologia*, or speaking about the self. In conjunction with Schmeller (2015), however, Bianchini argues that this popular convention of *periautologia* has been paradoxically transformed by Paul in Phil 3:1–4:1 into speaking about Christ (*perichristologia*?) in light of the way that Paul links himself with Christ through the empowerment that he experiences in Christ for his virtuous behavior. Thus, "the Apostle's 'I' is not actually placed at the center, but rather the person of Christ". That is, Paul's presentation remains focused on the I. It is self-talk, only "the identity of the Pauline 'I' [has been] completely transformed…. he is able to speak of himself as 'other-than-self'". Bianchini especially notes the self-boasting features of 3:4b–14, which can be viewed in three steps, from boasting about the past (3:4b–6, the "Jewish boast") to boasting about the past–present (3:7–11, the "boast *turned upside down* in Christ"), to boasting about the present–future (3:12–14, the "moderated Christian boast"). Each of these segments is marked by a verb of "thinking" or "considering". Hence, the apostle effectively "upends all the classical conventions of the *periautologia*", modeling a way of life that locates all of one's praise and boasting in the person and activity of Christ, thereby guiding his friends at Philippi to follow his model of participating in Christ to such an extent that Christ becomes their very life. This discussion of Paul's technique of boasting in Philippians 3 nicely balances with Chaaya's essay (Chapter 4), which alternatively focuses on both Paul's self-presentation and the boasting that arises from it in Philippians 1.

Chapters 12–13 feature a more general discussion of Philippians 3. In Chapter 12, Eric Covington presents the bold claim that Philippians ought to be read as intentionally participating in philosophical dialogue. Such a reading of the letter furnishes ways forward for understanding the repeated references to opponents throughout the epistle, insofar as Paul has "craft[ed] the letter as a philosophical dialogue between the assumed position of the 'opponents' and Paul's own perspective". By bringing in philosophical discourse, Covington is not trying to set up an either-or dichotomy between Hellenistic and Jewish influences of the text, which dichotomy he rightly (as does Lamb's essay in Chapter 1) rejects. Instead, Covington sees Paul's Jewish interests in a crucified and risen Messiah converging with his presentation of transformed *phronesis* in order to create a new "way of life" for the Christ-following community at Philippi. For Covington, the concept of a "dialogue" becomes an important tool in the hands of the apostle for differentiating between the correct "way of life" in Christ for which he advocates in in the letter, and the erroneous way of life that must be avoided.

Rounding out Philippians 3 is Chapter 13, which features Laurie Wilson's essay. Wilson places Paul's comparative language in dialogue with the philosopher slave Epictetus, uncovering both "deep parallels" and striking dissimilarities in how each thinker handles that which is to be valued most in life. In terms of similarity, both Paul and Epictetus are in agreement that once the greatest good has been identified, this should then determine how all lesser things should be regarded and handled. Insofar as Paul views Christ as that which has "unsurpassable value", all other possible goods can be regarded as σκύβαλα, whereas for Epictetus, such unimportant things are to be viewed as ἀδιάφορα, "unnecessary". But the differences between these two thinkers arise in the fact that Paul still upholds the intrinsic good of externals (Wilson here also points to Augustine's further development of Paul's line of thought in the later church father's ordering of loves), where Epictetus disregards external things since within his system that is the only way for an individual to be self-sufficient in maintaining one's own joy.

Philippians 4 occupies Chapters 14–16 and concludes Part II of this volume. Heiko Wojtkowiak's essay (Chapter 14) continues the social-scientific explorations of Philippians—another common thread woven throughout this volume. Wojtkowiak explores the economic dimensions of the so-called *danklösen Dank* ("thankless thanks") of Phil 4:10–20 and the socio-economic situation of the Philippian Christ community. In his succinct study, Wojtkowiak clarifies the "uncertainties" and the "limited scope" inherent within social-scientific studies of Paul and Philippians and the "challenges" that must be addressed for social-scientific criticism/interpretation to remain a viable research methodology for biblical studies. As a result, Wojtkowiak offers a helpful rubric to refine such socio-economic inquiries of Philippians and other ancient texts. Using this rubric, Wojtkowiak concludes that the thesis of "religious oppression" best fits the data when considering the delay between the Philippians' gifts to Paul and their socio-economic decline.

In Chapter 15, Isaac Blois tackles the knotty interpersonal issue raised by Paul when he addresses (publicly!) the two individuals, Euodia and Syntyche. Blois argues that the particular language that Paul employs ("who have striven together with me for the gospel", 4:3) provides a powerful commendation of these two female co-workers, thereby establishing the importance of their leadership role among the community of Christ-followers at Philippi. While the exhortation the apostle issues to these leaders does seek to draw them back into a renewed *en Kurio* pattern of thought and activity, far from ostracizing these women, Paul's words hold them up as significant leaders within the community.

Lastly, in Chapter 16, Peter-Ben Smit investigates the motif of "peace" (εἰρήνη; Phil 1:2; 4:7, 9), which frames Philippians' beginning and end. The twin occurrences of εἰρήνη in Philippians 4 are the foci of Smit's study, which suggests that Paul's use of peace in Philippians foreshadows the flourishing, eschatological peace that in-Christ saints will enjoy as heavenly citizens of God's kingdom. Smit highlights the eschatological tension of the "now" and "not yet" in that such peace is present for the progressively persecuted Philippian saints presently in the communal relationships of the marginalized Christ community (ἐκκλησία)—albeit in an imperfect, limited fashion—but will be experienced in a more fulsome, perfected way in the eschaton. In Smit's schema, the Philippian Christ community becomes the sacred space through which Christocentric "virtuous" behaviors are taught, modeled, and imitated both as a respite from their present persecution and as a result of their eager expectation of God's restored world to come (Phil 3:20).

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. Recent Scholarship Published on Philippians (2008–2024)

Joseph Marchal quipped back in 2006 that "Philippians is...a criminally underexamined letter" (RBL Review of Smith's monograph on *The Marks of the Apostle*). On the other hand, Bird and Gupta have more recently asserted that "a quick glance at [their list of commentaries on Philippians] will demonstrate *how much has been written on this short epistle*" (Bird-Gupta, *Philippians*, 31, emphasis added). Whether or not the fourteen years that have passed

between Marchal's 2006 statement about the paucity of research on Philippians make Bird-Gupta's 2020 seemingly opposite assertion warranted, Philippians continues to remain an under-utilized resource for interpreting and understanding Paul. There have indeed been numerous scholarly investigations into the letter since Marchal's 2006 assessment, but might his comment still apply? Are scholars within the Pauline guild giving this "apparently minor letter" its proper due?

In light of the extensive general bibliography (pp. 23–45) in Reumann's magisterial commentary in the Anchor Bible series, we have chosen the publication date of that commentary (2008) as the determiner for what we present as significant "recent" analyses of Philippians, that is, scholarly material published in 2008 or after up to the present (2024).

In addition to literature cited in Reumann, one can find previous literature reviews in the following:

Still, Todd D. 2008. "An Overview of Recent Scholarly Literature on Philippians". *ExpT* 119.9. 422–428.

E. A. C. Pretorius, "New Trends in Reading Philippians: A Literature Review", *NeoT* 29 (1995), 273–298.

> Arguing in 1995 that a "paradigm shift" has taken place in readings of Philippians, Pretorius acknowledges "that ample scope exists for the co-existence and co-operation of different and even opposing methods" for approaching the letter (p. 291).

Wolfgang Schenk, "Der Philipperbrief in der neuren Forschung (1945–1985)", *ANRW* 2/25.4 (1987), 3280–3313.

Ascough, Richard S. 1997. "Recent Studies of Philippi". *TJT* 13.1. 72–77.

Also, see the helpful listing of Philippians resources on the publicly accessible syllabus for the 2013–2014 Ruhr-Universität Bochum class "Ausbruch aus dem Gefängnis: Der Philipperbrief" by Prof. Thomas Söding, accessible through this link: https://www.kath.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/imperia/md/content/nt/nt/aktuellevorlesungen/vorlesungsskriptedownload/vlskriptess14/skript_philipperbrief_sose_2014.pdf, accessed on 20 September 2024.

See also the helpful references to European scholarship on the *Welt der Bibel* website available at https://www.welt-der-bibel.de/bibliographie.1.6.philipperbrief.html, accessed on 20 September 2024.

Appendix A.1. Recent (2008–2024) Philippians Commentaries

Allen, Pauline. 2013. *John Chrysostom, Homilies on Philippians: Translated with an Introduction and Notes*. WGRW 16. Atlanta: SBL Press.

Belleville, Linda L. 2021. *Philippians: A New Covenant Commentary*. NCCS. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books.

Bird, Michael F. and Nijay K. Gupta. 2020. *Philippians*. NCBC. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Jeanine. 2022. *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*. TNTC (Volume 2). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic.

Cassidy, Richard J. 2020. A Roman Commentary on St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians. New York: Herder & Herder.

Cohick, Lynn H. 2013. *Philippians*. SGBC 11. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Flemming, Dean. 2009. *Philippians: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*. NBBC. Kansas City: KS: Beacon Hill Press.

Focant, Camille. 2015. *Les letters aux Philippiens et* à *Philémon*. CBNT. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf.

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Appendix A.2. Provisional Forthcoming Commentaries (As of 2024)

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Eva-Marie Becker (KEK reboot from Lohmeyer)
N. T. Wright (ICC)
Pheme Perkins
Daniel J. Treier *Philippians*. ITC. London: T&T Clark.
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Matthew Novenson (Oxford University Press)

Appendix A.3. Recent (2008–2024) Significant Monographs on Philippians

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Appendix A.6. Noteworthy Dissertations Not (Yet) Published

Cable, Paul S. "'We Await a Savior': 'Salvation' in Philippians" (Wheaton, 2017, under Moo).

Fogg, Julia Lambert. "Κοινωνία Is Σωτηρία: Paul's Theological Reading of Practices in His Letter to The Philippians" (Emory, 2006, under L. T. Johnson)

Mueller, Dierk. "Military Images in Paul's Letter to the Philippians" (Pretoria, 2013, under Gert Steyn).

Sanders, Steven. "The Commendation of Epaphroditus" (DTS 2019, under Fantin).

Szerlip, Brandon S. "Paul's Use of the Old Testament in his Letter to the Philippians" (Westminster, 2020, under Beale).

Tan, Melissa Chia-Mei. "Centring a Relational Paradigm for Honour-Shame from Confucianism for Biblical Interpretation" (Aberdeen, 2023, under McGaskall).

Tan, Rachael. "Conformity to Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis of Paul's Perspective on Humiliation and Exaltation in Philippians 2:5–11" (SBTS, 2017, under Siefrid).

West, Audrey Lynn Sharon. "Whether By Life or By Death: Friendship in a Pauline Ethic of Death and Dying" (Duke 2001, under Hays).

Weymouth, Richard J. "The Christ-Story of Philippians 2:6–11: Narrative Shape and Paraenetic Purpose in Paul's Letter to Philippi" (Otago, 2015, under Trebilco).

Wiles, Virginia. "From Apostolic Presence to Self-Government in Christ: Paul's Preparing of the Philippian Church for Life in his Absence" (Chicago, 1993, under Arthur Droge).

Notes

1 However, this trend is changing with edited anthologies in top-shelf series such as (Frey and Schliesser 2015), (Friesen et al. 2021), and in scholarly journals such as the Special Issue focusing on Paul and the *Praetorium* in *JSNT* 43.4 (2021): 435–522 (Schellenberg and Wendt 2021), which focus on Philippians and its importance to Pauline studies.

2 (Horn 1992) argues that Philippians represents the third and final stage of Paul's pneumatological development—reflecting Paul's sophisticated treatment of pneumatology and host of other important topics. (Jonathan Bernier 2022) sees Philippians as one of the last Pauline letters penned—being written during Nero's reign with a *terminus post quem* and *terminus ante quem* of 57–59 CE, respectively. Interestingly, Bernier posits a Cesarean imprisonment and provenance for Paul in penning Philippians. Other scholars, who adopt Roman imprisonment and provenance, often date Philippians even later into the 60s. See, e.g., Keown's comments in Chapter 2 below.

3 Novenson, *Paul*, 4.

4 See Novenson, *Paul*, 10–12 for Novensen's sympathy with and contrast to the concerns of Cavan Concannon, who decries continued attempts of the historical-critical study of Paul and his letters. Cf. (Concannon 2016).

5 Novenson, *Paul*, 5–8.

[6] Gupta, Heim, and McKnight, "Introduction", 2–4, emphasis original.

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Beyond the Greco-Roman or Jewish Monocle: Reading Philippians and Paul 'Kaleidoscopically'

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Abstract: Typically, scholars view/read the enigmatic apostle Paul monolithically—that is, through either a Greco-Roman or Jewish socio-cultural lens. The traditional Lutheran (Greco-Roman/Western) lens was criticized in the mid-/late-twentieth century by scholars highlighting Paul's Jewishness—resulting in the so-called "New Perspective on Paul" and "Paul within Judaism" movements. This paradigmatic post-Shoah shift of Pauline interpretation begs the questions, "Should we abandon Greco-Roman readings of Paul?" and "Should we continue to read Philippians and Paul through a singular (Jewish) lens?" Building upon the work of Markus Bockmuehl, Abraham Malherbe et al., I argue for an "eclectic and pragmatic" approach. I explain how "monocular" (Greco-Roman *or* Jewish) and even "binocular" (Greco-Roman *and* Jewish) approaches flatten Paul's complex thought world and *Sitz im Leben* as an in-Christ church-planting missionary. The purpose of this study is to read Philippians and Paul "kaleidoscopically"—considering the distinct *Romanitas*, juxtaposed and colliding cultures, worldviews, and religions that Paul likely encountered in the cosmopolitan *colonia* of first-century Philippi. This article transcends the Greco-Roman/Jewish debate surrounding Paul—highlighting the literary and archaeological evidence of competing pagan, Jewish, and Pauline Christ cults in first-century Philippi—and thus encouraging scholars to read Philippians and Paul through a "kaleidoscopic" rather than a monolithic lens.

Keywords: Philippians; Paul within Judaism; New Perspective on Paul; Pauline theology; hermeneutics; New Testament Greco-Roman backgrounds; Egypt; Isis-Regina; pagan cults; ancient Philippi

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1. Introduction: The Problem of Reading Paul "Monolithically"

World War II was the largest and deadliest conflict in human history—including some seventy countries fighting in four major global theaters and leaving about fifty-five million casualties and countless others scarred physically and psychologically in its wake (Overy 2015, pp. 1–6). Imagine if such a global war were only discussed from a singular point of view—merely from an American, German, Japanese, or British perspective. Such a monolithic presentation of history would certainly color the way the war is interpreted—for better or worse. At its best, such a shallow reading of history would offer a mere skewed, surface-level understanding of the major events and figures (as interpreted and presented by the respective authors). Seminal figures from the opposing side may be left out altogether or presented in an unbalanced, pejorative way. Lesser-known but equally important heroines and heroes of the conflict—such as the ethnically diverse groups of female and male code breakers who helped crack the Enigma machine or those courageous victims and survivors of the Shoah—would possibly be forgotten and their stories left untold. Such a scenario has vital implications for world history but also for Pauline studies: no reader could ever hope to gain a fulsome understanding from such a narrow, selective reading of historical data—whether the topic is the D-Day invasion or Paul's conflicts in first-century Philippi.

Paul did not fight this battle alone, however. He depicted Epaphroditus, his Philippian "brother" and "co-worker,"[1] as his "fellow-soldier" (συστρατιώτης; Phil 2:25) and

exhorted the in-Christ Philippian saints to be incessantly "striving together side-by-side"—as if they were in a military formation (*phalanx*)—"for the faith of the gospel" (1:27).[2] Paul presents the exigences in Philippians in rhetorically vivid (*ekphrastic*) terms, which elucidate the concrete physical realities of conflicts, persecution, imprisonment, suffering, and potential death/martyrdom, as well as the spiritual nature of this missional warfare.[3] A priori assumptions regarding Philippians—pervasively parroted in the commentary tradition—often obfuscate Paul's rhetorical moves and intent. When Paul and his letters—especially those written to Christ communities in highly diverse, cosmopolitan settings like Philippians—are read monolithically (typically, from either a Greco-Roman or Jewish perspective), an imbalanced presentation (at best) or misunderstanding of the imprisoned apostle and his epistle to the first converts in Europe emerges.

Despite the risk of such imbalance, scholars have typically read Philippians and Paul through a monolithic lens. While it could be argued that any reading or discussion of Philippians is inherently "monolithic," given that we only have the first-century *verba/vox Pauli* and not the thoughts or responses of his audience or opponents, this misses my main point in this article and the point abundantly made by scholars such as J. M. G. Barclay et al. (see ensuing discussion below): that despite our inability to decipher the minds of Paul and his hearers/readers, research should be performed by scholars apprising themselves of all available data—as far as their capabilities allow—and honestly assessing and allowing the evidence to inform, shape, and transform their understanding of Paul and Philippians. This is not rearing the "essential and extremely problematic" old horse of "mirror-reading" (for a discussion of the issues involved, see Barclay 1987, pp. 73–93), as it were, in trying to read into Philippians' text connections, theories, and issues that may or may not be present. At its worst, mirror-reading is plagued with pitfalls such as over-reliance upon selective evidence and lexical analyses, as well as the issue of over-interpretation (1987, pp. 79–83). However, in order to better understand the *Sitze im Leben* surrounding Paul, the Philippians, and the opponents against which Paul warns in texts such as Phil 3:2, 18–19, a fulsome grasp of the socio-cultural milieu from which canonical Philippians emerges is necessary. Furthermore, we will not begin to understand the "real import" of Paul's words in Philippians "until we have critically reconstructed," as much as possible, the available background data (1987, pp. 73–74). K. J. Vanhoozer and D. J. Treier (2015, p. 114) add, "No single glance [or lens aimed] at . . . Scripture sees all that is there"—which is precisely why a kaleidoscopic lens is needed. Whence the monolithic view?

Since the Protestant Reformation and up to the mid-twentieth century, Pauline scholars primarily viewed Paul through a Greco-Roman lens—that is, from what some have termed the "old," "traditional," or "Lutheran" perspective on Paul (see, e.g., the title/subtitle of Westerholm 2004). This Western trajectory began to shift post-Shoah, and especially in 1963, with K. Stendahl's seminal essay in the *Harvard Theological Review* (Stendahl 1963, pp. 199–215)—which called into question anachronistic, "westernized" readings of Paul and the New Testament (NT). Stendahl's study—though not necessarily informed or colored by the Shoah itself—built upon W. D. Davies's pioneering monograph (Davies 1948) and was given much credence in the enormous, encyclopedic presentation of evidence within Hengel's two-volume work (Hengel 1974), which highlights Hellenism's impact on Judaism at a much earlier date than previously thought—"at least a century before the Maccabean revolt in 168 B.C.E." (Feldman 1977, p. 371). E. P. Sanders (1977) et al. furthered Stendahl's work in a movement that J. D. G. Dunn would later coin the "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP) in 1982—highlighting the Jewishness of Paul and the NT.[4] More recently, scholars subscribing to the tenets of the Paul within Judaism (PWJ) movement, such as Paula Fredriksen (2017) and Mark Nanos (2017) et al., argue that Paul never abandoned his Jewish roots, never "converted" to Christianity, and remained a Torah-observant Pharisee throughout his life and ministry.[5] Such a paradigmatic, post-Shoah shift of Pauline interpretation begs the questions: "Should we abandon Greco-Roman readings of Paul?" and "Should we continue to read Philippians and Paul through a singular (Jewish) lens?"

However, what if the supposed Greco-Roman and Jewish debate is a false dichotomy? Numerous scholars such as Joseph Hellerman (2005), Joseph Dodson (Dodson et al. 2017; Dodson and Briones 2017; Dodson and Briones 2019), Richard Cassidy (2020), Ryan Collman (2021), and even others within this special Philippians journal edition continue to fruitfully read Philippians and Paul through a Greco-Roman lens while simultaneously acknowledging Paul's Jewishness. Moreover, Nanos (2017, pp. 111–85) has widened his lens to include potential Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Assyrian-Babylonian influences in Philippi in his reading of Philippians within Judaism.[6]

While other essays in this volume feature specific, often technical discussions within the text of Philippians itself, my essay will be more general—focusing on methodological and hermeneutical considerations and implications in reading Philippians and Paul. I suggest there is an inherent danger in reading Philippians and Paul monolithically of predetermining our conclusions and superfluously—or worse still, intentionally—ignoring evidence that may suggest otherwise. I argue for an "eclectic and pragmatic," approach or "lens" through which to read Philippians and Paul that resembles more of a "kaleidoscope" than a "monocle" or pair of "binoculars." In the remainder of this essay, I will discuss pathways forward in moving beyond this implied "impasse" of the Greco-Roman and Jewish debate, investigate the complex, cosmopolitan nature of ancient Philippi and how a "kaleidoscopic" reading of Philippians and Paul may illuminate hotly debated passages such as the *Carmen Christi* (2:5–11), "the dogs, evil workers, and mutilation" (3:2), and the "enemies of the cross" (3:18–19), as well as inform debates surrounding Philippians' structural integrity. I conclude that a "monocular" (Greco-Roman *or* Jewish) or even a "binocular" (Greco-Roman *and* Jewish) approach flattens Paul's complex thought world and *Sitz im Leben* as an in-Christ, church-planting missionary.

2. Beyond the Greco-Roman and Jewish Debate

The battle to "pigeonhole" Paul—firmly "anchoring" him in either Greco-Roman or Jewish soil—was brought to the fore by Troels Engberg-Pedersen et al. at the turn of the millennium in an edited anthology titled *Paul beyond the Jewish/Hellenism Divide* (Engberg-Pedersen 2001). Engberg-Pedersen's collection of essays was birthed from two conferences (*Paul on His Hellenistic Background* [1991][7] and *Paul between Judaism and Hellenism* [1997]), which highlighted the problematic language, assumptions, and tendencies within biblical studies to see Paul as *sui generis*—uniquely positioned outside of Judaism and Hellenism—rather than seeing Paul as "a coplayer within a shared [first-century Mediterranean] context" (2001, pp. 1–3). The 1991 conference elucidated the need to make the methodological, ideological, and hermeneutical shift in nomenclature from "background" to "context." Engberg-Pedersen explains, "Participants perceived that Paul should not be seen against a 'background' from which he would stand out in splendid isolation. Such a picture would not do justice to the many and complex ways in which he interacted directly with his cultural contemporaries" (2001, p. 1). In comparative analyses of Paul, "the observer must in principle look with equal attention and interest at each individual item that is brought into the comparison," according to Engberg-Pedersen (2001, p. 2).

However, Engberg-Pedersen erroneously assumes the possibility of a methodological and hermeneutical *chimera* when he states: "scholars must attempt to shed all unacknowledged, ideological, and historically unfounded presuppositions in addressing Paul in his context" (2001, p. 2). Any attempt to shed "all" presuppositional baggage and biases—irrespective of intentionality—is doomed to fail (cf. Bultmann 1960, pp. 289–96). It would be like trying to separate lint from a dryer, wrinkles from cotton sheets, or dirt from a pig—an impossible task, indeed! Bultmann explains this impossibility: "*no* exegesis is without presuppositions, inasmuch as the exegete is not a *tabula rasa*, but on the contrary, approaches the text with specific questions or with a specific way of raising questions and thus has a certain idea [a priori] of the subject matter with which the text is concerned" (1960, p. 289), emphasis his). Vanhoozer adds, "interpretation is always biased. The interpreter never stands in the same place as the author" (Vanhoozer 1998, p. 392). However,

Vanhoozer (1998, p. 392) suggests that it is precisely in this different stance that we can become a "friend or foe" of the text depending on our ability or inability to recognize that "faithful interpretation" takes place as a part of a communicative tradition—giving "attention" and "justice" to the text in aiming "to develop" its "full range" and "potential" by examining all available data and not just reading the text through one or two selective lenses. Thus, despite Engberg-Pedersen's laudable shift to move from "background" to "context," from "monocle" to a "binocular" view of Paul, and intent to eradicate the false dichotomy between "Hellenism" and "Judaism,"[8] his project, nonetheless, falls short as it failed to move "beyond" the categories of Hellenism and Judaism—as the subtitle of his 2001 edited anthology suggests—and to consider the other cultures and shared contexts around Paul.

The critique from Engberg-Pedersen (and those before him) against "Greco-Roman" readings of Paul has chiefly led to the hybridization within descriptions of Paul and within scholarly literature—take, for example, titular descriptions of Paul as a "Hellenistic Jew" and the description of Christian origins within "Hellenistic Judaism(s)"[9]—and the recent scholarly elevation of Paul's Jewishness above other cultural and contextual lenses.[10] This risks an anachronistic, imbalanced perspective (whether to the Greco-Roman or Jewish extreme) that contradicts what Paul himself writes in Gal 3:28: "There remains neither Jew nor Greek; there remains neither slave nor freed person; there remains no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."[11] Paul is no *Mischwesen*, as it were—a hybrid Greco-Roman/Jewish creature, whose visage can be twisted *mutatis mutandis* into the image of scholars seeking to share their opinions regarding his letters and story.[12] Rather, Philippians and Paul should be read within their actual shared cosmopolitan historical contexts—a point that Abraham Malherbe and Markus Bockmuehl share.

Abraham Malherbe was involved in the field of comparative studies, and—prior to the volumes and conferences by Engberg-Pedersen on the topic—Malherbe argued that Paul should not be seen merely against his Jewish or Greco-Roman "background" but, rather, as part of a "shared 'context'"—a Greco-Roman discourse in which he participated as a "Hellenistic Jew" (Malherbe 1989, pp. 67–70). Malherbe's desire to view Paul from such a "shared 'context'" is echoed by Markus Bockmuehl, who, in his commentary on Philippians (Bockmuehl [1998] 2013, p. 40), refuses to evaluate and present Paul in a "flattened" manner—from the monolithic lenses of "Greco-Roman Paul," "Jewish Paul," "rhetorical Paul," "apocalyptic Paul," etc. Rather, Bockmuehl suggests that an "eclectic and pragmatic perspective" is best—taking into consideration the complexity and nuance within ancient Philippi and Paul's first-century world—which helps prevent the seeming "tunnel vision" of reading Philippians and Paul monolithically ([1998] 2013, p. 40). The concern for reading Paul in a flattened, monolithic manner is also shared by N. T. Wright (2015, p. xii), who laments that monolithic approaches to Paul have produced a myriad of "interpretative cultures," which have arrived at differing, often antithetical conclusions about Paul and his letters. An eclectically kaleidoscopic, pragmatic, comparative approach to Philippians (specifically) and Pauline studies (generally)—as proposed in this essay—may help avoid the "worlds of difference," which Wright suggests exists between these different interpretative schools (2015, p. xii). Like the competing interpretational cultures and schools of thought within modern Pauline studies, there was also a collision of competing cultures and ideologies in ancient Philippi.

3. The Cosmopolitan *Colonia* of First-Century Philippi[13]

In this section, I briefly explore the rich diversity and complexity of first-century Philippi from three perspectives: (1) Philippi's history as a *colonia* within the Roman Empire; (2) the variegated religiosity of the Philippian peoples, given Philippi's geographical location and reputation as a major trade center; and (3) the socio-/ethno-cultural diversity of its population and colliding worldviews and traditions. I shall argue that as an in-Christ missionary church planter, Paul would have likely familiarized himself—on at least some

level—with the various competing religio-cultural views of the pagan Philippians in order to effectively communicate his gospel in a winsome way.

First, Philippi was twice founded as a Roman *colonia* (Acts 16:12): first by Gaius Octavian (later Augustus Caesar) and Mark Antony in the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE when they defeated Cassius and Brutus—and, thus, ended the Roman Republic; and second, when Octavian famously defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra at the battle of Actium in 31 BCE, and Philippi was founded as *Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis* (Reumann 2008, p. 3). These battles (especially the Battle of Philippi in 42 BCE) brought much fame to Philippi (Koukouli-Chryssanthaki 1998, p. 8) and, with it, an increased population. Colonies essentially had three functions for the Roman Empire: (1) a fortified military outpost in a conquered country; (2) a means of providing for the poor in Rome due to their somewhat limited local resources; and (3) a means of a retirement settlement for Roman veterans who had served their time in the military (Vincent 1900, p. 1:529). Acts 16:12 reveals that Philippi was a highly prominent city of the region of Macedonia (Φιλίππους, ἥτις ἐστὶν πρώτη[ς] μερίδος τῆς Μακεδονίας πόλις).[14] Philippi became one of the four most important Augustan colonies within the region (Porter 2016, p. 330) and was one of three colonies (including Dyrrachium and Pella) that Octavian established along the major artery of trade and military deployment in the Roman Empire, the famed *Via Egnatia* (Ἐγνατία Ὁδός), which passed through the center of Philippi—a sign of Philippi's affluence as a mining and trade center (Lolos 2009, p. 269; cf. Strabo, Geogr. 7.34).

Second, given Philippi's likely affluence, proximity to the *Via Egnatia*, and port at Neapolis on the Aegean Sea, there would have likely been a constant influx of travelers and traders, resulting in the Philippians' exposure to various competing religions and worldviews, including the mystery religions of Egypt and the cult of Isis-Regina and other pagan pantheons.[15] The interest in mystery cults and magic in Philippi is evidenced in the demon-possessed slave-girl of Acts 16:16, who "was bringing" her masters "much profit" through "fortune-telling" (ἐργασίαν πολλὴν παρεῖχεν τοῖς κυρίοις αὐτῆς μαντευομένη). The religious makeup of Philippi, which Paul would have encountered during the first century, was largely pagan and diverse (Porter 2016, p. 331). Numerous extant inscriptions in Philippi reveal a pervasive presence of Imperial religion and Emperor cults,[16] the worship of the traditional Greco-Roman pantheon (especially Dionysus [Bacchus] and Diana[17]), oriental and Egyptian mystery cults, Thracian deities, at least some worshippers of the Jewish God YHWH, and a strong presence of practical henotheism (i.e., the exclusive worship of one god among the possibility of many gods).[18]

Third and last, the population of Philippi was rather cosmopolitan, consisting of numerous competing (Thracian, Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Egyptian) cultures, worldviews, and traditions.[19] While not technically a Greek city, Philippi was thought of as a small, primarily Greek settlement due to Macedonia and Greece proper being under the common control of Philipp and his successors.[20] However, when Antony and Octavian defeated the murderers of Julius Caesar (Brutus and Cassius) at Philippi, retired Roman soldiers began settling there, and thus, the cultural atmosphere of Philippi took on a more distinctly Roman "flavor" after 42 BCE.[21] Given its rather diverse background and humble beginnings, the populous of Philippi reflected "Thracian underpinnings, Hellenistic culture, but dominant *Romanitas*" (Reumann 2008, p. 3). The *Romanitas* was perhaps so entrenched in the culture of Philippi (cf. Acts 16:21) that despite Greek being the lingua franca of Philippi and its environs, eighty-five percent of the extant inscriptions discovered in Philippi thought to be contemporaneous with Paul are in Latin (Porter 2016, p. 330).

Despite the seeming Roman pride within Philippi, the majority of its inhabitants were not Roman (contra Gerald Hawthorne[22]) but Thracian, Greek, and other nationalities, whereas the outspoken aristocratic minority were "emphatically Roman and Latin speaking" (Bockmuehl [1998] 2013, p. 4). The indigenous population was often displaced when Roman veterans were invited to retire in Philippi. It was mostly the rich locals who were able to keep their lands during this transition toward *Romanitas*, and such displacement

would have created at least some angst between Philippi's aboriginal groups and its Roman colonizers. This has led some scholars to suggest (so Witherington 2011, pp. 5–6) that what can be said about Philippi is that it had a thin veneer of Roman culture on top of a thick indigenous Hellenism, which continued to reveal itself over time and in various ways. This civic pride in Philippi would wane by the third century CE onward as the majority of the Philippian population progressively returned to Greek customs and culture. Thus, the hybrid term "Greco-Roman" can also obfuscate and flatten the distinctiveness of Philippi's rich and diverse history, people groups, and religiosity.

Such is the variegated religio-cultural climate in which Paul ministered with love, joy, and tears (3:18) to the Philippians during his second missionary journey and subsequent travels. While Paul is often viewed as a "preacher," "letter writer," and "theologian," he was "first and foremost a pioneer missionary" (Burke and Rosner 2011, p. 1). As an in-Christ church-planting missionary and pastor to his fledgling Christ communities (Thompson 2011, p. 36), Paul would have likely perceived such cultural language and concepts and used them to build bridges for his gospel and for the continued instruction and maturation of the Philippian saints (1:6–11; 2:15; 3:15).

Paul's gospel and missional concerns in Philippians are underscored by Paul's pervasive use of lexemes and concepts related to "the gospel, mission, and preaching" (Ware 2011, p. 165). For instance, Paul employs εὐαγγέλιον ("gospel") more often here (9x), despite Philippians' brevity (104 verses), than anywhere else within the *Corpus Paulinum* (Ware 2011, pp. 165–66), save Romans (also 9x). Paul's focus on his gospel mission was so important, Mark Keown (2008, p. 1) argues, that "essential to Paul's understanding of evangelistic proclamatory mission, was his desire that the church continue this work in their own towns and regions." Paul expected "an active participation of the [Philippian] congregation, their involvement in the gospel, [and] their cooperation in the preaching of the gospel" (Schnabel 2004, p. 1460). The saints' participation in Paul's gospel mission is clarified at the beginning of Philippians (1:5), where Paul thanks God in his prayers for their "partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν). In Philippians and elsewhere in Paul's corpus, Paul explains his gospel mission in terms of a cooperative effort at the "behest of God" (1 Cor 3:5–16), which requires cooperative effort amongst Paul's Christ assemblies (Schnabel 2022, p. 57). Eckhard Schnabel further suggests that unlike the ostentatious displays of later medieval missionaries, who entered pagan cities with Christian crosses, relics, and "supplicatory processions," Paul "made an effort to adopt traditional and accepted practices of pagan religiosity to make it easier for Gentiles to accept faith in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ" (Schnabel 2008, p. 341; Acts 17:16–34).

This is not to say, as it were, that Paul promoted the syncretistic incorporation of Christ into existing pagan pantheons or that the Philippians should continue the pagan customs, lifestyles, and worship praxes of their ancestors—points which texts like Rom 1:18–32 and Phil 2:15; 3:18–20 forebodingly elucidate. Indeed, for Schnabel, the only steps Paul made to cross the "unbridgeable contrast" between paganism and Christ's gospel were cognitive and linguistic in shape (2008, p. 341).

As a result of Paul's strong gospel and missional foci in Philippians, he would have likely been familiar with the influential literary traditions driving the worldviews of the first-century pagan and Jewish cultures as his putative quotations of the Greco-Roman writers illustrate (see, e.g., the use of the sixth-century BCE Cretan philosopher Epimenides [Κρητικά] in Titus 1:12; cf. Callimachus, *Hymn. Jov.* 8 and Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.14). While some may balk at citing the Pastoral Epistles or Acts (see below) as valid sources informing Paul's missional praxis, a kaleidoscopic reading examines all available evidence under the rubric of plausibility. In sketching his seven-fold criteria for reading Galatians polemically, Barclay (1987, pp. 84–86) realizes that his rubric is hedged throughout in the caveats of "'mays' and 'mights,'" which highlight the necessity for scholarly pause, reflection, "cautious handling," and "all due sensitivity" to the textual and non-textual evidence under consideration. In examining such a wide-ranging set of data, what is

needed, according to Barclay (1987, pp. 85–89), is a range of controlling categories—which Barclay sets from "Certain or Virtually Certain" at one end of the spectrum to "Incredible" on the other extreme—that evaluates Pauline lenses in terms of plausibility. In this vein, J. Louis Martyn (1985, p. 313; cited in Barclay 1987, p. 85) implores biblical scholars "to employ both 'scientific control' and 'poetic fantasy'"—though, I would replace "poetic fantasy" with "flexibility" in reading NT texts like Philippians. Thus, when reading Paul and Philippians kaleidoscopically, controlling categories should be in place to honestly assess the viability and plausibility of the lenses and evidence we include as well as our resulting hypotheses generated from the data. The controlling categories in a kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians could be simplified to a fourfold rubric ranging from (1) Certain; (2) Probable; (3) Plausible; to (4) Inconceivable. Returning to the citation of Epimenides in Titus 1:12, if Paul were, on at least some level, familiar with Epimenides's Κρητικά—a point which is not inconceivable—then it logically follows that Paul was probably an exegete of the cultures around him as a church-planting apostle and missionary.

One possible example of Paul's "exegesis of culture" is found in Acts 17:22–31, in which the Paul of Acts engages the surrounding pagan cultures around the Areopagus (i.e., "the hill of Ares," the Greek god of war), the intellectual center of Athens, with Christ's gospel. Here, Paul's purported missional strategy is threefold: (1) Paul observes the pagan culture around him and their objects of worship (διερχόμενος γὰρ καὶ ἀναθεωρῶν τὰ σεβάσματα); (2) Paul sees, analyzes, and deconstructs the pagan beliefs in an inscription "to the unknown god" (Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ); and (3) Paul transcends this erroneous "agnostic" theology to show the superiority of Christ and to reorient their pagan understanding to a Christocentric one (17:31). The mixed pagan reaction to Christ's resurrection (17:32) is a plausible window of illumination into Paul's missiology and the complexity of the cultures in which Paul served, as well as the opposition which Paul perceived (cf. Phil 3:2, 18–19) and was actively engaged against in his gospel mission (cf. Phil 1:5–7, 12, 16; 4:3 *et passim*). Thus, rather than asking the question of whether or not Acts and the Pastorals are "*permissible*" as sources informing our reading of Paul and Philippians, we should ask the question, "Is their data *plausible*?" That is, is it *plausible* that Paul was at least somewhat familiar with ancient pagan literature and writers such as Epimenides or Callimachus? Indeed, it is, since Paul, arguably (Strecker and Horn 2000, p. 51; cf. Traill 2001, p. 287, esp. n. 11), cites the popular,[23] fourth-century BCE work of Menander (*Thais*) in 1 Cor 15:33: φθείρουσιν ἤθη χρηστὰ ὁμιλίαι κακαι—a passage within Paul's undisputed, seven-letter corpus. Any astute first-century observer and student of culture, as Paul seemingly was, would have likely been cognizant of popular poets such as Epimenides and Menander much in the same way that contemporary culture is aware of its own leading voices within the musical, literary, and visual arts.

In viewing Paul kaleidoscopically and deciphering the data obtained from Philippians and passages such as Acts 17 describing "Paul's" apparent modus operandi for missional engagement, Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of "answerability" may be helpful here in shedding insight into the nature and rationale behind Paul's missional praxis. In his brief essay (Bakhtin 1990, p. 1), Bakhtin suggests that there are three spheres of culture in a flourishing society: "science, art, and life." Human flourishing intersects all three of these spheres, and, for Paul in Philippians, flourishing in the ultimate, eternal sense could only be had "in Christ [Jesus]" (ἐν χριστῷ [Ἰησοῦ][24]) as heavenly citizens (1:21, 27; 2:5–11; 3:8, 20). Paul faced "answerability" to God (vertically) and to others (horizontally) for his response to any competing forms of flourishing in the Christ communities he planted—whether such traditions were primarily oral ("liquid" and malleable stories), visual (physical temples, art, and iconography), or textual (literature) in nature.

For Bakhtin, answerability is the ethical vehicle that gives these spheres of culture integration and unity (1990, p. 1). Without answerability, these domains of culture remain "mechanical," "external," bifurcated, broken, and "alien" to one another (Bakhtin 1990, pp. 1–2). "Answerability" creates and fosters a dialogical process of engagement in which Paul deconstructs what he experiences in competing forms of flourishing to show the

supremacy of Christ in every aspect of life and the human experience. The parts of a culture (like Philippi's) are "contiguous and touch each other, but in themselves remain alien to each other" apart from answerability (Bakhtin 1990, p. 1). Each must answer with their own lives what they have experienced and understood in these spheres so that these spheres do not remain alien and ineffectual, in hopes that flourishing may ensue in terms of life within the *missio Dei*. In other words, answerability demands an active response: that one does not remain a passive spectator of the world. If the poet, as Bakhtin argues, must remember that it is their "poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life" and the common man's "willingness to be unexacting and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life" bears the blame for the "fruitlessness of art," then how much more is Paul answerable to God for his response (or lack thereof) to competing forms of flourishing in the communities which he engages (1990, p. 2)?

Paul's religious zeal was once placed primarily in Torah-keeping (Gal 1:13–14, 23; Phil 3:5–6) and removing anything or anyone serving as a stumbling block to that end—including assemblies/proponents of the nascent Jesus movement. However, in Philippians, Paul's post-Damascus zeal is aimed against all competing influences (Phil 3:2–14, 18–19)—be they Thracian, Greek, Assyrian-Babylonian, Egyptian, Roman, Jewish, or a syncretistic combination of any/all—prohibiting Christ-worship and the spread of his gospel. In consideration of Paul's missional approach in Acts 17:22–31, had Paul failed in his answerability to God for the pagan inscriptions "to the unknown god" and, in Paul's mind, the erroneous modes of worship he encountered, then some would not have invited him back to hear more about Paul's gospel and to believe it (17:33–34). As a result, the Pauline Christ assemblies became "new communities" called ἐκκλησίαι, a term with primarily political (not religious) roots/connotations (Koester 2007, p. 12; cf. Phil 3:6; 4:15). Paul did not envisage this new, in-Christ community in Philippians to become a "new religion" per se but a "functioning [utopian] social and political entity in its own right, distinct from such organizations as the Roman society and its [self-serving] imperial hierarchy" (Koester 2007, p. 12). Paul reminds the Philippian saints that their "citizenship exists in [the] heavens" (τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει; Phil 3:20), and their in-Christ, "superordinate identity" trumps their former personas as mere citizens, commoners, foreigners, or slaves within the Roman Empire.[25] These in-Christ saints are to be a people who bend their knees not to "Lord Caesar" (κύριος καίσαρ[26] but to the "Lord Jesus Christ" (κύριος Ἰησοῦς χριστός; 2:10–11).[27]

There is also the question of whether Paul in Philippians continued to think of his mission as being valid within Judaism—albeit a Judaism that was long hybridized by Greco-Roman and Egyptian influences. What Paul denounces in his intra-Jewish, rhetorical *reductio ad absurdum* argument is not Judaism per se (3:3–14)—indeed, Paul's "gospel arises from *within* Judaism, and the Christ community is itself *a form of Judaism* (Zoccali 2017, p. 63, emphasis his)—but a fleshly confidence in an erroneous self-made "righteousness" that is not Christocentric or spiritual in nature. In other words, as Zoccali has argued, Paul appears here to be denouncing "the prospect of gentiles in Christ taking on normative [ethnic] Jewish identity" (2017, p. 64; cf. Gal 1:13). In contrast, Paul seemingly echoes what he has previously said in passages such as Rom 2:28–29 (cf. Deut 30:6; Jer 4:4; 31:33), which reimagine "circumcision" from being merely an outward, fleshly human symbol of ethnicity and religiosity to an inward, spiritual reality and divine transformation of identity and being (ἡμεῖς γάρ ἐσμεν ἡ περιτομή; Phil 3:3). Thus, the ambiguities surrounding gender and membership within YHWH's covenant community are removed (and not just *male* foreskins[!]): "the Christ community *is* the covenant people of God" (Zoccali 2017, p. 23, emphasis his). YHWH himself circumcises the hearts of his children, who love him supremely (Deut 30:6). In this sense, Paul invites his Jewish friends to follow his own example and the examples of others (Phil 3:17) in becoming "the circumcision" (ἡ περιτομή)—living lives worthily of the gospel of Christ and aspiring toward the resurrection from the dead and heavenly citizenship (1:27, 3:20). Moreover, Paul's missionary activity to Jewish and gentile communities was not delimited merely to himself or to a select few "elite" missionary

companions but, rather, is traceably visible throughout the extant evidence to have been a shared, collaborative missional effort amongst the Christ communities Paul founded (Ware 2011, p. 8; cf. Rom 15:19).

While Adolf von Harnack's opening lines "*Das Christentum auf der Balkanhalbinsel (Illyrische Diözese) ist uns für die ersten Jahrhunderte schlecht bekannt*" from his magisterial study *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* betray his skepticism toward the ability to witness the organized, missional effort in ancient Philippi and its environs during Christianity's first three centuries (1924, p. 786; cf. Ogereau 2023, p. 1), the data reveal that von Harnack's century-old assessment is patently false. Macedonian Christianity had not spread in some haphazard, "heterogeneous, if not ad hoc, fashion" (Ogereau 2023, p. 1; cf. von Harnack 1924, p. 787), as nearly "five hundred Christian inscriptions have come to light" since von Harnack's study, which paint a much different picture (Ogereau 2023, p. 3). Julien Ogereau explains, "we can reasonably assume that the apostle Paul and his companions sowed the first seeds of the Christian faith in the late AD 40s or the early AD 50s, even though we lack reliable sources that describe the process in detail and allow us to appreciate fully the impact of their ministry at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Beroea. . .. His subsequent letters to the churches he founded at Philippi and Thessalonica, and his allusions to Macedonian believers in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians, nonetheless attest that his initial efforts had not been in vain, and that these small clusters of believers had progressively grown in size and importance despite inner conflicts and fierce local opposition" (2023, p. 328). Paul's gospel and missionary ambit did not statically remain in the cities (such as Philippi) he visited and where they initially took root but rapidly spread along the *Via Egnatia* throughout Macedonia and beyond via the conduit of the churches he planted (2023, p. 329). To account for the gospel's rapid progress throughout Europe, lines of communication, relatability, and familiarity with the surrounding cultures would have been formed by Paul and the earliest Christ-followers. Hence, a kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians and Paul helps to account for this cultural and missional complexity.

4. Toward a "Kaleidoscopic" Reading of Philippians and Paul

Given the diverse religio-cultural milieu of first-century Philippi and the numerous problems associated with monolithic readings of Philippians and Paul as outlined above, it would seem that scholars would readily adopt a kaleidoscopic approach. However, there are three main problems thwarting attempts to read Paul "kaleidoscopically": (1) the problem of misunderstanding Samuel Sandmel's (1962, pp. 1–13) concept of "parallelomania" and the subsequent downplaying of comparative analysis; (2) the problem of scholarly "guilds" and "gatekeepers" within Pauline/biblical studies establishing and perpetuating what they feel is the one "right" reading of Philippians and Paul (Rowe 2016, p. 183), and their establishing exclusive lists of texts and traditions that are and are not (e.g., Acts and the Pastorals) permissible in performing "acceptable" historical-critical Pauline research; and, lastly, (3) the problem of the hard work involved in learning new information and skill sets beyond our current specializations. This is why multidisciplinary endeavors are so potentially fruitful and helpful. Biblical studies should not be a "solo enterprise" but a collaborative chorus of diverse, blended, and harmonious voices in which each voice matters and contributes to this "scholarly symphony."[28]

First, Sandmel's observations of what he coined "parallelomania," resulted from the shallow, superficial comparative analyses performed by scholars within the so-called "*Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*" and were perpetuated well into the twentieth century. These comparative studies tended to focus merely on similarities between the pagan sources and biblical texts with little to no regard for the differences between the two. The a priori assumptions driving the conclusions of these comparisons were that the biblical writers were using the pagan material as genealogical sources in their scriptural writings, which post-dated the borrowed pagan literature. Sandmel's concerns were threefold: (1) the extravagant exaggeration/overstatement of alleged literary parallels, similarities,

and allusions between biblical and non-biblical sources; (2) the description of literary connection in terms of "source and derivation;" and (3) the "predetermined direction" of literary dependence flowing from the pagan source to the biblical literature (and not vice versa) (1962, p. 1). In this sense, Sandmel's description of "parallelomania" is equally as applicable to exaggerations of Paul's alleged parallels and allusions to Scripture as it is to overstated claims of pagan literary influence. Yet, some focus only on this latter assumption and reduce Sandmel's concerns to being leveled only against the direct literary dependence of biblical texts upon pagan documents as genealogical sources—as if Paul had pagan papyri in one hand while copying their contents in his letters with the other.[29] Such confusion of Sandmel's concerns has, perhaps, stymied much of the fruitful comparative work in biblical studies that Sandmel sought to encourage in his famous essay (1962, p. 1).

Second, C. Kavin Rowe probes the problems of scholarly "guilds" and "gatekeeping" in biblical studies when he writes, "[I]n the same way that an apprentice learns from a teacher how to acquire the skills needed to practice a craft well, a participant in a tradition requires a teacher of the craft of inquiry. . . . [N]ot only does a teacher 'help actualize' such potential in a particular direction we would not necessarily find ourselves, a teacher is also the concrete authority on what we need to learn" (2016, p. 183; cf. MacIntyre 1990, pp. 64–65). Such "traditionalists" become a part of a "guild" requiring the mentorship of qualified "teachers" and docents informing their students of the acceptable and non-acceptable standards of practice as members of said guild. Thus, in terms of Philippians and Pauline studies, the teachers, leaders, and respected voices of these traditions of inquiry (or "guilds") effectively become the "gatekeepers" controlling who is "in" and who is "out," as well as the parameters of what is considered "acceptable" and "unacceptable" when reading and writing about Philippians and Paul. The effects of scholarly "guilds" and "gatekeeping" can be seen in the monolithic readings of Paul and his letters within study groups and program units in various professional academic societies.

Third, a kaleidoscopic approach forces scholars to move beyond what is "comfortable" into the difficult realm of learning new skills and languages and the value of scholarly networking and collaboration. There is an encouraging rise in academic groups, Ph.D. programs, and publications that showcase the fruit of multidisciplinary approaches within biblical studies.[30] While there has traditionally been an inherent tendency in doctoral programs toward laser-like precision and (often myopic) specialization that breeds "staying within your scholarly lane," Pauline and other biblical studies scholars should learn to "play well with others" who have expertise outside of our respective niche fields, as we can accomplish more together than we could ever do on our own.

Is reading Philippians and Paul kaleidoscopically worth the effort? Indeed, it is. While I will not cite (as do so many) Phil 4:13 in a manner shorn from its context to support my proposal, perhaps the inspirational words attributed to Paul in exhorting his "son in the faith," Timothy, are apropos: "Make every effort to present yourself approved by God—[as an] unashamed worker—interpreting correctly the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). Below, I succinctly highlight three debated passages in Philippians in an attempt to show how a kaleidoscopic reading can offer windows of illumination for their interpretation: the *Carmen Christi* (2:5–11); "the dogs, evil workers, and mutilation" (3:2); and the "enemies of the cross" (3:18–19). I will also explain how a kaleidoscopic approach informs the debates surrounding Philippians' structural integrity.

4.1. Philippians 2:5–11

The *Carmen Christi*, or "Christ Hymn" as it is commonly known, is the most discussed portion of Philippians within and without academic circles, with debates often centering on matters of authorship, Christology, eschatology, and anti-Imperial readings of Philippians. It is these latter two points (eschatology and anti-Imperial nomenclature) that are of interest here. In 2:9–11, Paul writes of Christ's exaltation and lordship, "God, therefore, also exalted him [Christ] to the loftiest height and gave to him the name above every name, in order that at the name of 'Jesus' every knee should bend—of those in the heavens and of those

upon earth and of those under the earth and every tongue should confess that, 'Jesus Christ [is] Lord [ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς χριστός]!' unto [the] glory of God the Father." While anti-Imperialist readings of Philippians keenly observe the descriptor κύριος ("Lord") in relation to Jesus (2:11)—thus emphasizing Paul's supposed κύριος Χριστός vis-à-vis κύριος Καίσαρ contrast[31]—many fail to notice the previous clause πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων in 2:10: "every knee should bend—of those in the heavens and of those upon earth and of those under the earth." This is a loose citation of the apocalyptic Greek text of LXX-Isa 45:23, and the parenthetical phrase describing the cosmic sphere and totality of Christ's supremely powerful lordship and reign—ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων—is absent from Isaiah's text but has been curiously added to Phil 2:10.

The phrase's last lexeme (καταχθονίων) is interesting, as it is a scriptural *hapax legomenon* and would have possibly invoked connotations of the monstrous and divine to pagans and former pagans in Philippi since καταχθόνιος (*katachthonios*) comprises in a generalized, cosmological, and theological sense the subterranean monsters, gods/goddesses (Chthonic/χθόνιοι θεοί: Euripides, *Hec*. 75–79), and netherworld realm within the pagan pantheons and appears in the pagan literature (and implicitly in art) as early as the Homeric epics (ca. eighth century BCE).[32] The native Thracian populace of Philippi worshipped Chthonic deities as reflected in the enigmatic mystery cult of the Κάβειροι and the cult of Dionysus (Zagreus), whose worship is attested in Philippi.[33] Moreover, the "Great" Thracian goddess, Bendis,[34] had Chthonic associations as a versatile, multifaceted lunar deity identified with Persephone and Hekate (West 1995, pp. 21–25). The worship of the Chthonic goddess Hekate is also evinced in ancient Philippi (Guthrie 2023, p. 9; Fowler 2013, p. 33). Additionally, Philippians' citation of LXX-Isa 45:23, "one of the most anti-pagan gods texts in all of Scripture" (Long and Giffin 2018, p. 276), in its wider context invokes YHWH's supremacy over all pagan deities. In Isa 46:1–2, the gods Bel and Nebo (a Babylonian Chthonic deity) "'kneel down' and 'bend the knee' . . . before Yahweh's ability to save his people; the gods have themselves been defeated and taken captive" in a type of cosmic "military victory" by God (Long and Giffin 2018, p. 277, esp. n. 116 and p. 23). Fletcher-Louis (2023, p. 10 n. 18) adds, regarding Christ's victory over the Chthonic gods, "It is fitting that Isa 45:23 should be filled out in Phil 2:10 with a specification that those who humbly bow the knee are the heavenly, earthly, and chthonic gods." The ancient Egyptians conceived of a flourishing afterlife as gaining entry into the glorious Chthonic kingdom of Isis and Osiris, who were also worshipped in ancient Philippi (Jennings 2017, pp. 88–89 n. 63). Revelation 5:3 echoes the cosmic victory of Christ in Phil 2:10–11 as "the heavenly, earthly, and subterranean gods" were deemed unworthy and unable to open the scroll as only the slain, leonine Lamb, Christ, was able (5:6; Long and Giffin 2018, p. 277). Christ is later enthroned (5:7–14; 7:17) and praised by the cosmos (5:13).

Hence, a kaleidoscopic reading of the *Carmen Christi* reveals not merely an "anti-Imperial" stance to Phil 2:5–11 but Paul's desire to showcase Christ as the omnipotent, cosmic Lord over all other gods, goddesses, divine and semi-divine beings, creatures, and monstrous *Mischwesen* in every conceivable cosmological realm and sphere of existence—including the deities and *daimonia* of the skies, the earth, and the underworld (Long and Giffin 2018, pp. 276–77). In this sense, the *Carmen Christi* seemingly anticipates the later (ca. 160 CE) hopeless dilemma imagined by Apuleius, the pagan Platonist, who writes,

"What then . . . am I to do . . . if humans are wholly driven far away from the immortal gods and banished, accordingly—relegated to this underworld of earth—where each one should be refused communion before the heavenly gods, and not any out of the heavenly host [acts] as a shepherd, groom, or cowherd [who] would secretly look after this bleating, neighing, and bellowing flock; who would allow the violent to be calmed, might heal the sick, or should help the poor? No god, you say, intervenes in human events. To whom then will I address [my] prayers? To whom shall I offer a vow? . . . Whom shall I call on to help the downcast, champion the good; whom will I go to as an opponent of the wicked in all of

life? And lastly, whom, to which one will I turn to witness an oath, the most frequent need of all?"[35]

Paul's answer in Phil 2:5–11:[36] we should bend the knee and confess Jesus Christ is the supreme, matchless Lord (2:9–11). It is Christ who left his heavenly comforts to visit and rescue humanity in its suffering and despair as its supreme Slave (2:6–7)—intervening in human history in the most beneficial way imaginable via his substitutionary self-sacrifice on a Roman cross (2:8). Consequently, Christ communes with the saints as they are "in Christ," and eternally indwelled by his Spirit. Christ beckons humanity to follow his divine mindset[37] and selfless example in service to one another for the present betterment and eternal flourishing of humanity and the cosmos (2:5).

Regarding the rubric of plausibility that we established above (see Section 3), let us ask the following four questions of "Paul's Master Story" Phil 2:5–11 (Gorman 2001, p. 88): (1) *What is certain?* Philippians 2:5–11 highlights the humiliation (ἐταπείνωσεν; 2:8), crucifixion (θανάτου δὲ σταυρου; 2:8), divine "superexaltation" (ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν; 2:9), and victorious supremacy of Christ over all created beings (κύριος Ἰησοῦς χριστός; 2:11). More specifically, 2:10–11 proffers a "loose citation" of LXX-Isa 45:23 that highlights the spatial/cosmological totality of Christ's dominion (ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων; 2:10).

(2) *What is probable?* It is probable that Paul had both the Imperial Cult and pagan pantheons in view with the additions to LXX-Isa 45:23 that he included in Phil 2:10–11.

(3) *What is plausible?* It is plausible, given the evidence and wider context of LXX-Isaiah 45–46, Revelation 5, and ancient Philippi's pagan religiosity, to see Phil 2:10–11 as an ode to Christ's cosmic "military" victory over all pagan pantheons, including the Chthonic deities.

(4) *What is inconceivable?* Given the data, it is inconceivable that the *Carmen Christi* is merely reflecting Paul's anti-Imperial stance. See Long and Giffin's discussion (2018, p. 241; cf. Fletcher-Louis 2023, p. 413ff) and conclusion: "the [Christ] hymn subverts 'imperial paganism' that encouraged the worship of the gods to maintain the *pax deorum*." Interpreters should consider a kaleidoscopic reading of 2:5–11 in considering the ways in which Paul might contextualize a "Jewish Jesus" to a largely pagan audience "in quite diverse settings" (Long and Giffin 2018, p. 279).

4.2. Philippians 3:2

Philippians 3:2 is another hotly debated passage, with scholars voicing wide-ranging opinions regarding the identities of Paul's/Christ's opponents. Given the previous discussion of kaleidoscopic readings of 3:2 by PWJ proponents above and the similar discussion of Phil 3:18–19 below, comments here will be brief, and the rubric of plausibility will combine the discussion of both passages. Paul writes, "Beware the dogs! Beware the evil workers! Beware the mutilation!" The commentary tradition has largely identified these opponents as being Jewish or Judaizers.[38] However, this assumption of Jewish/Judaizing opponents in 3:2 has been recently called into question. Scholars such as Kathy Ehrensperger (2017) and Nanos (2017, pp. 111–85) have suggested that pagan opponents make more sense of the extant evidence than do Jewish/Judaizing ones. Indeed, a kaleidoscopic reading of the data yields a wide swath of potential Greco-Roman, Egyptian, and Assyrian-Babylonian pagan cult candidates regarding the opponents in 3:2.[39] So much so that the a priori assumption of Jewish or Judaizing opponents by Pauline scholars commenting on 3:2 can no longer be "dogmatically" assumed. What of the opponents in 3:18–19?

4.3. Philippians 3:18–19

The identity of those whom Paul describes as "enemies of Christ's cross" (3:18–19) is also a highly discussed issue in Philippians scholarship. Paul laments, "For many are walking as enemies of the cross of Christ, which I was telling you all many times, but now I also tell [you] crying, whose end [is] destruction; whose god [is] the belly [κοιλία]; and glory in their shame; those setting their minds [on] earthly things." While Holloway (2017, p. 179) sees the opponents here as Judaizers—"Torah-observant Christ-believers" focusing

on "the 'flesh' rather than 'Christ,'" and Osiek (2000, pp. 102–3) argues for their identity being "the circumcision party" previously mentioned in 3:2, Cassidy (2020, pp. 121–26) sees this indictment as a "hidden transcript" against "Nero and his confederates at Rome," who worship, "their god, their sexual organ"—as κοιλία can also connote sexual organs euphemistically in the LXX (see, e.g., 2 Sam 7:12; 16:11; Ps 131:11; Sir 23:6). Hellerman (2005, pp. 218–21) echoes Cassidy's view for gentile opponents in 3:18–19 and suggests these "enemies of the cross of Christ" represent "a libertine party," who "gratify the lusts of the flesh"—whether gluttony, sexual desire, or a mixture of both. Paul has previously rebuked those who are slaves to such appetites (Rom 16:18). Seneca (*Ben*. 7.26) likewise refers to those he considers to be "slaves of their bellies" (Hellerman 2015, p. 218). Euripides (*Cycl*. 335), one of the most influential tragedians of the ancient world whose works—along with Menander's—were highly regarded as foundational to "civic *paideia*" (Connolly 2001, p. 364), also describes those whom he considers belly-worshippers, when he refers to Cyclops as saying, "I offer sacrifice . . . to this belly [γαστρὶ] of mine, the greatest of deities" (Reumann 2008, p. 571, translation his). However, Bockmuehl ([1998] 2013, pp. 231–32)—in his eclectic and rhetorical reading of Philippians—laments the "wide range of contradictory interpretations" regarding the opponent identification of Paul's enemies in Philippians 3. Thus, the recognition of the impossibility of making a clear identification might be a valid scholarly outcome—however lamentable.

Given the seeming impasse regarding opponent identification in 3:2, 18–19, a more fruitful approach appears to be in Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Animal Studies, which highlight Paul's use of dehumanizing insider/outsider boundary marker language and concepts in Philippians.[40] A kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians allows the flexibility of cross-disciplinary approaches—such as those of the social and animal sciences—in order to gain a more fulsome understanding of the data. When all we have is Paul's account and the scholarly (human) desire to know "more"—that is, to "know" the identity(ies) of the opponents to whom Paul refers—the inherent problems of "mirror-reading" in overstating hypothetical assumptions abound. All that can currently be done—until more and better evidence arises—is to recognize the variety of possible opponents and proceed with much scholarly pause, reflection, and caution. Here, Paul's point seems not to be the identification of these opponents but their threat and potential danger to the Philippian saints.

Let us now turn to the fourfold rubric of plausibility in considering 3:2, 18–19: (1) *What is certain?* We can speak with certitude regarding the complexity of the issues involved, which have resulted in a plethora of often antithetical hypotheses regarding the identity of Paul's/Christ's opponents. We can certainly echo the conclusion of Nanos (2017, pp. 111–14) et al., who have convincingly shown that the assumption of Jewish/Judaizing opponents within the commentary tradition is largely overstated and often parroted without having performed adequate research.

(2) *What is probable?* It is probable that unless more compelling evidence is discovered and set forth, there will not be a definitive answer that "proves" beyond doubt the identity of these opponents. Thus, scholars should, in the meantime, not speak "dogmatically" regarding their identity.

(3) *What is plausible?* It is plausible that Paul is here denouncing gentile opponents, who, in Paul's purview, pose an urgent, dangerous threat given his dehumanizing and *ekphrastic* repeated warning (βλέπετε τοὺς κύνας, βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, βλέπετε τὴν κατατομήν). While these opponents may have been associated at some level with the inside group,[41] it is plausible that such proximity was not ideological but geographical, religio-political, and/or familial in nature. That is, Paul's audience in Philippians comprised former pagans, who once stood as enemies of Christ—as did Paul (3:6)—and the pressures of persecution by pagan authorities and kin for those saints failing to bend the knee to Caesar or the patron deities of the Philippian guilds could lead to syncretism or (worse still) apostasy within Philippi's Christ communities.

(4) *What is inconceivable?* Given the evidence, it is inconceivable that Paul is here encouraging a supersessionist reading that—beyond all possible doubts—refers to Jew-

ish/Judaizing opponents. Similarly, one cannot speak with certitude regarding gentile opponents. A kaleidoscopic reading of the evidence shows the possibility of both groups (even opponents from the Egyptian cults within first-century Philippi) and highlights the value of SIT and Animal Studies as possible ways forward in understanding Paul's rhetoric in Philippians 3 *et passim*.

4.4. The Literary Integrity of Philippians

Lastly, scholars remain divided regarding the literary integrity of Philippians, yet a kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians informs this discussion on both sides of the debate. Scholars arguing for the literary integrity of Philippians typically appeal to the unity of the epistle via epistolary approaches—hence, Paul Holloway's (2001, p. 1; 2017, pp. 1–10, 31–35) "letter of consolation" thesis—or by noting Paul's sophisticated rhetorical moves throughout (see, e.g., Watson 1988, pp. 57–88; Black 1995, pp. 16–49; Osiek 2000, pp. 18–19), and, especially, in explaining the sudden shifts at 3:2 and 4:10–20 (Paul's so-called *danklose Dank* or "thankless thanks"). Such an appeal assumes at least Paul's familiarity with and, possibly, genius in what Aristotle (*Rhet*. 1354a1–3), Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Rhet*. 1.1.255–57), and others (*Rhet*. *Her*. 4.10) called "the art of rhetoric." Moreover, a kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians pushes readers beyond Paul's supposed knowledge and familiarity with Greco-Roman rhetoric in contemplating how non-elites, Jews, and other foreigners within Philippi would have understood Paul's complex literary artistry in Philippians or whether Paul was writing strictly to the in-Christ insiders within Philippi with no concern for outside groups hearing, reading, or understanding his letter(s).

Scholars arguing for a multiplicity of letters stitched together by a later redactor can also benefit from a kaleidoscopic approach in noting the external evidence of a double-listing of Philippians in the *Catalogus Sinaiticus*, the medieval Byzantine historian Georgius Syncellus's reference to a "first epistle to the Philippians," Polycarp's mention of Paul having written multiple letters to the Philippians (ἔγραψεν ἐπιστολάς) in Pol. *Phil*. 3.2, and, as Philip Sellew (1994, pp. 17–28) argues, that the pseudepigraphal *Epistle to the Laodiceans*—drawing upon Philippians in its contents and literary structure—omits Phil 3:2–4:3, 7–20, which are key points for the partition theory of Philippians (Holloway 2017, pp. 11–12). Internal evidence for the partition hypothesis also benefits from the study of Greco-Roman letter forms and editorial tendencies by later letter collectors/redactors—arguing that the Pauline itinerary (Phil 2:19–30) typically marks the end of a letter (Holloway 2017, pp. 13–14). Indeed, much exegetical and historical "sweat" is generated in performing the hard work of a kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians and Paul—investigating Philippians through the lenses of Greco-Roman rhetoric, epistolary genre, forms, and editing/redaction, textual criticism, and reception history—but such efforts can also bear much fruit.

What can be deduced from the plausibility rubric? (1) *What is certain?* We can speak with certainty that there is valid evidence on both sides of the debate that problematizes the discussion. Scholars can certainly agree that, according to Polycarp above, Paul wrote other "epistles" that may or may not have been lost over the centuries and included in the NT canon.

(2) *What is probable?* As with 3:2, 18–19, it is probable that further research and evidence should be gathered before speaking definitively on this issue. However, current trends in scholarship (rhetorical readings of Philippians, especially) seem to favor the case for literary unity. However, it may be the case that sufficient evidence to "prove" either debate regarding the literary integrity of Philippians never becomes available, and that remains, as it does currently, a satisfactory scholarly outcome.

(3) *What is plausible?* It is plausible that Paul had at least some civic *paideia* as a Roman citizen from Tarsus—perhaps more so than has typically been "allowable" by scholars[42]—in Greco-Roman writing and rhetoric. Canonical Philippians betrays at least some knowledge on Paul's behalf of rhetorical complexity and sophistication.

(4) *What is inconceivable?* Given the evidence, it is inconceivable to forcefully assert that Philippians consists of multiple, fragmented letters, as do some scholars within the

commentary tradition.[43] Likewise, it is inconceivable for scholars accepting the literary integrity of Philippians to offer a mere "cavalier dismissal" to the arguments surrounding the partition theory of Philippians without giving an adequate defense of their position.

5. Conclusions

The fruit of reading Philippians and Paul kaleidoscopically can be seen in the variety of proposed essays contributing to this present volume: readings of Paul through the lenses of "self-praise" (*periautology*), priestly cultic imagery, rhetoric, "ethical kerygma," citizenship, philosophy, and so on. Each of these approaches offers a distinct yet harmonious voice in the discussion of Philippians and Pauline scholarship.

Like Paul's seemingly incessant battles with his/Christ's opponents in ancient Philippi and beyond, a "war" has also been waging within Pauline studies regarding the myth of "one, right way" to read Philippians and Paul. I have attempted above to show the deficiencies in reading Paul "monolithically"—through a singular, primary lens (typically, either Greco-Roman *or* Jewish)—and even "binocularly" from a combined Greco-Roman *and* Jewish perspective. Within "binocular" approaches to Philippians and Paul, a "bifocal" view often emerges with a dominant (Greco-Roman or Jewish) lens being "near" and in sharper focus, while the other, secondary lens remains "far" and more blurred in the background.

In Peter Oakes's essay, "The Use of Social Models in Biblical Studies," he writes of the dangers of monolithic presentations of selective historiography: "[There are] a range of issues that are left invisible if we unreflectively treat the audience as an undifferentiated mass" (2020, p. 208). Despite the massive number of scholarly publications on Paul and his letters—most of which cast a monocular or binocular vision of the apostle and his works—such a kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians (and other Pauline texts) as has been proposed in this essay "can shed still more light" on Philippians and the *Corpus Paulinum* (Oakes 2020, p. 208).

To sum up, a kaleidoscopic reading of Paul and Philippians requires the humble admission that our presumptions on Philippians, Paul, and a host of other topics may be wrong and need correcting. In some cases, this requires a willingness to hold loosely our scholarly convictions and be willing to abandon erroneous assumptions that need to be rejected. Many of the most profound truths are discovered in the unlikeliest of places—beyond our scholarly "comfort zones." Moreover, a kaleidoscopic reading of Philippians and Paul requires the realization of the impossibility of uncovering every "stone," as new research is constantly being published, and we are finite beings. Our finitude necessitates scholarly participation and collaboration across a variety of fields and disciplines—leveraging time, resources, and knowledge across a wide swath of other researchers/truth-seekers/voices within this scholarly "symphony."

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Notes

1 (Koester 1998, pp. 54–55) notes that Epaphroditus was likely a Philippian citizen playing a key role in Philippi's Christ assemblies and in Paul's mission in Macedonia and Europe.

2 Representative of scholars highlighting Paul's military topos in Philippians is (Krentz 1993, pp. 105–27).

3 "*Ekphrasis*" denotes a vivid, rhetorical effect—giving the audience the visceral impression of experiencing what the author describes—e.g., τὴν κατατομήν in Phil 3:2. Theon's *Progymnasmata* contains the earliest extant usage of *ekphrasis*/ἔκφρασις—defined as: "descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight." Aelius Theon, *Progymnasmata* 7.118/Spengel 11.118. Greek text derives from (Heinsius 1626). Cf. (Webb 2009, p. 39).

4 Dunn coined the phrase "the new perspective on Paul" in his 1982 Manson Memorial Lecture of the same name at the University of Manchester.

5 See, e.g., (Fredriksen 2017, p. xii), who states, "Paul lived his life entirely within his native Judaism. Later traditions, basing themselves on his letters will displace him from this [Jewish] context. Through the retrospect of history, Paul will be transformed into a 'convert,' an ex- or even an anti-Jew; indeed, into the founder of gentile Christianity."

6 In his assessment regarding the possible identities of Paul's enemies in Phil 3:2, (Nanos 2017, pp. 125–32) lists the Greco-Roman cults of "Silvanus, Diana, Cerberus, Hekate, and Cybele" as options along with the Egyptian cult of Anubis and the Assyrian-Babylonian Sun-god cult of Merodach (Marduk) rather than the traditional view of Jewish/Judaizing opponents, which has pervaded the commentary tradition. See also the discussion of the issues surrounding the identification of Paul's opponents in Phil 3:2 in (Lamb 2024, 2025).

7 This conference was held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in June 1991 and featured a veritable "who's who" of American and European Pauline scholarship in 1991. The participants and resulting monograph (Engberg-Pedersen 1994) highlighted the necessary shift away from nomenclature—especially that which focused on Paul's Hellenistic "background"—that exacerbated the dichotomy between Hellenism and Judaism in Pauline studies.

8 Regarding the false dichotomy between Hellenism and Judaism, Engberg-Pedersen (2001, p. 4, emphasis original) writes, "Only by going self-consciously beyond the Judaism/Hellenism divide and giving up relying on it in any form will scholars be able to see Paul in the broad cultural context to which he belonged and to use that insight fruitfully for the comparative elucidation of his own ideas and practices. . .. The problem is that the standpoint from which comparisons are made is often frightfully skewed, as if *either* the Jewish *or* the Hellenistic material is in the end the really important one."

9 Representative of this hybridization is the 2013 edited anthology *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism*, which features an essay by Emma Wassermann whose title puns Engberg-Pedersen's 2001 work (Wassermann 2013). In her essay, "Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide? The Case of Pauline Anthropology in Romans 7 and 2 Corinthians 4–5," Wassermann investigates Paul's complex thought world—especially his anthropology—and concludes that Paul is "a producer of a highly creative synthesis of multiple traditions" (Wassermann 2013, p. 278).

10 The series by Wipf & Stock/Cascade "Reading . . . within Judaism" and "Reading . . . after Supersessionism" are exemplary of studies highlighting Paul's Jewishness. See, e.g., Christopher Zoccali's *Reading Philippians after Supersessionism* (Zoccali 2017) and the aforementioned title by Nanos, which reads Philippians "within Judaism" (Nanos 2017). The "Paul within Judaism" program unit at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature also betrays the popularity of reading Paul and his epistles within Judaism. The NPP and PWJ movements rightly and helpfully correct anti-Semitic tendencies within biblical studies and the commentary tradition and highlight the Jewishness of Jesus, Paul, and the NT documents. However, it seems that in some of these NPP and PWJ readings, the pendulum has swung, perhaps, a bit too far in the opposite direction: to view these first-century characters and documents through an exclusively Jewish lens while ignoring other important socio-cultural influences.

11 Translation mine. Unless otherwise noted, English translations of the primary biblical and extrabiblical texts are my own original translations. NT translations derive from the Greek text of the twenty-eighth edition of the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA^{28}) (Barbara Aland et al. 2012). Wayne Meeks concurs with Paul's assessment and writes, "Among those who have been baptized into Christ, wrote the apostle Paul, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' (Gal 3:28). Modern scholars have not believed him." (Meeks 2001, p. 17).

12 Such an assessment echoes the criticism leveled against much of the historical Jesus movement by scholars over the past 120 years. Among this criticism was George Tyrrell's famous comment regarding Adolf von Harnack's "classic liberal portrait" of Jesus: "The Christ that Harnack sees, looking back through nineteen centuries of Catholic darkness, is only the reflection of a liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well" (Tyrrell [1909] 1964, pp. 49–50).

13 Much of this section derives from Appendix 3 and Chapter 5 of my forthcoming monograph (Lamb 2024).

14 On the various issues surrounding the accuracy of Acts 16:12, see (Ascough 1998, pp. 93–103).

15 At least three Egyptian gods/goddesses were worshipped in ancient Philippi, as attested by extant inscriptions referencing Serapis (also "Sarapis"), Harpocrates (the Greek equivalent of Horus, the Egyptian god-child of Isis and Osiris/Serapis), and Isis-Regina. See (Collart 1929, pp. 87, 99–100) and (Oakes 2007, p. 14). That the Roman (Latin) writers contemporary with Paul (and perhaps well-known in Philippi) were familiar with the Egyptian pantheon is elucidated by Ovid. See Ovid, *Metam*. 9.688, 692. Nanos (2017, pp. 111–85) offers a helpful survey of the various pagan cults worshipped in ancient Philippi.

16 John Reumann suggests that the Imperial religion was so pervasive throughout the first-century Greco-Roman world that it accounted for "some fifty million" practitioners, with "rituals and celebrations that touched most of life" (Reumann 2008, p. 4).

17 See, e.g., (Hendrix 1992, vol. 5, p. 315) and (Abrahamsen 1988, pp. 48–50).

18 See (Porter 2016, p. 331) and (Novenson 2022, pp. 58–59). Among the most popular of the Thracian deities was the Thracian Rider (Hērōs Aulōneitēs [Ἥρως Αὐλωνείτης]), who is depicted as a Horseman, "a guardian spirit" (or *Lar*) on the funerary monuments and cliffs throughout Philippi and its environs (see Montanari 2015, p. 918; Glare 2012, p. 1:1103; Koukouli-Chryssanthaki and Malamidou 2022, pp. 132–37, respectively). The Thracian Rider served as a "Hero" and "tour guide" helping the deceased navigate the afterlife and to become a deified, hybrid (ἄνθρωποδαιμων) "Hero" (Ἥρως) or "Heroine" (Ἡρώϊσσα) themselves (Koukouli-Chryssanthaki and Malamidou 2022, p. 134; Oakes 2022, pp. 252, 257–58; and cf. Euripides, *Rhes.* 970–73) as the

Heroikos of Philastros explains regarding the Hero cults in the early third century CE (Maclean and Aitken 2001, pp. xliv–xlv). The adoration/veneration of Paul and other "apostles" and Christian martyrs of the past soon replaced the pagan praxis of Hero worship over subsequent centuries (Koester 2007, p. 87). The *Heroikos* was written likely to preserve the distinct Thracian and Greek identities and traditions while living amidst the amalgamated "melting pot" of cultures within the Roman Empire (Mestre and Gómez 2018, p. 107). Thus, a natural segue emerged for the Christ assemblies to reimagine this pagan practice in light of Paul and his gospel as a bridge between these two modes of worship. Such a missional "bridge" is evinced in the fact that an early Christian basilica was built upon the foundation of the pagan sanctuary to Hērōs Aulōneitēs after the sanctuary's destruction in ca. the first half of the fifth century CE, given the numismatic evidence (Koukouli-Chryssanthaki and Malamidou 2022, p. 152–53). The fact that pagan sanctuaries and altars surrounding Philippi—including that of Hērōs Aulōneitēs and others like it—were not immediately destroyed after the persecutions against paganism from Theodosius I (ca. 379–392 CE) and the issuing of the Theodosian Law by his grandson, Theodosius II (ca. 435 CE), speaks to the "continuity" of religious worship and the reimagining and reappropriation of these sacred spaces. These sacred spaces were "purified" by the Christian symbols of the dove and the cross, which was "the victorious immortal symbol of Christ" (Koukouli-Chryssanthaki and Malamidou 2022, pp. 128–29, 131).

19 See (Schowalter 2022, p. 2) and especially (Brélaz 2022, p. 83–84), who argues that the inscriptions in and around Philippi reveal that this competition was not between "distinct homogeneous, exclusive groups," and the inscriptions display religious and social syncretism as the competing groups assimilated and adopted various traits and traditions from one another. Albeit minimal, at least some Jewish presence in and around first-century Philippi is attested by Acts 16:13. Cf. (Verhoef 2005, pp. 568–69) and the inscriptional evidence (*Grabinschriften*) dating from the third century CE, which reveals the presence of a Jewish synagogue in Philippi (Koukouli-Chryssanthaki 1998, pp. 28, 34). Moreover, Philo attests the Jewish presence in Macedonia during the first century (*Legat*. 281).

20 See (Porter 2016, p. 330) and Strabo, *Geogr*. 7.41.

21 Strabo, *Geogr*. 7.41. Though, it should be noted that not all the citizens were in favor of this Roman colonization—especially the wealthy locals who would not be pushed out by the influx of Roman veterans. Though, Joseph Marchal suggests that it is perhaps better to think of Philippi as a "contact zone," a cluster of competing cultures, peoples, religions, and groups interacting, struggling, striving, and coexisting with each other (Marchal 2008, p. 92). Cf. (Concannon 2024).

22 Hawthorne suggests that Philippi was inhabited "predominately by Romans, but many Macedonian Greeks and some Jews lived there as well" (Hawthorne 1993, p. 707).

23 On the popularity of Menander in the ancient world, see E. Fantham (2011, p. 215) who writes, "The abundant papyri of Menander and allusions to his plays in Greek authors of the early Roman Empire leave no doubt that he was more than a recognized classic: he was a favourite of the Hellenistic world, alongside Homer, Euripides, and Demosthenes. Indeed the Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander attributed to Plutarch shows that he was not only studied but performed both publicly and on private occasions." Moreover, Traill (2001, p. 284) argues that the *Thais* was "one of Menander's most famous plays in antiquity."

24 The phrase "in Christ" permeates each chapter of Philippians—appearing explicitly ten times: 1:1, 13, 26; 2:1, 5; 3:3, 14; 4:7, 19, 21. In his commentary on Philippians, Hansen (2009, p. 32) notes that the phrase "in Christ" has a "dominating role" in Philippians, and it occurs in various forms a grand total of twenty-one times. Cf. (Marshall 1993, p. 138). In her robust study of Paul's "in Christ" language, Teresa Morgan argues for what she calls an "encheiristic" understanding—connoting the sense of being in the hands of God through Christ and under Christ's divine protection, which results in humanity's trusting of God and complete dependence upon him in Christ (Morgan 2020, pp. 14–15). Cf. (Morgan 2022, pp. 64–66). Morgan's encheiristic understanding of being in God's/Christ's hands in Philippians has bivalent ethical and associational implications: the Philippian saints are to live and serve together in ways commensurate with being a part of the inside group and whose primary identity and allegiance are bound together in the risen Christ (Morgan 2020, p. 77).

25 In Social Identity Theory (SIT), the "superordinate identity" can be described as that identifying factor uniting the insider group in shared solidarity and which supersedes all other (personal) identifiers and identity markers, which are subordinated under the supreme, superordinate identity (Baker 2012, p. 130).

26 The enticing temptation of emperor worship under the threat of pagan persecution among the nascent Christ communities is depicted in Mart. Pol. 8.2. In this text, Polycarp is tempted "to say: 'Caesar [is] Lord'" (εἰπεῖν Κύριος Καῖσαρ) at the threat of martyrdom. Polycarp refuses to renounce Christ, exclaiming: "and if you pretend to not know me, who I am, you listen with plainness of speech: 'I am [a] Christian!'" (Mart. Pol. 10.1). My translation derives from the Greek text of (Ehrman 2003, pp. 376, 380).)

27 For the supremacy of Christ in the form of Christ's superior, triadic title Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός in Phil 2:9–11, see (Fletcher-Louis 2023, pp. 422 n. 26, 510–16).

28 During an interview in 1989 with Connie Chung, Marlon Brando speaks of the power and beauty of collaboration—be it in the guild of acting or Pauline studies. Brando, who was experiencing the success of his role in The Godfather trilogy and anticipating the release of The Godfather III (1990), was asked by Chung, "Don't you realize you're thought of as the greatest actor ever?" Brando musingly turned to his dog, Tim, and replied, "Tim is the greatest actor ever. He pretends he loves me when he wants something to eat." Brando then quips, "What's the difference? See, that's a part of the sickness in America that you have to think

in terms of 'who wins,' 'who loses,' 'who's good,' 'who's bad,' 'who's best,' 'who's worst.' We always think in those terms—in extreme terms. I don't like to think that way. Everybody has their own value in a different way, and I don't like to think who was 'the best' at this or that. What's the point of it?" The same is true in biblical studies: each scholar has a role to play and a voice to be heard—no matter how small or large—in the symphony of scholarship. In the Western urge for radical individualism and scholarly "innovation," we risk becoming the discordant, dissonant "clanging gong" that Paul himself eschews (1 Cor 13:1).

29 Such confusion regarding Sandmel's "parallelomania" became apparent to me in an exchange on social media with a fairly well-known Pauline scholar focusing on Paul's Greco-Roman philosophical and rhetorical associations/influences. In the exchange, the scholar reduced Sandmel's three concerns to the following singular point: "Sandmel decried claims of direct literary dependence of biblical authors on GR [Greco-Roman] literature." I then reminded them that Sandmel actually had three concerns, which were not merely delimited to Greco-Roman literary dependence in Scripture. Gregory Jenks is representative of scholars seemingly downplaying the value of comparative analyses and Paul's diverse socio-cultural influences. Jenks, in his otherwise excellent work, seems to contradict himself at times, stating, on the one hand, the importance of Paul's being "steeped in this convergence of cultures" but later claims, "their [i.e., the Egyptian] influence on his [Paul's] thinking or on the Jews or pagans of Asia Minor where he served was negligible" (Jenks 2015, p. 41). The extant evidence, especially regarding Jenks's cavalier dismissal of Egyptian influence on Greco-Roman culture, proves Jenks's claim to be demonstrably false. While Jenks is correct that Paul was not borrowing from Egyptian tradition in the genealogical sense (a superficial mode of comparison as shown above), as an in-Christ church-planting missionary in first-century Philippi, Paul would have likely encountered these Egyptian influences and temples that dotted the Philippian landscape and engaged these competing religious concepts as a part of his apostolic responsibility and answerability to Christ.

30 Exemplary of such multidisciplinary collaborations in scholarly societies are the Multidisciplinary Approaches and the Gospels research group of the Institute for Biblical Research, the Bible and Film, Bible and Popular Culture, and Bible and Visual Art program units of the Society of Biblical Literature, and the Animals and Religion program unit of the American Academy of Religion. Monograph series like SCIBS (Sheffield Centre for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies) by Sheffield Phoenix Press and academic journals such as *JIBS* (Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies) also reveal the growing multidisciplinary nature within the field of biblical studies.

31 For a succinct discussion of the issues involved, see (Cohick 2013, pp. 166–82).

32 On the Chthonian deities of the Egyptian and Greco-Roman pantheons, see, e.g., (Armour 2016, pp. 176, 181) and (Bremmer 1999, p. 15). The dating of the earliest references of καταχθόνιος is based on lexical searches in the *TLG* database. See, e.g., Homer, *Il*. 9.457; and the first-century CE philosophical/theological writings of the Stoic Lucius Annaeus Cornutus *Nat*. *d*. 72.18 (καὶ χθονίαν ἐκάλεσαν καὶ τοῖς καταχθονίοις θεοῖς ἤρξαντο συντιμᾶν), which were contemporaneous with Paul and his Philippian audience.

33 Zagreus, son of Zeus and Persephone, is known in the Orphic tradition as the first incarnation of Dionysus (Bacchus), the "Chthonic . . . god coming forth out of the Earth, from the realm of Persephone" (Irwin 1991, p. 38).

34 Aristophanes, in his comedy *The Lemnian Women* (*Fragments* 384), described Bendis as the μεγάλη θεός (Greek text derives from (Henderson 2008, p. 290); cf. Photius, *Lex*. 251.7).

35 My translation derives from the Latin text of (Jones 2017, p. 356).

36 While much debate surrounds the authorship of the *Carmen Christi*—whether it was penned by Paul or represents a pre-Pauline species of early confessional material within the nascent Jesus movement—Paul no doubt *included* the additions to LXX-Isa 45:23 in canonical Philippians to show the universal supremacy of Christ above all other gods, goddesses, titans, monsters and the monstrous, and human rulers throughout the cosmos.

37 Crispin Fletcher-Louis (2023, pp. 4–5 n. 5) refers to this mindset as "the divine heartset" of Christ, which is for Fletcher-Louis (2023, p. 2), "Christ-shaped patterns of relating in love, honor, and empathy."

38 For a helpful discussion of the commentary tradition surrounding the identity of the opponents in Phil 3:2, see (Nanos 2017, pp. 111–16)—albeit Nanos seems to overstate his case, as (contra Nanos) there are examples in the commentary tradition (John Calvin, for example) in which commentators did not ascribe to Paul's opponents a strictly Jewish or Judaizing identity. Furthermore, (contra Nanos) examples exist of Jews calling gentiles "dogs" in the extant Second Temple Jewish literature (see Lamb 2020a; 2020b, n.p.).

39 These data stem mostly from extant epigraphic evidence in the rock reliefs, *Grabinschriften*, and temple dedications within the archaeological record of Philippi and its environs. See, e.g., Valerie Abrahamsen (1988, pp. 46–56). An under-considered possibility in terms of opponent identification in 3:2 is the Egyptian cults that dotted the Philippian landscape during Paul's day. On the pervasive spread of the Egyptian cults through Europe (generally), Macedonia, and Philippi (specifically), see W. H. Roscher (Roscher 1890–1894, pp. 379–92) and Paul Collart (1929, pp. 70–100), respectively. Though older, these works remain seminally important since much of their research was performed prior to the destructive effects of two world wars. The dehumanizing slur "dog" (*canis*) is utilized by the Jewish historian Josephus against his Egyptian opponent, Apion, for the Egyptians' theriomorphic, doglike deities such as Anubis (*C. Ap*. 2.85). The Pharaoh, his taskmasters, and magicians would have widely been considered "evil workers" to the Jewish people of the exodus and beyond (Exod 1:10–14). The writer of the Sibylline Oracles highlights the Egyptian deification of dogs (Sib. Or. 5.279), the description of "Isis, thrice-wretched goddess," Serapis,

and "thrice-wretched Egypt" (Sib. Or. 5.484–88). The fourth-century BCE Greek comic poet Anaxandrides jokingly contrasted the customs of the Greek and Egyptian priests, with the Greek priests being "whole" and the Egyptian priests being "mutilated" via castration (Dillon 2002, p. 74; cf. Herodotus's reference to ancient Egyptian circumcision in *Hist.* 2.37.5). Moreover, the pervasive threat of syncretism and the religious appropriation of Egyptian deities and modes of worship during the first four centuries of the Jesus movement are evinced in the words of the anonymous writer of *Historia Augusta* (8.1–5). Here, the writer references the apparent syncretistic worship of Serapis among the Christ communities of Egypt in the fourth century: "There [Egypt], those who worship Serapis are Christians" (*illic qui Serapem colunt Christiani sunt*). Author's translation of the Latin text of David Magie (2022, p. 388). This supposed syncretism perhaps led to the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria by Pope Theophilus—its ruins being soon replaced by a Christian church in what was, perhaps, a symbolic gesture of Christian supremacy and Theophilus's having conquered the Egyptian pagan cult (cf. Jerome, *Epist*. 107.2; Socrates of Constantinople [Socrates Scholasticus], *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.16 [PG 62:281b–c]).

[40] See, e.g., the SIT work of Paul Trebilco (2017) and the Animal Studies work of Ingvild Gilhus (2006) for a helpful introduction to these disciplines. For a reading of Philippians 3 through the kaleidoscopic lenses of SIT, Animal Studies, and Monster Theory, see the forthcoming LNTS chapter (Lamb 2025).

[41] For Trebilco (2017, pp. 4–5, 25), Paul's highest, most severe boundary marker language (what he termed, "Category 3") was reserved for those most "proximate" to the inside group—that is, former or "incognito" insiders who seek to infiltrate, corrupt, and/or destroy the Pauline Christ communities.

[42] See such scholarly skepticism regarding Paul's knowledge of rhetoric and rhetorical conventions in (Porter 2016, p. 16). While Porter concedes at least some basic Greco-Roman education for Paul, he further writes, "In all, the evidence of Paul progressing very far in the Greco-Roman educational system is lacking. He almost assuredly received an elementary education and may well have attended grammar school, but Paul was not trained as a rhetorician, and to examine his letters as if they are instances of ancient rhetoric is probably misguided."

[43] An example of such a bold assumption is found within the title of W. Schenk's commentary (Schenk 1984), *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* ("The Philippian Letters of Paul").

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Article

The Missional Power of the Christ-Hymn

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Abstract: Discussions of Philippians 2:6–11 consider whether it is intended kerygmatically or ethically. Kerygmatic proponents consider that Paul inserted an early hymn to narrate the story of Christ's coming and his exaltation to encourage the worship of Christ. Ethical readers argue that the hymn aims to shape readers' ethical posture. Others argue that both ideas are in play. This essay argues that the passage has kerygmatic power. It declares the story of Christ's coming, self-emptying and humbling, incarnation, death, exaltation, and cosmic lordship. However, it also presents Christ as the ultimate ethical paradigm. It argues, however, that the "ethical" reading is reductionistic unless explained in the direction of social relationships (socioethically) and mission (missioethically). The passage's missional power is then clarified. First, the broader context in the first century is missional and evangelistic. Second, the "fabric" of the letter urges engagement in gospel proclamation. Third, the movement of the passage is missional, and it succinctly proclaims the gospel of Christ. Fourth, the purpose of Christ's exaltation is universal submission supposing the proclamation of his lordship. Finally, the hymn climaxes with worship, the end goal of all missions. As such, the hymn should be read through a missional and evangelistic lens as it invites readers to participate in God's goal of universal submission to Jesus Christ as Lord.

Keywords: Philippians; Christ-hymn; mission; evangelism; Apostle Paul; Pauline theology

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1. Introduction

For over a century, scholars have argued whether the so-called "Christ-hymn" should be read kerygmatically as a declaration of Christ (e.g., Käsemann 1968, pp. 45–88; Barth 2002, pp. 59–68; Beare 1976, pp. 74–75) or ethically as a presentation of Christ as an ethical example (e.g., Lightfoot 1913, p. 110; Müller 1955, p. 77; Fee 1995, pp. 199–201). Some scholars challenge the typically Western "either-or" perspective and read the passage from both a kerygmatic and an ethical perspective (Silva 2005, pp. 95–98; Hansen 2009, pp. 119–22; Gorman 2001, p. 44). In this essay, I will take this third way—the passage should be read in both ways. It *is* a glorious proclamation of who Jesus is. It *is also* integral to Paul's appeal to a Christocentric ethic for the Philippians and other Christian readers.[1]

However, I will also aver that, while both approaches go some way to understanding the passage, neither reading captures the missiological intent and power of the Christ-hymn. I argue that the hymn is not merely written to declare the Christ story to the world or to appeal to the Philippians to emulate Jesus in their internal relationships. It challenges readers to evangelism and a Christoform posture as they share the gospel throughout the world. It is to be read kerygmatically, ethically, socially, and missionally/evangelistically.[2]

2. Kerygmatic and Ethical Perspectives on the Hymn

Contemporary Philippians 2:6–11 studies customarily ask whether the passage should be read kerygmatically or ethically. Kerygmatic readers like Ernst Käsemann consider the piece a declaration of the lordship of Christ rather than an appeal to live in a particular way. They abstract the text from its context, search for an alternative earlier *Sitz Im Leben*, and ponder its extraordinary Christology and meaning (Käsemann 1968, pp. 45–88). Kerygmatic readers are, to some degree, right in doing this. They recognize that the so-called "hymn"

(e.g., Deichgräber 1967, p. 22; Sanders 1971, pp. 1–5; Hofius 1976; Hengel 1983, pp. 78–96; Hurtado 1984, pp. 113–126; Martin 1997), or exalted prose (Fee 1992, pp. 29–46; 1995, p. 40), which I will call a "hymn" for simplicity, is an astonishing summative declaration of the person and identity of Christ, his humble service and self-sacrifice for the world, and his glorious exaltation as Lord over all spiritual and other political forces. I will comment further on this as I briefly consider the missional and liturgical implications of the hymn.

Ethical readers like Gordon Fee critique kerygmatic readers for failing to read the hymn in its context. They usually discuss its *Sitz im Leben* but recognize that such a setting remains speculative. They focus on the ethical implications of the passage for readers.[3] This approach is appropriate, for Philippians 2:6–11, read in the context of the whole letter and its immediate context (particularly 2:1–4, 12), summons readers to a certain ethic. Paul is calling them to emulate the phronesis of Jesus who, in his earthly life and presently in heaven, embodies the things Paul is asking the Philippians to cultivate to end the nascent conflict between rival factions grouped around two leaders, Euodia and Syntyche (4:2–3).

They rightly recognize that, throughout, even as he moves between discussions of his context and that of the Philippians, Paul appeals for a particular ethical response. Everything in the letter is crafted to summon them away from attitudes and behaviors fueling their dispute. They are to renounce such things as envy, rivalry (1:15), selfish ambition (1:17; 2:3), causing others pain (1:17),[4] vain (literally, "empty")[5] conceit (2:3), self-centeredness (2:4, 21), grumbling, disputing (2:14), and gluttony (3:19).[6]

Instead, they are to cultivate in their community such things as mutual servanthood (1:1; 2:17, 22), unity and fellowship in the gospel and Spirit (1:5; 2:1; 4:2), affection (1:8), love,[7] goodwill (1:15), joy,[8] prayer (1:19; 4:6–7), hope (1:20), sacrifice for the gospel (1:22–25), perseverance (1:27; 3:12, 14; 4:1), suffering (1:27–28; 3:10), encouragement, comfort, compassion, mercy (2:1, 27), humility (2:3), others-centeredness (2:4, 20, 26), obedience (2:12), blamelessness (2:15), sacrifice (2:17, 30), empathy (2:26–27), mutual honor (2:29), help (4:3), clemency (4:5), peace (4:7, 9), correct thinking (4:8), material generosity (4:10–18), contentment (4:12), and God-dependence (4:13, 19).

However, I contend that "ethical" is an unsatisfactory term to describe the power of the hymn. The first issue with the ethical reading is that "ethical" in conservative Christian circles is often read in terms of personal rather than relational morality. Such a limited ethical perspective can lead to failure to appreciate the social or relational dimension of the letter's appeal.[9] Unlike his other letters, which cover a range of ethical matters, *all* the ethical material in this epistle is set within the context of the social relationships under strain in Philippi. There is no genuine interest in many of the moral and ethical issues that come up in the Pauline corpus, such as sexual immorality. Hence, the term "ethical" is inadequate; instead, the appeal is, more correctly, socioethical.[10]

With this caveat in mind, the declaration of Jesus in 2:6–8 undoubtedly has an ethical dimension. Although divine and rightfully able to claim and exploit his status of equality with God, Jesus renounced the use of rapacious force usually associated with imperial rule, emptied himself, assumed the posture of a slave, became human, and humbled himself by being obedient to the point of crucifixion. God then exalted him as Lord and the embodiment of himself, calling to mind Isaiah 45:23, where all humans bow the knee and confess his lordship. Believers are to emulate his example of self-giving for the world.[11]

Still, I remain unsatisfied even with the qualifier "socio" added to ethical. When read in the context of Philippians, the passage is also profoundly missional. Kerygmatically, it brilliantly and succinctly declares who Jesus is and what he has done. It is then an evangelistic proclamation of Christ. It also points to the global mission that flows from the Christ event to this day, whereby the gospel will be preached to *every* human capable of hearing the word, believing, and responding by bending the knee and acknowledging Christ's divine lordship. It invites faith-filled readers to engage in missional engagement with the posture of Christ. So, while it is ethical in its challenge to readers to take up the posture of Christ in their lives, it is not simply ethical or socioethical; it is missioethical.[12]

Paul desires the Philippians to assume a Christlike ethic in service of the defense and advance of the gospel (1:7, 12).

Furthermore, it is profoundly liturgical, as it declares who Christ is and summons all people to bend their knees to the glory of God the Father now. Its liturgical dimension flows from the hymn's missional dynamic—the mission is to declare this Jesus to the world so that every knee will bend, and every tongue acknowledge now the lordship of Jesus, to the glory of God the Father.

In what follows, I will lay out the basis for these claims by first looking at the missional aspects of the hymn, then its missional movement, and finally, its mission-liturgical dynamics.

3. Missional Aspects of the Hymn

Here, I identify six aspects that convince me that the passage can and should be read missionally and evangelistically. It summons believers to participate in God's mission and with a particular posture.

3.1. The Missional Setting in the First Century

The letter was written either in 52–55 AD or, as I prefer, in AD 62–63.[13] Either way, this was when the church was missional to its core as it radiated out from Jerusalem to the world. Jesus' courageous mission was a recent phenomenon.[14] His sacrificial death and example inspired the early Christians to a similar degree of commitment.[15] Since Pentecost, after which the disciples were thrust into Spirit-empowered witness (Acts 2:1–4, cf. 1:8),[16] Christians were taking the gospel with them wherever they went (e.g., Acts 8:4).

The account of Paul's traveling coworker and travel companion, Luke, confirms this evangelistic zeal.[17] After Peter preached in Jerusalem, some 3000 people from the nations became believers at Pentecost and carried the gospel home north, south, east, and west (Acts 2:9–11, 42). The writer of the Philippians, Paul, then Saul, accelerated this mission through his persecution as believers driven from the city evangelized Samaria, Judea, and Syrian Antioch (Acts 8:1–40; 11:19–26).[18] After his Damascus Road encounter with his coworkers, Paul took the gospel into Arabia, Cilicia, Syria, Anatolia, and the Balkans (Acts 9, 13–28; Rom 15:19; Gal 1:17–21). Others, known but largely unknown, continued the work.

Unlike Western Christianity, which has been thoroughly evangelized for centuries and is now in decline, Christianity was expanding at an incredible pace through the social networks of the Roman world. Whereas Western Christians are evangelistically quiet, the gospel's spread was in full swing at the time of the writing of Philippians. An evangelistic mindset was essential to a first-century believer.

If Philippians was written in the 50s from Ephesus, according again to Luke, it was written during a period of dramatic evangelism by Paul and his coworkers in Asia Minor, western Anatolia (Acts 19:10). It is likely in that two-to-three-year period that the churches addressed in 1 Peter 1:1 and Revelation 2–3 were established. One of those coworkers was likely Epaphras, who established the church in Colossae and probably Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 1:6; 4:12–13, 16). If, as I argue, Philippians was written in the 60s, Paul was in Rome during a period of high evangelistic fervor among local Christians (1:12–18a) within a few years of Nero's horrific persecution and the execution of Paul and Peter (1:12–18a).[19]

About to face trial after his appeal to Caesar, Paul's vision for the mission was not spent. While Philippians suggests he wants to return east to Philippi to ensure they are okay, we know from Romans of his yearning to go further west to Spain to establish the gospel where it has not been preached (Rom 15:20–28). His concern expressed in the letter to continue living was partly motivated to see more fruit for the gospel, likely meaning further converts (1:22; cf. Rom 1:13) (Bowers 1987, p. 197).

His desire to return to Philippi was also missional—he wanted the Philippians for their προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως. In an intentional inclusio, earlier προκοπή was

used for the advance of the gospel. As will be discussed below, While the emphasis is the Philippians' progress and joy from the faith, the inclusio suggests that within the range of the noun is not merely their ethical advance and deepened social cohesion but further missional success as they, with refreshed unity, will stand firm in the Lord, contend for the faith of the gospel (1:27), and hold forth the word of life (2:16), as they have done in their past with Paul (cf. 4:2–3). Their joy is not that of a happy community but one into which new converts won through wise, gracious, winsome evangelism (Col 4:5–6).[20]

Wherever he is imprisoned, the letter's writer is Paul, a missionary, passionately motivated that all the Gentiles hear the message. Contemporary Western readers accustomed to seeing a church on every corner for centuries must reorientate themselves to the mindset of the early Christians who knew of no other life than seeing the gospel expand. As such, even before considering the literary context of the letter and the Christ-hymn, we cannot think merely in ethical terms. Everything Paul writes has an evangelistic and missional edge.

3.2. The Missional Fabric of the Letter

Not only was the broader context missionally shaped, but as Fee and Ware have in different ways argued (Fee 1995, pp. 47, 158–67, 244–48; 1999, pp. 20–22, 77–79, 107–109; Ware 2005, passim), and I aver at length in *Congregational Evangelism in Philippians*,[21] the content of Philippians and the context for the Christ-hymn breathes mission.

Uniquely, Paul begins the letter by naming himself and Timothy as "slaves of Christ Jesus". Their collaboration speaks of their father-son partnership *in the gospel* (2:19–23).[22] It emphasizes their desire to emulate the "slave-formed" Jesus in posture and mission (2:7). The letters of Paul and Luke in Acts indicate how closely the pair worked, something that would have been well-known to the Philippians since Paul and his team evangelized the town a decade or so earlier (Acts 16) and their visit around four to five years earlier en route to Jerusalem with the Collection (Acts 20:6; 2 Cor 2:13; 7:5–8:5).[23]

The thanksgiving has at its heart in 1:5, "partnership in the gospel", a phrase that, as I have argued extensively, cannot be limited merely to financial support as some continue to espouse. Instead, it speaks of partnership in mission including at least shared faith, financial (2:25–30; 4:10–19) and prayer support (1:19), shared suffering (1:28–30), ethical witness (2:15), active evangelization amid persecution (1:27–30; 2:16a; 4:2–3), unified resistance to false gospels (3:2–21), and defending and advancing the gospel (1:27; 3:1–20) (Keown 2009, pp. 209–16; Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 127–33). Although disputed and able to be read more generally of salvation, with many others, I maintain that in context, Philippians 1:6 and 7 continue the theme of mission.[24]

Paul's report in 1:12–18e does not focus on his dramas in Roman imprisonment but on the gospel's advance at his point of imprisonment (esp. 1:12). The government officials (Osborne 2017, p. 37)[25] know why he is in prison (in Christ). Some are likely being converted (4:22).[26] Even though one group of these passionate proclaimers[27] is falsely motivated by envy, rivalry, selfish ambition, and malice toward Paul, the apostle rejoices that the gospel is being preached (1:18a). Indeed, it is axiomatic for Paul that the gospel is preached at all times and in every way (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 215–18; 2016, pp. 195–208). Philippians 1:18f–26 speaks of Paul's forthcoming trial and his dilemma concerning its outcome—life or death. Still, the evangelistic mission is mentioned in three ways. First, Paul rejoices that his situation will turn out for his salvation due to the Philippians' prayers and the Spirit's help or supply.[28] This confidence accords with his eager expectation and hope that he will not be ashamed as he faces Nero's judiciary. Mention of shame here recalls Mark 8:38 (Friedrich 1965, p. 103) and other Pauline texts where Paul declares his lack of shame in the gospel and a crucified Christ (Rom 1:16; 2 Tim 1:8, 12, 16). Instead, Paul, as always and now, will, with all courageous proclamation (ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ),[29] Christ will be honored in his body whether he lives or dies (v. 20).

Second, ongoing life will mean bodily life with Christ and "fruitful labor". As in Romans 1:13, καρπός likely means further fruit from his apostolic ministry of bringing

about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles (cf. Rom 1:4). This fruit includes the strengthening of disciples and further converts (Loh and Nida 1995, p. 33).

Third, faced in some way with life or death and a choice he does not want to make known, Paul chooses to remain in the flesh for the sake of the Philippians. He desires to remain for the Philippians' joyful progress (προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν) produced by faith (τῆς πίστεως). Such progress would seem to be ethical, but noting that προκοπή is used in 1:12 of the advance of the gospel, it should be seen here to be holistic, including virtuous lives, social relationships, and missional progress. This advance will result in worship (boasting) in Christ Jesus as the Philippian Christians and converts welcome Paul back to Philippi (1:25–26). It also includes the chorus of praise from new converts Paul will make on his trip.

The proposition of the letter (Witherington 2011, p. 96) summons the Philippians to live as heavenly citizens (cf. 3:20) worthy of the gospel (1:27a). On its own, the appeal applies to every facet of their Christian existence, whether it be worship, community wholeness, and missional engagement. Still, Paul leaves nothing to chance and ensures they recognize the appeal's missional dimensions. The sub-clauses indicate that their heavenly citizenship will result in Paul hearing of their unity as they stand as tightly bound as a Macedonian phalanx or a Roman maniple or cohort, as they defend and advance the gospel in Macedonia, as the situation demands (1:27c). Like athletes at the games, they will contend as one soul for the defense or advance of the gospel (1:27d). They are to engage in mission without being intimidated by those in the community who oppose them, for their suffering is a gift from God as is their faith. Indeed, their unwavering determination signifies their eternal salvation, just as their persecutors' antagonism indicates their endless destruction. In standing, contending, and defying their opponents, they emulate Paul, who suffered greatly in his first visit to Philippi and his current experience in Roman prison (1:28–30; Acts 16:11–40) (Keown 2009, pp. 107–24).

Philippians 2:1–4 flows from[30] the focus on evangelistic heavenly citizenship to the posture the Philippians are to take up as they live and conduct their mission. With literary creativity, Paul summons the Philippians to the encouragement, consolation from love, Spiritual unity, gut affection, and compassion they together experience in Christ (2:1). With the nascent contention between the missionary workers Euodia and Syntyche in view (4:2–3), Paul urges the Philippians to complete his joy with unified thinking, the same love, and oneness of soul and mindset (2:3). He encourages them and the whole church to renounce selfish ambition, empty pride, and self-interest, but with a posture of humility, esteem others above themselves and look toward the interests of others (2:3–4).

The material following the hymn is launched by the inferential conjunction ὥστε, "therefore, for this reason" (Arndt et al. 2000, p. 250), and so draws out how the Philippians are to respond to the glorious declaration of Christ's humiliation and glorification. They must respond with continued obedience and work out their own salvation by God's strength and power (2:12–13).[31] This appeal is not that they may gain salvation through their work but that they work out their status as God's saved people. Of course, their doing this will result in greater community cohesion.

This general appeal, like the appeal for gospel-worthy citizenship in 1:27, includes worship, personal ethics, church relationships, and mission. Indeed, these elements feature in what follows as Paul works out the imperative, "work out your own salvation".

In 2:14, with the feud between Euodia and Syntyche again in mind, Paul urges the people of the church to abandon grumbling and arguing. These destroy community cohesion. They do this for a missional purpose (ἵνα):[32] *so that* the Philippians will be blameless and pure, unlike Israel in the wilderness (Silva 2005, pp. 123–25). Cursory readers can assume Paul's interest here is personal ethics or morality. However, the context suggests Paul's primary concern is social relationships; hence, it is socioethical. In their social relationships, they are to be spotless and pure.

In verse 15, the appeal becomes explicitly missioethical as it takes on an explicitly missional edge. The Philippians are to be united in the gospel amid the crooked and perverted world of Macedonia and the Roman Empire. In this context, they are to shine

as lights of the world.[33] This interest in the κόσμος, "world", here moves the appeal from social ethics to missional ethics. Paul imagines the quality of the shared life of the Philippians radiating into the darkness of the region. At first blush, this appears to speak of ethical purity or spotless social relationships within the church. However, the metaphor of light includes its movement from the people of light into the world's darkness. This missional twist brings evangelism into view as elsewhere, Paul likens the gospel of the glory of Christ proclaimed to light radiating into the world darkened by sin and evil forces. As a new creation act, this gospel shines God's truth into the hearts, bringing enlightenment concerning the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:4–6).[34]

As I have argued and explicated on three occasions in various writings, the outward evangelistic dynamic flows on in the debated 2:16a. Although 2:16a can be translated as "hold fast the word of life", as is extremely common today, as most earlier commentators and a growing group today assert, it more likely calls the Philippians to "hold forth the word of life"; that is, offering the gospel to a dark, thirsty, and hungry world (Ware 2005, pp. 269–70; Murray 1998, pp. 322–23; Fee 1995, pp. 244–48; Keown 2020, pp. 98–117). Just as Paul being poured out as a libation includes his evangelistic endeavor, the "sacrifice and service" flowing from the faith of the Philippians should be read to include the same. Notably, their mutual sacrifice leads again to corporate joy.

Timothy and Epaphroditus are not mentioned merely to convey Paul's travel plans (2:19–30). They are presented as rhetorical examples not only of godly virtue but also of evangelism. In the gospel, they partner with Paul and others who are prepared to give their lives for the gospel and other Christians. In the case of Timothy, he seeks not his interests but those of Jesus Christ, which, of course, includes the evangelization of the world (v. 21). He is tested and approved through his service for the gospel with his "father" Paul (v. 22).

Where Epaphroditus is concerned, in 2:25, Paul esteems him as a brother, coworker, and fellow soldier. All three ideas indicate his participation with Paul for the gospel (Keown 2017b, vol. 2, pp. 32–38). He is also the Philippians' ἀπόστολος, which is traditionally read as "messenger", but in my view, here carries the nuance "apostle" of the local church (Dickson 2003, pp. 315–17; Keown 2009, pp. 170–83; 2017b, vol. 2, pp. 38–45). He is also a servant to Paul's needs. Paul holds him in high esteem for nearly dying to deliver financial aid to him from Philippi. Thus, the Philippians should honor him (2:26–30).

Chapter 3 is often seen as an excursus or aside. However, the chapter fits snugly into the flow of the letter, continuing the themes of phronesis, cruciformity, the gospel, and unity. The Philippians are to emulate Paul, who in turn emulates Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11:1), rather than the Judaizers who propagate a flawed gospel (3:2) and pagans and others who repudiate the foolish message of the cross (3:18–19).[35] The Philippians are to be united in the gospel of Christ. They must "watch out for" and reject those with false perspectives on the word of the cross. There are limits to the unity the letter espouses—those with a false gospel are to be excluded and rejected (cf. Galatians; 2 Cor 10–13). As Paul presses on to win the prize of eternal life with Christ, the Philippian heavenly citizens must also push on in Christ as they await their Savior from heaven (3:14–21).

Chapter 4 gets to the grist of the relational issue in Philippi. Two evangelistic coworkers and significant leaders, Euodia and Syntyche, are urged to find unity in the gospel and the Lord (4:2–3). In these verses, we learn why Paul started the letter at his point of imprisonment with the contrast of well-motivated and falsely motivated believers preaching the gospel. The two gospel workers are to learn from the example of the well-motivated where Paul is imprisoned (1:15–18a), and those of Christ himself (2:5–11), Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19–30), and Paul himself (esp. 3:1–11), and partner together to continue to proclaim Christ in the world (see 3:17; 4:9). Unified evangelism is what matters, rather than the flawed ethics of the falsely motivated preachers. The one true gospel must be verbally shared in the world, not the flawed expressions of the Judaizers and enemies of the cross. The Philippians are to do so cemented together with all the ethical attributes the letter summons them to, including those that follow the direct appeal to the women (4:4–9).

The letter ends with issues of money and gospel mission as Paul commends their generosity (4:10–20). Notably, every example in the letter is evangelistic, whether the examples are negative or positive. Undeniably, the fabric of the letter is evangelistic and missional.

3.3. The Missional Movement of the Christ-Hymn

The story of the Christ-hymn is missional in its movement. The phrases "in the form of God" and "equality with God" speak of Christ's prior existence as the divine Son of God (Cohick 2013, pp. 112–13). This person is the same being as "the man from heaven" (1 Cor 15:47–49), the Son God sent out from heaven, born of a woman under the law to redeem those under it (Gal 4:4), and the one who came in the form of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3). The fully divine invisible Son became human and dwelt on earth where he lived the life and died the death the hymn portrays.

Without dwelling on Jesus' ministry details, the passage climaxes with Jesus' self-humbling death by crucifixion, which, throughout Paul's letters, is the sacrificial death that deals with sin, enables justification, and saves humankind.[36] In v. 9, Jesus is exalted to the highest place, which 3:20 tells readers is heaven.[37] He is given the name above all names, the name of God made known to Moses in the wilderness (Bockmuehl 1997, p. 142).[38] He is forever God the Son, the Lord, incarnate, and the Savior of humankind (3:20). Moreover, by this time, through the ministries of Paul, Timothy, Silas, Luke, the Jerusalem Collection group, and others who came to Philippi in the time between the church planting and the letter,[39] the Philippians would be aware of the whole story of Jesus's mission. They would naturally "join the dots" as we do.[40]

3.4. The Hymn as Evangelistic Proclamation

Those who argue for a kerygmatic reading are right to say that the hymn is a magnificent declaration of the identity and work of Jesus. Jesus is declared the main subject of vv. 6–8 in v. 6 as ὅς. The hymn then moves crisply from his preexistent divinity to humble servanthood, culminating in the cross. The passage crisply declares τό εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. As such, it is profoundly evangelistic. It is what we might call a very succinct gospel tract. Indeed, although it may have predated Mark's Gospel,[41] it reads as a sharp summary of what Mark produced. Mark then became the foundation of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.[42] History shows that believers experience this as they dwell on the passage and experience its lyrics speaking into our hearts the mystery of the gospel: that the Son of God in the form of God and equal in every sense to God would empty himself for humankind. That he would be born a man in a patriarchal world and yet serve people relentlessly to the point of death. That Jesus would become a human encased in mortal flesh subject to death. That Jesus was obedient to the point of dying to save the world on the cross, the most shameful death in the ancient world.

For those with ears to hear, in the hands of the Spirit (cf. Eph 6:17), it has the power to penetrate hearts as Paul's words did for Lydia (Acts 16:14) and as prophetic proclamation can potentially do for outsiders and unbelievers (1 Cor 14:20–25). It has the power to generate faith that brings salvation (Rom 10:14–17). It is the gospel-in-cameo. It is missional in its very essence. If what we have in the passage is all or parts of a hymn,[43] it was a song sung in early churches; a song that, like Isaac Watts' "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (Watts 1707), or more recently, Graham Kendrick's "The Servant King" (Kendrick 1983), and "In Christ Alone" (Getty and Townend 2001), that evokes faith and a desire to respond to God with service. The climax of the hymn declares the appropriate response to Jesus—to bend the knee and acknowledge him as Lord. As such, the hymn summons all people to yield to Jesus Christ as Lord to the glory of God the Father.

3.5. The Missional Purpose of Christ's Exaltation

In verse 10, the hymn tells readers the purpose of God's exaltation of Jesus, and it is missional. Having poured himself out for God's mission to save humankind and this

world, God highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on him the highest of all possible names. This designation speaks of Christ's return to the status he had before he came, "Lord", and now with a new twist—he is also the "Savior" who has completed his work (3:20). For Paul, he is the Lord we read of in Isaiah 45 and across Israel's Scriptures.

Verse 10 explains why the *Huios tou Theou* entered the creation as the *doulos*-, *anthrōpos*-, and crucis-formed one (2:6–8). Jesus did this "so that (ἵνα) at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (emphasis mine). Verses 10 and 11a can be quickly read over without much thought given to the ἵνα that launches v. 10. However, a lot is happening in this conjunction. It is disputed whether this is a purpose (or final) clause: "*with the purpose that* every knee will bend . . . and every tongue acknowledge";[44] or that it is a result (or ecbactic or consecutive) clause: "*with the result that* every knee will bend to the glory of God the Father".

An excellent case can be made for this being a result ἵνα (Fee 1995, p. 223). Most notably, universal submission to God fits with Isaiah 45:23, where God swears by himself that this universal submission and confession will come to pass. If so, while this verse has been used to defend universal salvation, this does not mean universalism, as Paul has made apparent in Philippians 1:28 and 3:19 that the destiny of those opposing God's people is destruction.[45] It conveys that a day of reckoning is coming when all will bend the knee to Jesus and confess his lordship. For believers like Paul, his coworkers, and his recipients who hold firm to the end, this bending of the knee and cry of confession will be the glorious day that the Savior returns from heaven and his citizens welcome him into his world (1 Thess 4:17) with joy and new life, willingly falling prostrate before him, singing "He is Lord!" For unbelievers, this will be a day of terror as they realize their error in rejecting the gospel of Christ and face judgment (Rom 2:5–11).

An equally good case can be made for a purpose clause, the majority view in NT scholarship (Arndt et al. 2000, p. 475; Silva 2005, pp. 111–12). According to Peter Lampe, eighty-three percent of Paul's uses are purposive.[46] If we take it this way, the purpose of Christ's mission and subsequent exaltation is that all humankind will yield to Jesus Christ the Lord. As such, readers or hearers are invited to consider their own posture regarding the Lord Jesus, now declared God. Implicitly, they are challenged to bend the knee and acknowledge Christ's lordship. Moreover, when they recognize the purpose of Jesus is that every person in the world do the same, they are summoned to not only reflect on it themselves but to convey its message to the world. Elsewhere, Paul expresses God's desire for all people (πάντας ἀνθρώπους) to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4) (Fee 2011, p. 57).[47] If we consider the Pastorals to be non-Pauline,[48] his desire for all humankind to hear the gospel and confess the lordship of Jesus is implied across all his letters.[49] And, notably, it is "*every* (πᾶν) knee", pointing to the need to get the message of this Jesus to every nation where knees are found. Readers are summoned to global mission by its appeal. And, as I have also argued elsewhere, Paul was under no illusion that this job was nearly complete. The first-century Romans' knowledge of the extent of the world and the Christian passion that all people hear the gospel rules this out (Keown 2018, pp. 242–63).

Of course, many scholars, rightly in my view, consider that ἵνα here indicates both purpose and result (W. Michaelis 1935, p. 42; Collange 1979, p. 106). It thus speaks of the purpose of Jesus's mission, death, and exaltation—that the gospel will go forth to the world, and people will yield to Jesus as Lord in the present. It also describes the result of that mission—all humankind will submit to Jesus as Lord at the eschaton. For believers, it will be a glorious moment of joyful submission, knowing the prize that awaits them (cf. 3:14). For unbelievers, they will submit to the Lordship of Christ and then eternal destruction (1:28; 3:19).

Even if we take it ecbatically, there is a profound hortatory power in the "so that" of verse 10—if Jesus is exalted so that every knee will bow, then there is a summons in the term to join God's mission of sharing Christ to others so that they will bow before God and

his Son voluntarily; at least for those with ears to hear. Such motivation drives Paul and should, to some extent, propel all who name Jesus as Lord.

Finally, if there is any doubt that Paul wants this to occur, the hymn is framed with appeals to be missionally engaged (1:27; 2:15–16). Authentic gospel citizenship includes being actively missional and evangelistic as the Lord leads. Similarly, working out one's own salvation by God's power and leading involves shining as lights in the world and holding forth the word of life. And the context also emphasizes that the posture of those who engage in this mission must be like that of Jesus Christ.

3.6. The Missio-Liturgical Climax to the Hymn

The other oft-neglected function of the hymn has been hinted at throughout this essay—its liturgical power. The kerygmatic force of the hymn compels readers to worship Jesus and God the Father. Indeed, as noted earlier, many scholars hold that the passage is all or part of a hymn sung in the early church, and these scholars recognize its liturgical power (Hawthorne and Martin 2004, pp. lv–lxv).[50] This appeal should not be separated from the missional function of the hymn. As noted in the previous section, ἵνα, here, is both purposive and telic. The purpose of Christ's exaltation is that believers yield to his rule and join Christ by the Spirit in inviting others to do the same. The result of this mission, where faith is generated through the hearing of the word, is that these new believers will bow and worship Jesus as Lord to the praise and glory of God the Father (1:11; 2:11).[51] The effect is like the prophetic word Paul envisages in 1 Corinthians 14:24–25 where unbelievers and outsiders fall on their faces and "worship God, proclaiming, 'God is truly among you!'" (LEB).

The result of the mission, then, is new converts joining the already believing community of God worshiping him in the Spirit, boasting in Jesus (1:26; 3:3), rejoicing (2:18; 3:1; 4:4), and in unity (2:2), bringing glory to God. For the already believing, the glorious retelling of the story of Jesus in the hymn has liturgical power. As believers ponder it, they are drawn to their knees, declare Jesus is Lord, worship him, and God is glorified. This yearning to worship spills over into the other aspects of authentic worship, including their service as they support Paul with prayer (1:19), in contending for the gospel (1:5, 7, 27; 2:16), suffering (1:30), and more. Believers are drawn to assume the posture of an enslaved person as did Jesus and serve him, the people of their church, and outsiders and unbelievers so that they, too, may experience Jesus.

Indeed, one aspect of that is God's mission; another is loving one another as the coworkers Euodia and Syntyche are being asked to do (4:2). They are then to continue to engage in evangelistic mission, united in Christ. Readers with faith cannot help but worship and serve Jesus and his God when they read or hear the piece as they are reminded of what God has done for them in the Son.

The hymn climaxes with the worship of God (2:11c). God exalts Jesus, honoring him and glorifying him (2:9). He bestows on him the supreme name (2:10). God demonstrates the self-subjugating partnership he summons believers to in the letter by being unfazed to share his absolute power and authority with Jesus, not as another god, but as the one God expressed in the Son of God and now eternally incarnate Jesus. If readers have open eyes, hearts, and ears to truly hear, feel, and see, they will respond by bending the knee to Jesus. They acknowledge his lordship verbally and as living sacrifices devoted to worship, *koinōnia*, and are moved to give witness to him. They bow volitionally, joyfully, gratefully, and willingly. They recognize that their worship fulfills the purpose of Jesus' self-giving on our behalf.

And they do all this while giving glory to God the Father. This praise of God is the result of the mission. When a person yields to Jesus, God is exalted. Glory is a key sub-theme in Philippians. In Philippians 1:11, the readers are to love one another, resulting in them being able to discern what is best and be pure and blameless, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the *glory* and praise of God.

Conversely, in Phil 2:3, they are not to seek κενοδοξία, "empty *glory*", meaning their glorification. Instead, in humility, they are to consider others more significant than themselves, consider the interests of others, and adopt the mindset of the one who died for the world in whom we believe. Such a posture brings *glory* to God the Father (2:11). Neither do believers, like the enemies of the cross, *glory* in the shame of our materialistic self-obsession and desires (3:19). Still, they eagerly await their heavenly Savior who is coming to transform their bodies of humiliation to be like Jesus's glorious body (3:20). The know that God will supply all they need for their lives according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (4:19). And as Paul says before his final greeting and grace, "to our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen" (4:20).

4. Conclusions

So, asking whether the Christ-hymn should be read kerygmatically or ethically is reductionist. There is so much more in this remarkable piece set within this lovely letter. The hymn is both kerygmatic and ethical. Yet, it is more—it is ethical and socioethical, urging believers to *agapē* relationships. Furthermore, it is missioethical. Through its flow and words, the Spirit calls people to participate in God's evangelistic mission with the posture of Christ.

All that is left is to reread it repeatedly and let it feed our souls. As we read, we again bend the knee and confess Christ's cosmic lordship. We then rise with a cross across the back and towels in hand (John 13:1–15). Led by the Spirit, we follow Jesus. We joyfully share his message through unified Christoform attitudes, actions, and speech. Then, others join the church as they hear the message, the sword of the Spirit pierces their hearts, and faith is born. They willingly fall to their knees, call on the name of the Lord (Rom. 10:13), and acknowledge the lordship of Jesus Christ. In this way, God is glorified. Amen.

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Notes

1 In my earlier work on this passage, citing O'Brien (O'Brien 1991, p. 272), I concluded that "the hymn's emphasis is ethical: it 'presents Christ as the ultimate model for Christian behavior and action'" (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, p. 378). On reflection, I downplayed the kerygmatic aspect of the hymn and agreed with others who hold that the hymn is both a glorious declaration of who Christ is and designed to inspire the Philippians to the pattern of the Christlife.

2 This essay will be light on secondary literature and detailed exegesis. Readers consult my monograph (Keown 2009) and (Keown 2017b), 2 Vols for detailed discussion of the relevant aspects see throughout the commentary. Throughout, I will cross-reference to the pages of the commentary that give further analysis. I also mention some other articles I have written. This essay is the culmination of years of bemoaning the failure of biblical scholars to recognize the missiological and evangelistic aspects of the NT and Philippians where the Christ-hymn is concerned. By "missionally," I mean the full range of Christian engagement in human society beyond the church. By "evangelistically", I mean the verbalization of the gospel, which I believe lies at the heart of the Christian mission.

3 "The context makes it clear that vv. 6–8 function primarily as paradigm," (Fee 1995, p. 196).

4 Some recognize the poor behavior of these opponents but do not draw out their heinous intent (e.g., Hansen 2009, p. 75; Bockmuehl 1997, p. 80). However, if Paul is in Roman imprisonment and death is a real threat (1:20–23), then these opponents effectively want him dead. (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 210–13).

5 The noun κενοδοξία compounds κενός, "empty, in vain," and δόξα, "glory" and in context, contrasts Christ's self-emptying (κενόω) (Garland 2006, p. 215).

6 Here, I am referring to ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία (3:19), which could refer to circumcision but, in my view, more likely refer to a desire to eat, but more likely encompasses bodily desires, including sexuality and other gluttonous behaviors. It fits with Epicureanism or hedonism (Witherington 2011, p. 216).

7 1:9, 16; 2:1, 2; 4:1.

8 1:18, 25; 2:2, 17–18, 28–29; 4:1, 4.

9 For a fuller discussion, see (Keown 2013, pp. 301–31).

10 An idea I touched on in my commentary (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 167, 449, 480, 482, 484).

11 The link between the hymn and the ethical appeal is most obvious in the use of ὥστε, "therefore", in v. 12, which leads into the section ending in 2:18. Moreover, the two examples, Timothy and Epaphroditus, are both presented rhetorically in part to emphasize their ethical fidelity to the Lord and gospel. However, the material leading into the Christ-hymn is also ethical (1:27–2:4).

12 I broach this in my commentary. See (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 166–67, 443, 450, 476, 480, 484, 511).

13 If written from Ephesus, the earlier date is preferable. If the traditional view is favored, the latter. See the discussion in (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 23–33). In terms of the missional zeal of Christians, the date matters little; Luke's account in Acts and the expansion of the gospel in the first century indicates substantial missional engagement across the Roman Empire.

14 If Jesus' resurrection and Pentecost were in AD 30, this is twenty-two to thirty-three years later. If AD 33 is preferred, this is nineteen to twenty-nine years later.

15 Their first-century writings show this commitment to the whole world. See reference to global mission and judgment in Mark 13:10, 27; 14:9; Matthew 8:11; 24:14, 31; 25:32; 16:13; 28:18–20; Luke 13:29; 24:46–49; and Acts 1:8. See also John's interest in the world (John 1:29; 3:16–17; 4:42; 8:12; 12:47; 17:1, 23); Paul's "full number of the gentiles" (Rom 11:25); and Revelation's interest in all peoples on earth worshiping God (esp. Rev 7:9). While the longer ending of Mark appears to be second-century addition (The first witnesses are Irenaeus and Tertullian (Metzger and Societies 1994, p. 103), it speaks of the ongoing commitment to this task.

16 With Witherington and others, I accept Acts as a historical document, and its description of the early mission and Christian expansion are accurate albeit focused on key figures (Witherington 1998, pp. 24–39).

17 I am of the view that the "we sections" in Acts are best understood as genuine albeit selective Lukan accounts from his trips with Paul (16:10–17; 20:5–16; 21:1–18; 27:1–28:16) (Schnabel 2012, pp. 39–41).

18 Paul's persecution is confirmed in his undisputed letters (1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6).

19 On the situation in Rome, see (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 3–14). Shaw rejects that there was such a persecution (Shaw 2015, pp. 73–100). However, a range of other scholars have responded negatively to such a proposal; see especially (Jones 2017, pp. 146–52).

20 On Col 4:5–6, see (Keown 2022), https://hail.to/laidlaw-college/publication/iOXHXeW/article/Puacv39 (accessed on 5 March 2024).

21 The whole book, (Keown 2009), argues Paul's partial intent in Philippians is to urge the Philippians to continue to engage in evangelism as they have in the past.

22 Paul regularly uses slave ideas of Christian service. See also Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Col 4:12; 2 Tim 2:24; Tit 1:1.

23 Timothy's partnership with Paul is extraordinary. They coauthored six letters (2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Phlm 1), traveled together aside from specific missional journeys Paul sent Timothy on (2:19; 23, cf. 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 1 Thess 3:2, 6; 1 Tim 1:2–3). Indeed, aside from these trips, they were never apart in the period covered by Acts 16–28. Timothy was also a co-preacher (2 Cor 1:19), and Paul had no one else who was equal-souled with Paul like him (2:20).

24 As Hawthorne and Martin succinctly note, "sharing in the gospel" *is* the good work referred to here" (emphasis original). See (Hawthorne and Martin 2004, p. 24).

25 The phrase τοῖς λοιποῖς πᾶσιν refers to those in connection with his situation. As Bockmuehl suggests, "perhaps other members of the military or legal establishment?" (Bockmuehl 1997, p. 74).

26 While some suggest that 1:13 speaks of people knowing the reason for his imprisonment and does not suggest converts, I argue with Fee and others that 4:22 indicates that some in the context had become followers of Jesus. (Fee 1995, pp. 112–14; Keown 2017b, vol. 1, pp. 180–87).

27 The use of τινὲς μὲν καὶ in v. 15 indicates continuity between the group in 1:14 and what follows. There are, thus, two groups who fearlessly proclaim the gospel inspired by the Lord through Paul's example. One is well motivated, one is not. Similarly, (Hansen 2009, p. 71).

28 While it is tempting to see σωτηρία here as a reference to "deliverance from prison", here, as in all Paul's uses, it more likely indicates eschatological salvation, that is by faith, is ensured by the prayers of the Philippians and the Spirit that will enable him to boldly share Christ at his trial (Fee 1995, pp. 131–32).

29 The term παρρησία here indicates "'resolute testimony' in circumstances of intimidation, particularly intimidation by the regnant political authorities" (Cassidy 2020), C. Paul's Potential for Death or Life (1:19–25).

30 Paul links 1:27–30 and 2:1–4 with the inferential οὖν, "so, therefore, consequently, accordingly, then" (Arndt et al. 2000, p. 736), indicating continuity.

31 While Michael and a few since have argued σωτηρία in 2:12 means "corporate wellness", here as elsewhere in Paul, it speaks of their eschatological status as God's people saved through faith in God and his Son (Michael 1924, pp. 439–50). For a critique, see (Fee 1995, pp. 460–64).

[32] While ἵνα here can indicate result, here it is more likely purposive. As such, what follows indicates the missional purpose of their renunciation of grumbling and argument. See (Hawthorne and Martin 2004, p. 144).

[33] In my earlier writings, I tended to prefer "stars in the universe"; however, I increasingly consider that there may be an allusion here to Matthew 5:16 (e.g., Keown 2017b, vol. 1, p. 486). As such, "lights of the world" seems preferable. See (Beare 1976, p. 92); H. Ritt, "φῶς", in (Balz and Schneider 1990, vol. 3, p. 448). Either way, it is missional.

[34] "The idea of light is dynamic and inclusive of proclamation in its use of the servant, Christ, and in Luke's account of Paul", see (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, p. 484). Further, the term ἄμωμος may also have a hint of the gospel as "the aroma of Christ" in 2 Cor 2:15. See (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, p. 478).

[35] On taking 3:2 as a reference to Jewish Christians following Paul demanding gentiles adopt Jewish customs, see (Belleville 2021, p. 72). On 3:18–19, see Sandnes, pp. 136–62. I argue these could include the opponents of Phil 1:28–30. See (Keown 2011, pp. 28–45).

[36] See, e.g., Rom 3:21–24; 5:9–10; 1 Cor 1:18; 15:1–3.

[37] See also Rom 10:6; Eph 6:9; Col 4:1; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:16; 2 Thess 1:7.

[38] See also Heb 1:4. This is the divine name of Exod 3:12; Isa 45:23.

[39] See Acts 20:4; 2 Cor 1:16; 2:13; 7:5; 8:1. The "we section" that ends in Acts 16:40, Luke remained in Philippi after Paul and his team left.

[40] While it is unpopular in some circles to accept that Mark and Luke traveled with Paul and were the writers of the second and third Gospel and Acts, I see no reason to reject the traditions concerning these documents and the Pauline authorship of Colossians just prior to Philippians. As such, with access to Mark and Luke, Paul would have been aware of the stories of Jesus. Moreover, Luke traveled with Paul to Philippi, and so we can suppose they knew well the stories of Jesus he was gathering.

[41] Especially if it is a pre-existing hymn, see, e.g., (Martin 1997, pp. lv–lxv). I date Mark in the early 60s, so if it is Paul's creation, it may coincide; see also (Edwards 2002, pp. 6–10).

[42] Hence, it stimulated me to write my two-volume book on Mark from the perspective of globabl imperialism (Keown 2017a, vol. 1, 1:1–5).

[43] I have suggested elsewhere that it is an intentionally broken chiasm with Jesus's resurrection and ascension missed either because they were lacking in the original or intentionally crafted this way by Paul or an earlier writer. See (Keown 2017b, vol. 1, p. 370).

[44] On ἐξομολογέω as "acknowledge", see (Cohick 2013, p. 123). This idea resonates with that of Matthew Bates who notes that *pistis* can mean allegiance—faith as allegiance captures what Paul is intending here with the bending of the knee and acknowledgement of Jesus' lordship (Bates 2019, pp. 60–63).

[45] See also Romans 2:12; 9:22; 14:15; 1 Cor 1:18–19; 3:17; 6:13; 8:10; 15:26; 2 Cor 2:15; 4:3; 2 Thess 1:10; 2:10; 1 Tim 6:9. Some consider Paul to be soteriological universalist, e.g., (Talbott 2003, pp. 32–52). However, this is dubious, see (Marshall 2003, pp. 55–76).

[46] P. Lampe, "ἵνα *hina* that, so that, in order that", in (Balz and Schneider 1990, vol. 2, p. 190).

[47] On this verse, see (Fee 2011, p. 57).

[48] On the authorship of the Pastorals, see Mounce's exhaustive treatment (Mounce 2000, pp. xli–cxxx).

[49] See, for example, 1 Cor 9:19–22; 1 Cor 10:33.

[50] Even Fee, who considers the passage "exalted prose" rather than a hymn (Fee, "Philippians 2:5–11", 29–46), states that "it obviously sings". In the same footnote, Fee mentions Kendrick's song, "The Servant King" and Francis Bland Tucker's hymn, "All Praise to Thee", which draws on the passage. See https://hymnary.org/text/all_praise_to_thee_for_thou_o_king_divin (accessed on 5 March 2024) (Tucker 1938). See (Fee 1995, 226 n42).

[51] "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't . . . When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever . . .. It's [worship] the gospl of mission because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory" (Piper 2022, p. 3).

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A Neurocognitive Approach Reveals Paul's Embodied Emotional Strategies

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Abstract: Joy is a central theme in Philippians. Joy is also a central emotional habit Paul deploys and encourages as a strategy for building community. In this paper, the examination of Philippians through recent developments in the neurocognitive study of emotions first illuminates how Paul cultivates emotional habits, like joy. Second, a neurocognitive approach to understanding emotions can explain how repeatedly choosing joy functions to alleviate suffering by restoring balance in the nervous system. Finally, shared emotional habits with the Philippian community, like shared somatic practices, build sustaining connections among the members. Intentional deployment of emotional practices, as Paul demonstrates and encourages in the Philippians, is a strategy for building the body of Christ. Such a neurocognitive understanding of emotional habits and bodily practices among community members in the Christ body points to a corporate experience of shared healing and neurocognitive resilience. Might we consider this somatic embodiment of shared emotions, what Paul calls "the same mind that is in Christ Jesus", also a participation in Christ's *soteria* (healing/salvation)?

Keywords: joy; suffering; Philippians; St. Paul; habits; emotions; neurocognition

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1. Introduction

Joy is a central theme in Philippians. Joy is also a central emotional habit Paul deploys and encourages as a strategy for building community. In this paper, the examination of Philippians through recent developments in the neurocognitive study of emotions first illuminates how Paul cultivates emotional habits, like joy. Second, a neurocognitive approach to understanding emotions can explain how repeatedly choosing joy functions to alleviate suffering by restoring balance in the nervous system. Finally, shared emotional habits within the Philippian community, like shared somatic practices, build sustaining connections among the members. Intentional deployment of emotional practices, as Paul demonstrates and encourages among the Philippians, is a strategy for building the body of Christ. Such a neurocognitive understanding of emotional habits and bodily practices among community members in the Christ body points to a corporate experience of shared healing and neurocognitive resilience. Might we consider this somatic embodiment of shared emotions, what Paul calls "the same mind that is in Christ Jesus", also a participation in Christ's *soteria* (healing/ salvation)?

"Most agree that there are four basic emotions—fear, anger, sadness, and joy. . .".

(John J. Ratey, A User's Guide to the Brain, 226)

Scholars and pastors alike have recognized the joyful tone in Paul's letter to the Philippians. Still, or perhaps because of this recognition, scholars have regularly overlooked Philippians as a source for Paul's theological thought. When scholars expand the genre of "theology" to include "pastoral" or "practical theology", Philippians has received much deserved theological attention beyond the Christ hymn.[1] Still, central emotions, like joy, rarely figured in to these theological analyses.[2] This lacunae raises the question: how can joy, just as central to Paul's letter and message to the Philippians as the Christ hymn, remain unconsidered in most analyses of Paul's theology and Christology? If Paul's joy is real,

and he really wants the Philippians to cultivate a habit of joy ("rejoice with me"), what is the role of this emotion in Paul's theology? Can emotions even be considered in a Pauline theology? If emotions are central to Paul's thinking in Philippians, how does joy contribute to Paul's theological strategy for building the Christ body?

The first step is to demonstrate the centrality of joy as an emotion Paul and the Philippians experience beyond its appearance as a literary or rhetorical theme in Paul's letter. Ryan Schellenberg seeks to connect the rhetorical function of a joyful theme to the real experience Paul's epistolary language elicits in the recipients (Schellenberg 2022, pp. 79–98). Building on other analyses of the *philophronetic* role of emotions in ancient letters, Schellenberg examines the "affective impact" of Paul's "epistolary practices" in Philippians that produce a unifying "collective emotion" in the community across geographical distances. Thus, collective joy results from Paul's practice of "constantly praying" for the Philippians (Phil 1:4). In this way, Schellenberg moves beyond the two-dimensional level of rhetorical impact and "literary" practice to describe the emotional and somatic impact of shared joy, "the rewards of common feeling" in the bodily experience of both sender and receiver. He writes the following:

> In Philippians and 1 Thessalonians, *philophronetic topoi* and the emotional norms they encode provide the basic cultural logic undergirding these prayers' effective work. Compensating more or less successfully for the somatic signals otherwise constitutive of collective emotions, Paul's explicit evocation of presumptively shared emotion nourishes the fantasy of presence and thus the rewards of common feeling, which include emotional sustenance for Paul himself and, if his letter is successful, a renewed feeling of solidarity among his addressees that reinforces their shared loyalty to Paul and his Lord. (Schellenberg, 79)

Schellenberg recognizes key elements of joy in Paul's thinking and practice. First, Schellenberg sees that joy provides Paul with "emotional sustenance" over the time he is in prison. This is not a one-time emotion, but a sustaining emotional process. Second, joy is part of the "affective work" of Paul's and the community's prayers in Thessalonica and Philippi. Habits of praying with joy pervade across three geographical locations to hold these groups of Christ followers in "solidarity" and "loyalty". Third, Schellenberg draws attention to the relationship between emotions and bodies.[3] Paul and his communities share a "common feeling" that is usually indicated by "shared somatic signals constitutive of collective emotions". Schellenberg's work establishes the ways in which ancient epistolary rhetorical practices serve as a substitute for the author's real bodily presence with the recipients and even across a distance, the letter still cultivates collective emotions among the Philippians and Thessalonians as if Paul were with them in person.[4]

While Schellenberg works to move beyond what happens in the letter, to describe what actually happens between Paul and the Philippians, he hedges on the "reality" of their collective emotions. Thus, Schellenberg describes Paul's epistolary sharing of emotions as "presumptive", nourishing a "fantasy of presence". This hedging misses the very real intermediary, Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus carries the letter of practices and emotions to the Philippians and reads it aloud among them.[5] Epaphroditus' embodied, somatic practices, his very real rejoicing, his love of Philippians, his posture of humility as a servant–minister, and his in-person expression of Paul's emotions convey directly and in real time the somatic and social impact of collective emotions. A letter is more than a "substitute" for the sender, a letter is actually read by real people who are members of the body of Christ with Paul.[6] When Timothy follows Epaphroditus, bringing more news to the Philippians, his real presence, voice, and emotions further embody Paul's presence in the community. This is not a "fantasy of presence", but through Timothy, who has been with Paul, it is a touchable somatic intimacy shared by the collected Christ followers in Philippi. In other words, Paul's epistolary performance of "presumptively shared emotions" read aloud together in Philippi is the strategic, emotional result of "renewed solidarity" that Paul seeks.

Paul's co-workers and "ministers" convey Paul's real presence and bring the practices, like prayer, and the emotions, like joy, to the Philippians. Their somatic presence is critical for cultivating the shared "collective emotions" Schellenberg identifies. Recognizing the entanglement of shared practice and collectively experienced "affect", the emotion of joy, is critical to understanding Paul's strategies for building the Christ community.

2. Neurocognitive Approaches to Emotion: Making Joy a Habit

> [Joy] is both the physiological experience of warmth and satisfaction and the cognitive assessment that this is the way things should be. Joy, happiness, and pleasure are their own incentives; they are what make the survival and propagation of the species worthwhile (Ratey, 242).[7]

Using the work of neurocognitive scientists moves the analysis of Paul's emotions from a rhetorical construction to a mutually experienced affect. In other words, by utilizing a neurocognitive approach, we can move beyond Schellenberg's "fantasy of presence" to reveal how emotional practices *actually* affect the cognitive, emotional, and somatic wellbeing of Paul and his friends in Philippi.[8] New evidence in the fields of cognitive psychology and neuropsychiatry can illumine Paul's emotional strategies in Philippians and help us understand, and perhaps even practice, the embodied ways of living "in Christ" that Paul shares with his friends.[9]

In (Solomon 2001), Philosopher Robert Solomon brings together his lifelong study of human emotions and Philosophy with contemporary neurocognitive studies of emotions in the field of psychology. Emotions, he writes, are "essentially neurological" and "in part, a physiological phenomenon" (Solomon 15–16). That is, emotions involve the mind—which oversees the nervous system anchored in the brain—and the body. This view of emotions mirrors Aristotle's explication of human emotion, particularly in the *Nichomachean Ethics*. For both Aristotle and neurocognitive approaches, emotions are processes (not a single event, or flash of feeling) that shift and change over time. While emotions may arise in an instant, they become an ongoing experience. And, argues Solomon, people can choose their emotions, shape them, and even cultivate them.

Solomon uses anger as his first example.

> Anger is much more than a basic emotion or a set of feelings. It is a way of interacting with another person (or with a situation or a task) and a way of situating oneself in the world… In other words, an emotion is a self-aware engagement in the world…. (19)

When people choose their emotions in consistent, repeated ways, they form emotional habits. Solomon continues.

> Emotions are often habits, to some extent learned but also the product of practice and repetition. It is very rare for a person to get angry *just once*… Anger tends to be recurring and habitual. And here is one of the many places where we can really learn something from the neurologists. Emotional habits are the products of pathways well worn and chemical dependencies well established… we become addicted to our emotions. (21)

For the human brain, "well worn pathways" are easier to choose. Thus, the stronger the chemical, or neurological, pathway we carve in the brain with our emotional habit, the easier it becomes for the brain to deploy the chosen emotion, the more deeply embedded the specific emotional habit becomes in the brain, and so on.

Solomon similarly describes the neurological process that moves joy from a unique and local experience in response to a situation to a repeatedly chosen habit and to a state of mind used to engage the world.

> So too, on a happier note, the emotion of joy—joy about some particular event or the enjoyment of some particular activity—may well expand its scope to include other things and people associated with that event activity and may even become

> global, about everything. The joy becomes a mood—a really good mood—and with some luck and training it can come to define one's life. (42)

"Training", or reinforcing one's choice and practice of joy, is the way one develops a single emotional response over time into a state of being or a state of mind. This state of mind, argues Solomon, governs how one engages and interprets the world. In fact, Solomon argues, emotions themselves are "*strategies* for getting along in the world. They are a means of motivating, guiding, influencing, and sometimes manipulating our own actions and attitudes as well as influencing and manipulating the actions and attitudes of others" (3).[10]

Solomon's work that presents the ways in which philosophical and neurological approaches to the study of emotion mutually support one another can illumine the ways in which Paul's emotional habit of joy in Philippians functions as a state of mind to aid his decisions about how to respond to others and to motivate his own behavior for others.

2.1. Joy Is a Process, Not a One-Time Feeling[11]

In Philippians, Paul does not refer to joy as a one-time feeling. Rather, Paul presents his joy as a sustained and sustaining emotion that he experiences over time in his relationship with the Philippians from the "first day" of their shared ministry to the present. In Phil 1, Paul writes

> I thank my God for every remembrance of you, always in every one of my prayers for all of you, praying with joy for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. . .. (Phil 1:11-13)

Paul's practice of praying for the Philippians is constant, and the experience of joy accompanies the practice. This seems natural, as the Philippians are one of Paul's least contentious communities and one of the most established and stable. Of course, he would regularly feel joy when thinking about them. But Paul's constant joy is more than a reaction to positive circumstances. In 1:18, Paul also rejoices in response to a difficult situation. Other preachers wish him ill, "intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment" (1:17). To these antagonists, Paul intentionally responds with joy, rather than anger, fear, sadness, or any other possible emotion. "What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true, and in that I rejoice" (καί ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω· ἀλλὰ καί χαρήσομαι, 1:18). Paul's experience of joy as an ongoing experience, rather than a one-time emotional flash, occurs in positive conditions and adverse situations.

The grammar of Philippians supports Paul's narrative depiction of joy as an emotional state over time. Nine of the twelve verbal occurrences of "rejoice" in Philippians occur in the present continuous or present imperative tense (1:18, two in 2:17, two in 2:18, 3:1, and two in 4:4). Philippians 1:18 contains a present form and a future form. Here, Paul indicates that his present choice to rejoice; "I am rejoicing" continues progressively into the future, "and I will continue to rejoice". Verse 2:28 occurs in the present subjunctive, indicating Paul's desire that the Philippians "might rejoice" upon receiving Epaphroditus back into their community carrying this letter. Verse 4:10 is an imperfect (continuous action) verb, indicating that Paul began rejoicing when he received the Philippians' thoughtful gifts in the recent past, and he now continues rejoicing in the present. Each use of the verb χαίρειν in Philippians specifies a continuous action, rather than defaulting to the simple description of an undefined action in the aorist form. The grammatical forms Paul repeatedly used in communicating his joy in this letter support the observation that Paul's existential experience of joy is an ongoing, continuous emotion. And, just as an author chooses their grammatical forms, Paul's personal reflection suggests further that Paul chooses his emotional responses.

2.2. Paul Chooses Joy as a Habit of Mind

Paul's ongoing emotional state of joy is a deliberate choice that he characterizes as a state of mind. We see this choice in 1:4, where Paul chooses to pray for the Philippians

constantly and "with joy." In the next sentence, 1:7, Paul describes his joyful state of mind in prayer and his confidence about the Philippians before God as a right way of thinking (καθώς ἐστιν δίκαιον ἐμοὶ τοῦτο φρονεῖν) about them.

> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I hold you in my heart, for all of you are my partners in God's grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Paul's "right way of thinking" in 1:7, or his "state of mind", refers back to 1:3–6; the sentence immediately prior that begins with Paul's emotions of gratitude (1:3) and joy (1:4). In this way, Paul characterizes his thinking, the state of mind he cultivates, as having emotional properties. These emotional properties (joy and gratitude) have an emotional cause and a behavioral cause. Emotionally, Paul and the Philippians love one another (indeed, they share a heart, 1:7).[12] In their behavior, the Philippians and Paul have cultivated an embodied "partnership," practicing ministry together over many years (1:7). Here, we see Paul's fundamental anthropology of emotions that characterize a state of mind and inform bodily action.

In what follows, Paul uses his mind, or thinking, to choose particular emotions and actions. First, as we saw above, Paul chooses joy in good times and in adversity. Of particular note, Paul even chooses joy in response to the extreme depredation and degradation he experiences in prison. An instantaneous or fleeting feeling would not address the existential needs one has in an ancient prison. Shaping an ongoing response or process through joy is more sustainable (1:4, 18).

Paul's deliberate choosing of joy occurs as Paul acknowledges the Philippians' worst fears. He is still in prison and is suffering in chains, and does not know when, or if, he will be released (1:19–26). He cannot give them concrete news to bolster their hope or optimism that his situation will turn out well.

> I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually resulted in the progress of the gospel (Kim 2015), so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ, and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. (Phil 1:16-18)

Paul does not obsess about the negative connotations of his imprisonment or the possibility that this imprisonment is the end for him. He does not succumb to negative emotions like fear, depression, exhaustion, fatigue, or physical pain. Instead, he reasons with his mind and seeks a positive outcome. "What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true, and in that I rejoice" (1:18). Paul's joy in response to suffering in prison becomes a habit over time, and the habit serves him well. He does not indulge reactionary flashes of emotions. His brain circuitry defaults to joy, his logical mind examines the situation through the lens of joy and finds a cause for rejoicing. Paul looks at the world and sees a reason to rejoice.

Likewise, Paul encourages the Philippians to share his practice of joy as an emotional habit that embodies a state of mind in imitation of Christ (2:5; 4:2). To practice this habit of joy, Paul gives the Philippians concrete reasons to rejoice in the letter itself. First, Paul describes the spread of the gospel message as an opportunity to rejoice (1:18–26). Next, the Philippians can rejoice at the promise that Timothy will soon come with more news of Paul's circumstances (2:22–23). Then, Paul will follow and visit them himself (2:24). In addition, Paul notes Epaphroditus' arrival in Philippi with this letter as cause for rejoicing (2:25–3:1). In Philippians 3, Paul even interprets his loss, suffering, and humiliation in prison as part of sharing the suffering and humiliation of Christ (3:7–11). By interpreting "the loss of all things" as an opportunity to "know Christ" through bodily experience, Paul presents the Philippians with one more opportunity to shift their emotional habit from sorrow, fear, and pain to joy. This ultimate cause for joy, Paul writes, is the promise that Christ will "transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body

of his glory" (3:21). Thus, the Philippians can "join in imitating me and the examples you have in us" (3:17) because they too will experience transformation from loss to gain.

Paul demonstrates his own emotional habit of joy in the letter. He also provides the Philippians with circumstances he interprets as opportunities for them to join him in rejoicing. In this way, the letter functions as a concrete, real-time experience for the Philippians to practice Paul's emotional habit of joy together and repeatedly. When the Philippians "join in imitating Paul" (3:17), Paul calls them "my joy and my crown" (4:1); their emotional practice complete Paul's joy (2:2). Furthermore, when they share their resources with Paul, Paul tells them that they have provided him with opportunities to "rejoice in the Lord greatly" because of their "revived concern for me" (4:10). In this context of offering each other reciprocal opportunities to feel joy and respond with joy to one another, Paul and the Philippians are already embodying Paul's final exhortation to "rejoice in the Lord always" and "again" to "rejoice" (4:3), even as they share Paul's "distress" (4:14). Across the letter, then, Paul reminds the Philippians they are already practicing joy with him, and they should continue this emotional practice even, and perhaps especially, as they open themselves to suffering members.

Consistently choosing joy in the face of hardship as Paul does creates an emotional habit that neurologically changes the brain. When Paul repeatedly rejoices in prison, rejoices at the spread of the gospel, rejoices at the Philippians' gift, rejoices that Epaphroditus is well, and seeks to share that joy with the Philippians by sending Epaphroditus to them, he is demonstrating an emotional habit of the mind. This habit—the culmination of consistent choices—influences how Paul sees the world. His emotional habits inform how he sees and interprets the world. This is the state of mind he seeks to share with the Philippians as they cultivate the practice of choosing joy.

2.3. Emotional Habits of Mind Influence Paul's Decision Making

Paul's decision making and interpreting the world through a mental habit of joy allow him to weigh his responses to others. In 1:15–18, Paul considers the different public players around him, the "brothers and sisters emboldened by my imprisonment," and weighs their motivations.

> Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry but others from goodwill. These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true, and in that I rejoice. (Phil 1:15–18)

Paul displays no emotional anger at recognizing the "false motives or pure" (1:18). Paul does not choose to rage or lament the "envy and rivalry" (1:15) of others—the emotional habits they have chosen in seeking to bring Paul down. Those who operate from emotions of "envy and rivalry" see Paul as an obstacle to their own ambitions. Their emotional habit of mind motivates them, in Paul's opinion, "to increase my suffering in my imprisonment" (1:17). Paul has effectively wired his brain to choose differently.

Paul goes a step further. He carefully leads the Philippians through his process of mental discernment. He names the emotional habit that guides him. He names the opposite emotional habits that lead his "opponents" to desire and create more suffering for Paul. Rather than try to stir up the Philippians' emotions or increase their sympathy for himself by bad mouthing his rivals, Paul frames the passage in terms of benefit to the gospel. This is critical. He shows the Philippians that choosing a habit of joy actually keeps them focused on Christ's gospel, their "heavenly citizenship" (3), not earthly rivalries. The gospel is spreading, Paul writes, exercise your joy and do not succumb to the suffering others aim to cause you; choose joy.

In Philippians 2, Paul again demonstrates choosing joy to guide his mind's decisions and his actions. Learning that Paul was in prison, his Philippian supporters sent Epaphroditus to "minister to [Paul's] need" (2:25). Epaphroditus fell ill on the journey, increasing

Paul's sorrow in prison (2:27), and the Philippians' concerns. Paul writes that he chooses to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians because Epaphroditus has "been longing for all of you" (2:26) and "in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again" (2:27). Paul seeks the Philippians' joy and acts accordingly. He urges the Philippians a second time to "welcome [Epaphroditus bearing this letter] then in the Lord with all joy" (2:28). And, in Philippians 4, Paul rejoices again, offering his gratitude for the resources the Philippians have sent with Epaphroditus (4:10). Indeed, their sharing of resources with Paul has been a regular practice when they consider his work in the gospel. Paul's response to their gifts is to continue to rejoice (1:3–5) and raise the gifts in offering to God, as a priest raises the community's sacrifice at the altar (4:18-19). (Fogg 2006). Even in prison, Paul rejoices because the Philippians' gifts and support demonstrate their solidarity with him and their ministry at his side in the gospel.

Cultivating joy in this letter, even more than hope, is a critical choice. The cultivation of joy in the midst of suffering is so critical that Paul encourages the Philippians to "imitate" him (3:17) by also choosing joy (2:17–18). They are not in prison, but Paul recognizes they are worried and anxious and sending their last resources with Epaphroditus to try to help Paul. Their state of mind is compromised. When even that gesture of help seems to fall short, other emotions may arise in Philippi—anger, frustration, and impotence. Paul heads off these other emotions by encouraging them to rejoice. Then, he assures them that their "ministry" has not fallen short, that Epaphroditus is faithful on their behalf, and that Christ will be magnified in Paul's chains. He urges the Philippians to share his joy just as they have chosen to share his suffering (1:7). Choosing joy will sustain their solidarity with Paul's suffering and strengthen them in their own anxious suffering and pain.

2.4. Shared Emotional Habits Build Community in Real Space and Time

Paul's careful reflection on his own emotions of suffering and joy are part of his community-building strategy with the Philippians. The strategy itself is existential. Strengthening the hearts, minds, and actions of each member of the body of Christ. Paul aims to sustain himself in prison and to sustain the community of Philippian Christians who are so worried about him in this difficult time. Paul argues that he is surviving the suffering of imprisonment because of the Philippians' partnership with him in the gospel (1:5). When they rejoice like Paul, they too will flourish and survive their hardships.

The strategy is also communal. Paul and the Philippians are not alone; they stand together. They belong to one community, one body of Christ. As members, they share each other's emotions (painful or pleasurable) and resources so that the whole Christ body flourishes. This existential and communal strategy operates as a form of circulatory or, perhaps better, respiratory system, energized by the one spirit to nourish and cultivate a shared, common Christ mind and body (Phil 2:1–5).[13] The Christ body thrives when members conform themselves to Christ's mind, and that mind shapes their emotional habits in the world.

3. Cultivating a Capacity for Joy: The Pain–Pleasure Principle

> The term "emotion" is derived from the Latin term *movere*—to move. . . Emotion is movement outward, a way of communicating our most important internal states and needs. (Ratey, 227)

While Paul clearly chooses to cultivate a habit of joy in prison, others, scholars included, might view Paul's joy as a strange or even discordant choice given the reality of pain, suffering, and death experienced in ancient prisons.[14] Robert Solomon discusses the social disapprobation arising when "displaying one's joy in inappropriate circumstances, say at a funeral" (184), or in prison. Solomon continues with the following:

> There are people, however, who feel joy in most joyless circumstances. Extreme examples were those rare prisoners in German concentration camps who managed to remain joyful despite their ultimate degradation and the constant threat of death. . . their joyfulness may well seem inappropriate to most people. (185)

Recent scholarly work by Elsa Tamez in the Wisdom Commentary series on "Philippians" addresses the problem of discordant, or seemingly "inappropriate", joy by interviewing Christian prisoners incarcerated for their faith (Tamez 2002, pp. 1–122). Like Paul, the prisoners Tamez highlights all experience "feeling an increase in their inner strength due to their faith in Christ as well as in what they do. They also express a very particular joy that helps them to endure their vulnerability" (Tamez 35). For this handful of people, joy is a stabilizing emotion in times of physical and psychic suffering. Thus, at least anecdotally, a habit of joy helps cultivate resilience and existential resources that people draw on in times of pain and suffering.[15]

Viewing joy in neurocognitive terms moves us beyond anecdotal evidence to understand how Paul's practice of joy in prison functions to balance the pain and suffering he experiences.[16] Cognitive studies, like Anna Lembke's *Dopamine Nation: Finding Balance in the Age of Indulgence*, show that the more intense the (negative) experience of pain, the deeper one's capacity for a (positive) pleasurable feeling, in Paul's case, joy. Cognitive neurologists call this the pain–pleasure principle. Lembke explains that in the human brain, pain and pleasure are co-located and, therefore, fundamentally interrelated. "Pleasure and pain work like opposite sides of a balance" (2). While complex chemical processes are involved, the principle is simple.[17] The brain constantly seeks to establish equilibrium in the nervous system. Neurologists call this equilibrium "homeostasis". Homeostasis is the state of neurological balance where the brain perceives neither pain nor pleasure. In other words, human brains seek a neutral state—no suffering (pain) to avoid, and no reward (pleasure) to acquire. In this understanding of the brain, pain refers to a constellation of "negative" sensations that range from discomfort, hunger, craving, and desire, to unbearable physical, psychic, or emotional pain. For our purposes, the brain registers any discomfort as "pain"—whether one perceives that discomfort as physical, emotional, or psychic. Pleasure, then, is the opposite constellation of "positive" emotions one experiences as feeling good, such as satisfaction, wellbeing, comfort, joy, and even ecstasy. Because pain and pleasure are co-located and mutually affecting, as pleasure increases, an equal and opposite feeling of pain will follow. If the balance does not occur from external stimulus (satisfaction of a hunger craving by eating), then the brain will manufacture the chemicals to restore the balance. Likewise, when there is pain, the brain seeks (externally) or creates (internally) equal and opposite feelings of pleasure until reaching homeostasis in the system again.[18]

In her book *Dopamine Nation*, psychiatrist and addiction expert Anna Lembke describes the pain–pleasure principle as a seesaw that seeks to rest in a horizontal plane but is constantly nudged or pushed out of balance by circumstances (50–58). The brain autonomously seeks to return to horizontal, or homeostasis. It is self-adapting, and, independent of our conscious awareness, the brain adjusts its own chemical production of neurotransmitters in relation to our physical and emotional habits—our regular patterns of behavior. This autonomous adjustment is called neurological adaptation. The brain learns and adjusts the pathways of its own operations. For all brains then, homeostasis is an adaptive, shifting set point.

We have all experienced this. For example, the caffeine in the first cup of coffee we drink has a greater effect on our system than the 30th or the 130th. The first dose of caffeine swings the seesaw widely. The brain adjusts to the habitual pleasure shot of caffeine and after three weeks of one cup a day, we no longer feel the "pleasure". The brain has adapted to a new set point in homeostasis. We discover that new set point when we stop the daily habit and suffer the "pain" of withdrawing from caffeine pleasure that the brain had incorporated into its configuration of homeostasis.

This is true for athletes as well. Athletes who practice regularly stretch and strain their system capacity to increase muscle, speed, and performance. Pushing one's physical limits to increase capacity is painful. But, at the end of a workout, the brain responds to the pain and releases endorphins to repair the athlete's body. The endorphins feel great, giving rise to the slogan "no pain, no gain." Endorphins are a pleasure-producing neurotransmitter that the brain releases to counter the pain registered in the neurological system. This

pleasure can motivate athletes to train again, perhaps harder, the next day in anticipation of (eventually) feeling good. Training through the pain, receiving the reward at the end, and repeating the procedure ensures increased athleticism and also changes an athlete's set point for enduring pain. As the athlete builds muscle (a longer-term response to habitual demands on the system), the pain lessens. The pain–pleasure principle helps explain how increased pain (discomfort, hunger, desire, need, want, loss, disappointment) forces the brain to increase pleasurable neurotransmitters to adjust to a new pain set point or to animate the body to seek relief in a counter form of pleasure in order to restore homeostasis.

3.1. Pain and Pleasure in Paul's Imprisonment

Richard Cassidy has documented the brutality of prisons in the first-century Roman world (Cassidy 2001). Torture was expected. Survival rates were low. Chronic illness often followed those who did escape prison. For most today, this kind of regular physical suffering is unimaginable.

Paul describes his experience of pain and suffering in multiple letters.[19] 2 Corinthians 11:23–24, 27–28 offers Paul's most comprehensive list of hardships. His description of prison is consistent with Cassidy's historical reconstructions. Paul describes

> imprisonments with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. . . .[I experienced] toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches.

In Philippians, Paul is less graphic but still refers to his increased "suffering" (1:7) in prison. He recognizes the Philippians share "the same" suffering "that you saw I had and now hear that I still have" (1:29–30). He highlights his experience of wearing shackles (ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου 1:13), "going hungry. . . and of being in need" (4:11). Unlike 2 Corinthians, in Philippians, Paul underplays any physical pain he may be experiencing in prison, saying only that he would prefer leaving his "flesh" to die and rise with Christ, "for that is far better" than remaining in his current circumstances (1:23–24).[20] Clearly, Paul knows pain and suffering over a prolonged period or even prolonged intermittent periods of his life.

In addition to his physical pain, Paul describes his emotional "anxiety for all the churches" in 2 Cor 11:28. This emotional anxiety also arises in Philippians, where Paul expresses concern for the Philippians as they worry about Epaphroditus and for Epaphroditus himself when he falls ill on the way to help Paul (Phil 2:19–25). The Philippian community learns that Epaphroditus has had a setback on his journey to see Paul and to deliver much-needed resources to him in prison. Paul is anxious and "eager to send him" back to the Philippians so they may receive Epaphroditus and know he is well (2:28). Likewise, Paul knows Epaphroditus "has been distressed because you [Philippians] heard that he was ill" (2:26). The community members are experiencing disregulated nervous systems. Their emotions are out of balance, or homeostasis. The painful emotions ("longing" v. 26, "sorrow" v. 27, "eager" anticipation and "anxious[ness]" v. 28) Paul experiences for Epaphroditus, for the Philippians, and even for himself create a disequilibrium in Paul's neurological state as well. From a neurocognitive perspective, we know that as the painful emotions increase, Paul's capacity or potential for feeling pleasure and joy (the positive feelings that will restore his neurological balance to equilibrium) also grows! Thus, when Epaphroditus recovers, continues his journey to Paul, and finally arrives at the prison in good health with the resources the Philippians have collected for Paul's aid, Paul seems ecstatic to see him and showers Epaphroditus with praise (2:25, 30). Paul would have been very grateful if Epaphroditus had arrived directly, with no setbacks. The resources and company of a friend in ministry from Philippi would have raised Paul's spirits (positive emotion). But, with increased suffering while waiting for Epaphroditus, Paul's positive emotional capacity, and that of the members he worries about, has also increased.

Above, we have also seen how Paul describes his increased suffering in prison when outsiders preach against him (1:8–9). Whether they aim to damage his reputation, increase Roman pressure on him, or undermine his gospel to the Gentiles is irrelevant. As Paul experiences greater suffering, his neurocognitive capacity increases for positive emotions that would bring his nervous system back to homeostasis. With an increased capacity for pleasure, Paul rejoices and finds increasingly more reasons through the letter to rejoice. He rejoices in the Philippians' fellowship with him, in his own circumstances, in Epaphroditus' recovery, and especially in the Philippians' sharing of resources with him. Neurologically, when Paul practices a habit of rejoicing, he lays down new neurological pathways in his brain. By choosing to practice joy, that is, by training his mind to search for sources of joy, he elevates rejoicing as a first "automatic" choice when he is in pain and suffering. Furthermore, the greater his suffering in prison, the greater his need and even capacity to feel joy when he chooses that pathway; that is, the greater the neurological reward for joy.

When Paul writes of cultivating joy in the letter, we may first see a rhetorical trope that elicits a particular effect on his readers/ audience. That Paul expresses an emotional practice in written form does not negate his emotional experience of joy, or, for that matter, his practice of cultivating joy. There is no reason to doubt that Paul feels joy or that Paul practices rejoicing and invites the Philippians to also experience joy with him. His insistence on joy as a practice in the past, present, and future, and Paul's invitation that the Philippians practice joy with him all seem to indicate the that rhetorical and the existential are both at work here. And, if Paul's experience of joy is real, it seems Paul has succcessfullly trained his mind to respond to suffering with a particular kind of pleasure—a habit of joy cultivated over time and in the community.

Bloomquist and others have written that Paul's joy and suffering (pleasure and pain) must be understood as a package in Philippians—these two emotions are interrelated thematically in the letter.[21] Once again, we must not confine this literary observation about thematic development to the realm of rhetorical devices alone. Paul's thematic interweaving of joy and suffering is more than rhetorical. Neurocognitive studies help us see the existential nature and the embodied experience, of Paul's interwoven joy as a practiced response to suffering.

Neurological systems seek homeostasis—neither pain nor pleasure, but balance. The brain's preferred path to homeostasis, or balance, is via the most trafficked neural pathways built up through the most practiced mental habits, or default modes. Thus, as Paul experiences physical suffering and emotional angst in prison, his brain seeks the quickest pathway to return his neurological system to homeostasis. Because Paul practices joy regularly, he has developed the mental habit of feeling joy. Paul's brain supports the mental habit of joy by laying down the infrastructure, or neural pathways, to quickly conduct the system to experience the pleasure of joy and offset suffering. When suffering tips Paul's neurological system out of balance, the brain defaults to the most trafficked pleasure to restore balance, his cultivation of joy. In this way, Paul's practiced of joy offers a direct counterbalance to Paul's suffering. In this scenario, joy does not cease to be a choice. It is because Paul has so often chosen joy that the neuropathway exists. Paul has habituated choosing joy to such a degree that his brain accesses those chemical pathways to reassert equilibrium as a default response to suffering.

Reading through a neurocognitive approach helps us to see that Paul's descriptions of choosing joy in Philippians, as well as his directives to the Philippians to choose joy, are not purely, or even only partially, rhetorical or literary moves. These habitual emotional practices are existential strategies that Paul embodies with his beloved community in Philippi and urges them to embody together with him. Such emotional habits set the interpretive frame for the entire community. For example, when Epaphroditus appears after a long road of service, illness, and return, the community's emotional "default" is to welcome Epaphroditus with joy, rather than suspicion or worry. This practice of rejoicing together as a community can further temper the Philippians' anxiety about Paul's imprisonment and provide respite for their neurological systems. Rejoicing together,

rejoicing with Paul across a distance of space and time regulates their nervous systems, and additionally joins their bodies in Philippi to the emotional rhythms of Paul's body.

3.2. Shared Suffering

Paul describes finding solace for his "sorrow" regarding Epaphroditus by sending him back to the Philippians (2:27). Epaphroditus risked his life to minister to Paul on behalf of the Philippians (2:25) and in falling ill, he "came close to death," sharing Christ's own suffering (2:30; 2:8). In fact, Paul anticipates the "sharing of [Christ's] sufferings" as Epaphroditus did, and so "becoming like [Christ] in his death" (3:10). For Paul, anxiety for the church or worry for Epaphroditus (his and the Philippians) and suffering illness (Epaphroditus and Paul), crucifixion (Christ), or imprisonment (Paul) are all shared sufferings that the whole Christ community experiences with one another.

Paul acknowledges the Philippians' anxieties and pain when he counsels them, stating "Do not be anxious about anything" (4:6). They worried about Epaphroditus' illness and tried to address Paul's suffering in prison by sending Epaphroditus to Paul with supplies and assistance (2:25–27). Paul is well aware of Epaphroditus' distress as well (2:26). With each written acknowledgment of pain and disequilibrium in the pain–pleasure balance or dysregulation of the community's neurological system, Paul demonstrates and encourages the practice of joy, to counter the suffering. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice" (4:4). In the Christ body, suffering and joy are shared.

Neurocognitive studies anchor the pain-pleasure principle in a model of the individual brain's equilibrium. Paul's insistence on shared suffering and joy goes farther. Paul seems to hold a model of a collective mind-body equilibrium. For example, we have seen Paul encourage members of the Christ body to share his emotional habit of joy. Paul also argues that he and the Philippians, Epaphroditus, and even Timothy share Christ's suffering (2:19–30). This sharing of emotions across a collective body goes beyond Philippains. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes the way personal experiences of suffering and joy can be shared within and across a community, stating that "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it" (1 Cor 12:26).[22] For Paul, individual emotions, when shared collectively, balance each other and bring the whole body of Christ into equilibrium.

How does this work? Is this collective sharing of joy and suffering even possible? Does the practice of choosing, practicing, and sharing joy help a community settle their nervous systems and find their emotional (neurocognitive) balance together in the face of some (or many) members suffering? Does an increase in a community's collective and/or shared suffering also increase the capacity for the members' shared joy?

4. From One Body and Mind to the Collective Body and Mind

> We are learning that emotions are the result of multiple brain and body systems that are distributed over the whole person. We cannot separate emotion from cognition or cognition from the body. It has always been our need as humans to divide and conquer, to separate out our two kingdoms as heaven and hell, but separating the body and the brain is rapidly coming to be seen as ridiculous. (Ratey, 223)

> Recent studies and discoveries increasingly point out that we heal primarily in and through the body, not just through the rational brain.
>
> In addition, trauma and healing are not just private experiences. Sometimes, trauma is a collective experience, in which case our approaches to healing must be collective and communal as well. (Resmaa Menakem, 13)

In his 2017 book, *My Grandmother's Hands*, Resmaa Menakem, a "long time therapist and licensed clinical social worker" (Menakem, 22), specializes in healing relational conflicts and racialized trauma through the body, where, he argues, emotional trauma resides (Menakem 2017).

> Our bodies have a form of knowledge that is different from our cognitive brains. This knowledge is typically experienced as a felt sense of constriction or expansion, pain or ease, energy or numbness. Often this knowledge is stored in our bodies as wordless stories about what is safe and what is dangerous. The body is where we fear, hope, and react; where we constrict and release; and where we reflexively fight, flee, or freeze. (5)

Menakem also specializes in working with groups of people. Somatic group practices link people's bodies and experiences together so that in a particular bodily practice, the whole group can find a release of shared emotions in their bodies.

> When one *settled* body encounters another, this can create a deeper settling of both bodies. But when one *unsettled* body encounters another, the unsettledness tends to compound in both bodies. In large groups, this compounding effect can turn a peaceful crowd into an angry mob. The same thing happens in families, especially when multiple family members face painful or stressful situations together. It can also occur more subtly over time, when one person repeatedly passes on their unsettledness to another. . .. (Menakem, 39)

Menakem acknowledges the ways in which traumas, deep-seated emotional wounds embedded in our bodies, pass from one generation to the next.[23] Thus, suffering and pain in one person's body can spread to other bodies and, in a similar fashion, release, relief, and healing can also leave people's bodies when they share coordinated practices together. He concludes, that "all of this suggests that one of the best things each of us can do—not only for ourselves, but also for our children and grandchildren—is to metabolize our pain and heal our trauma" (Menakem, 42). It is this kind of embodied—somatic—group work that aims at healing people through group practices that is often missing from analyses of Paul's ministry and theology.

Menakem, like Robert Solomon, recognizes the physiological character of emotions and begins with this relationship between the physical body and the emotions we experience in our bodies. Activating the body also engages the nervous system connected to the brain center.

> New advances in psychobiology reveal that our deepest emotions—love, fear, anger, dread, grief, sorrow, disgust, and hope—involve the activation of our body structures. These structures—a complex system of nerves—connect the brainstem, pharynx, heart, lungs, stomach, gut, and spine. (Menakem, 5)

When Menakem invites his groups to activate and move their bodies together in therapy, perhaps while using the rhythms of a drum, he is simultaneously inviting the participants to experience the emotions that arise from the collective activation of their bodies.[24] This somatic group work helps the dysregulated nervous systems of each individual find grounding through their collective physical practices. In other words, moving together in our bodies can help heal and bind together disrupted nervous systems.[25]

Menakem further argues that healing is not "something binary: either we're broken or we're healed from that brokenness" (12). Instead, healing, like emotions themselves, is a process. Healing happens when people engage their physical bodies and their somatically embedded emotions in order to reset their nervous systems. Bodies are central to healing.

> Recent studies and discoveries point out that we heal primarily in and through the body, not just through the rational brain. We can all create more room, and more opportunities for growth, in our nervous systems. But we do this primarily through what our *bodies* experience and do—not through what we think or realize or cognitively figure out. (13)

Thus, for Menakem, healing is a process involving the three parts of the nervous system: the cognitive part (brain), the limbic system (emotions), and the body, (the sensory input). Healing trauma is brain *and* body work, emotional *and* somatic work. One cannot rationally think oneself into healing. That is not how our brains work.

Equally key to the healing that Menakem seeks is communal participation. Menakem argues that "trauma and healing aren't just private experiences. Sometimes trauma is a collective experience, in which case our approaches for mending and healing must be collective and communal as well" (Menakem 13). This participatory communal aspect of Menakem's work utilizes neuro-cognitive science and offers a more complete framework for understanding the shared somatic practices and emotional habits that makeup Paul's strategies for building community.

From the Individual to the Collective Body

For Paul, cultivating a habit of joy that he invites the Philippians to share is more than a personal strategy to survive imprisonment and return to his beloved community. Paul seeks to spread his joy, his sense of wellbeing in the midst of suffering, to the Philippians. This "contagion", to use Menakem's term, comes through shared bodily practices that convey joy. In Paul's letter, the embodied practices he shares with the Philippians include prayer and giving thanks to God (Phil 1), exchanging letters and news (Phil 2:19–23), exchanging "ministers" in the sending, receiving and welcoming Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:19–30), sharing resources (Phil 4), and worship (Phil 4:10 ff). When Paul and the Philippians practice these reciprocal actions together, and they also cultivate a shared habit of joy *in their bodies*, according to Menakem's model, they are metabolizing the suffering and pain they are all experiencing from witnessingEpaphroditus' illness "even unto death" and his being ill, as well as witnessing Paul's imprisonment and his being imprisoned. The shared physical, somatic practices and the shared emotional habits of mind will strengthen Paul and the Philippians' relationship with one another, no doubt. Furhtermore, the shared somatic and emotional work increases their collective resilience as a social body. In other words, shared somatic practices and emotional habits ground the separated members of Christ's one body; these practices and habits allow healing to arise in the members' individual bodies as in their collective body.

In 2:1-5, Paul's exhortation regards the final triad of neurological systems as we understand them today: "share the same mind".

> If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. (Phil 2:1-5)

The state of mind Paul invites the Philippians is the mind of Christ. Christ's mind is not a rational, logical one. Christ's mind is better understood in the neurocognitive frame developed here. The mind of Christ does not "think", but feels. The mind of Christ chooses emotional responses and directs individual members toward a collective relationship that will stabilize their experience in an unpredictable world. In Christ, Paul writes, is comfort, consolation, affection, sympathy, love, and full accord—agreement in communal outlook and engagement with the world. Practicing the emotions of "affection", "love", and "humility" toward others fills up Paul's joy, which he shares with the other members of the body. As we have seen elsewhere, the Philippian members of Christ give Paul reason to "rejoice, and. . . rejoice together with all of you" (2:17), even while he suffers in prison. The emotions that Paul encourages the Philippians to practice, in addition to joy, will bind the community in Philippi to one another because they are pro-social habits. Additionally, according to Menakem, practicing these habits of emotion that, for Paul, constitute the mind of Christ, will also "ground" and "settle" their individual and collective experiences of suffering.[26]

Thus choosing love, affection, compassion, and joy in the midst of suffering is more than an individual habit of mind and emotion in Paul's letter. Paul's strategy for cultivating his own joy may help him survive in prison, but the impact is far greater. Cultivating

an emotional habit of joy influences how Paul interacts with antagonists, friends, and co-workers. His practice influences the somatic practices and nervous systems of those who are in the community with him, even if they are miles and towns away. When the Philippians imitate Paul and shape their emotional habit of joy, they are simultaneously shaping joy in the collective body of Christ.

Paul's strategy aims at shaping *collective* cognition and *shared* emotional habits in order to build a single, balanced Christ body. Paul does not seek individual wellbeing per se, but the wellbeing of all the members that exists when their shared emotions and bodily practices provide communal equilibrium (a balance of joy and suffering—when one suffers, all suffer, and when one rejoices, all rejoice). Corporate emotional equilibrium, together with a shared mind of long-term emotional perspectives that inform community discernment and actions, are part of Paul's strategy for uniting and shaping a body of believers that can survive in the world.

5. Conclusions

Applying a neurocognitive framework to Paul's strategies for community building raises questions. Does the collective Christ body have a nervous system? Can we understand the mind of Christ as a collective mind shared across the cognitive awareness of individual members? It would seem that the individual members—Philippians, Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Syntyche, and Euodia—of the Christ body are all contributing to one another's healing, grounding, settling, and surviving through their emotional habits and shared practices. Is this participation in the Christ body the "now" of Paul's "now and not yet" salvation in Christ? Is this somatic, cognitive, and emotional participation with the "one spirit" the present experience of Christ's resurrection body that Paul writes?

It may seem too great a leap from examining Paul's mind, emotions, and actions in neurocognitive terms to examining the shared "mind", emotions, and behaviors of the Christ body in similar terms. The difficulty is that an individual has a brain center where electrical currents and neurotransmitters produce and deploy the chemical processes to shape the human mind's emotions into actions, behaviors, and habits. But, a social "body" of humans is not a biological organism. Social bodies lack an actual brain center, nervous system, and chemical receptors and producers. Given this fundamental difference between an individual and a group, we must ask if the same neurocognitive relationships and processes are in effect for a social body of human beings as they are for individual humans.

Still, Menachem's success in healing groups of people with shared trauma through somatic therapy work invites further conversation with Paul's strategies for building community through shared suffering, joy and somatic practices. Neurocognitive systems are complex. This science is only beginning to understand the evolution of the human brain, systems connections, community and generational effects. We do know individual humans cannot survive alone. This is one reason why COVID-19 was hard on communities—across the globe, human societies had difficulty with long-term enforced separation from their social networks. As further evidence, the CDC has declared an epidemic of "loneliness". In other words, more and more people who have been isolated from their social networks, especially the elderly, are suffering mental and physical declines. Although human beings have individuated bodies, we also require social bodies and social-somatic dynamics for our health and wellbeing.

The fields of neurocognition and psychology, or psychobiology, have substantial evidence of this social need. While social bodies do not have a separate brain or a physical system for conducting chemicals between individuals, brain scans of individuals register the impact of a child's emotions on their mother and a mother or parent's emotions on their children. Spouses experience increased wellbeing when their partner is healthy and safe, and spikes of adrenaline when their partner is in danger or upset. Social bodies are highly attuned to the synaptic effects unfolding in each individual member's brain. How does this neurocognitive understanding illumine Paul's strategy for community building given the body metaphor for interdependence that he develops in 1 Cor 12–13?

Understanding the potential psychological, neurological, and cognitive effects of Paul's community-building strategies on human members of the Christ body raises the stakes for Christians today. On the one hand, shared practices and emotional habits may be the work we must perform together if we seek to address chronic divisions in our local social, national, perhaps even global landscapes. Choosing to respond to suffering by sharing joy balances and settles the whole community's nervous systems. On the other hand, speaking theologically, practicing the emotional habits that embody Christ to one another may also ground our experience of salvation in our actions and bodies right now. Might the following not be the saving work God enables in us and calls us to, as Paul writes in Philippians 2:12–13: "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure"?

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Notes

1 Biblical scholars such as (Bassler 1994) redefined theology as "practiced" or pastoral reflection on God. This allowed Bassler's edited series to headline Philippians and Thessalonians, and letters that scholars rarely drew on when constructing a more systematized Pauline theology. See similar work to reframe "theology" by theologians (Bass and Volf 2001) volumes. I build on this work and discuss Paul's theology grounded in daily shared practices and emotions that cultivate a community ethos of embodying the mind of Christ. (Fogg 2014, pp. 543–56).

2 While some studies focus on joy, the incorporation of the emotion as a theological subject is less than robust. For example, (Cornelius 1994) examines joy as an epistolary practice that creates/shapes *ethos* and *pathos*. (https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5530/efaeb923d546a10a16e7a39a999e4db4abb6.pdf accessed on 1 January 2024) Cornelius concludes, "one can perhaps catch a glimpse of what the relationship between Paul and the Philippians might have been" (72). Analysis of the emotions in the letter are rhetorical and cannot even been affirmed as real enough to be considered in theological reflection, although they do indicate the creation of ethos.

3 Recognition of this relationship between emotions and the body is a recent neurological admission. In *A User's Guide to the Brain: Perception, Attention, and the Four Theaters of the Brain*, John J. Ratey, M.D. acknowledges, "For years psychologists have maintained that emotions are purely mental activities, some of which, such as fear, elicit a physical response by the body. But while a few unique emotions, such as altruism, are dominated by mental processes, the rest are equally due to the body" (Ratey 2002, p. 223.) In other words, Ratey writes, "emotions well up from the brain and the body acting together" (223).

4 For example, Pieter J J Botha. "Rhetoric and the New Testament: essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference," Sheffield, Eng: JSOT Pr, 1993, pp. 409–28.

5 I follow Bill Kurz's observation that Paul structures Philippians 2-3 as a series of positive and negative examples to "look at" (translating βλεπετε as an instruction to consider, rather than an alert to "beware" in Phil 3:2) and then avoid or "imitate" (Phil 3:17). (Kurz 1985, pp. 103–26) Kurz's work solves the question of integrity in Philippians by showing the shift in 3:1b-2 functions rhetorically together to extend the examples Paul presents for consideration. In my dissertation I take Kurz's work further and show that the whole letter presents a series of examples for embodying the mind of Christ in bodily and emotional practices. (Fogg 2006) Epaphroditus, for Kurz and for me, is key to seeing the literary (Kurz) and theological-ethical (Fogg) integrity of the letter. See also (Fogg 2014, pp. 550–51).

6 For discussions of epistolary practices in the sending and receiving of letters and letter carriers, see, for example: (Stowers 1986; Mitchell 1992; White 1990).

7 For a brief summary of the pain and pleasure principle, as well as the effects of neurotransmitters on pain and pleasure, see John Ratey, A User's Guide to the Brain. Ratey uses "joy" and "pleasure" as synonyms in the neurocognitive activity of balancing pain and pleasure. Thus, joy is the opposite or "pain" and equivalent to "pleasure." (242–47)

8 Elsewhere I argue that practicing these habits of mind and body as members of Christ is how Paul and the Philippians "work out" their salvation (Phil 2:12). To these habits of working out one's salvation in community, we can add emotional habits. For example, when members of the Christ community practice joy together as they are sharing in Christ's suffering (Phil 1:28) they are participating in an unfolding salvation that culminates in Christ. See my discussion of salvation in Chapter 5 (258–97) (Fogg 2006).

[9] Thanks to Isaac Blois for pointing to Shantz's work in neurocognition related to Paul's ecstacy: *Paul in Ecstasy* book? She doesn't treat Philippians, but she does read Paul while attending to "the neurological and cerebral basis for ecstatic experience" (pp. 79–81, etc.). (Shantz 2009).

[10] For Solomon, this important "intelligent" quality of emotions means we must contend with the ethics of emotions—something neurocognitive studies do not address. This is the reason for bringing a philosophy of emotions into conversation with neurocognitive evidence. Neurocognitive evidence establishes the chemically real pathways of brain habits, while philosophy offers the moral and ethical reasons for training one's mind, or brain, to develop certain pathways and not others.

[11] Joy occurs as a noun in Philippians 1:4, 1:25, 2:2, 2:29, 4:1. In 1:18, 2:17, 2:18, 2:28, 3:1, 4:4, 4:10, Paul uses "rejoice" as a verb, often doubling the occurrence, as in "I am rejoicing and I will continue to rejoice" in 1:18.

[12] In my dissertation, I make the argument that the "heart" Paul holds in Philippians 1:7 is grammatically a shared heart: the Philippians have Paul's heart and he has their heart in this *koinonia* or partnership of ministerial practice for the gospel. (Fogg 2006). Also mentioned in (Fogg 2014, p. 545).

[13] Compare also Rom 12 and 1 Corinthians. See Gordon Fee's comprehensive work on the role of the Holy Spirit in Paul's understanding of the body of Christ. (Fee 1994).

[14] One of the most comprehensive discussions of circumstances in ancient prisons comes from (Cassidy 2001). Cassidy reviews primary sources such as literature, legal and court documents, epistolary references and other resources to construct 3 types of imprisonment as punishment, and further discusses where Paul's first hand epistolary evidence would place him in the ancient Roman systems. Rather than the Acts portrayal of Paul under house arrest or in a building, Paul was most likely chained to a guard underground or in a cave and dependent on supplies from supporters outside the prison that would first be used or consumed by his guard.

[15] DETERR describes the difference between "happiness" and joy in an on-line reflection on carla bergman and (Bergman and Montgomery 2017). In contrast to happiness, joy "entails refusing to avoid pain, and instead struggling *amidst and through it*. For instance, making space for collective feelings of rage, grief, or loneliness can be deeply transformative, but not happy. Undoing our own subjection might be subtle and tender, or it might be a violent act of refusal. Sometimes these shifts are barely perceptible and take place over decades, and sometimes they are dramatic and world-shaking.One name for this process is *joy.* This is not the conventional meaning of joy, as a pseudo-religious synonym for bliss, but a concept cribbed from the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza and contemporary affect theory. From this perspective, joy isn't an emotion at all, but a process that moves us away from conditioned habits, reactions, and emotions. It is the thinking-feeling that arises from becoming capable of *more,* and often this entails feeling many emotions at once. Joy can be devastating, painful, and dangerous. Whereas happiness is used as a stifling anesthetic, joy is the growth of a sense that things are different, that *we* are different, that a more capable "we" is forming that didn't exist before. (DETERR 2017)

[16] For an overview on the workings of the brain, see (Van Der Kolk 2014, pp. 55–60).

[17] Lembke acknowledges that "in real life, pleasure and pain are more complex than the workings of a balance." For example, "what is pleasurable for one person may not be for another" and "pleasure and pain can occur simultaneously" and even that "not everyone starts out with a level balance" (65). (Lembke 2021).

[18] Neuroscientific studies show that pain and pleasure work together in the same location in the brain to maintain equilibrium, or homeostasis. Feelings of pain (suffering or discomfort) and pleasure (well-being, enjoyment) disrupt homeostasis. For every disruption, the brain releases chemicals, creates emotions or seeks actions that will restore equilibrium. Additionally, the brain always chooses the most efficient emotional and behavioral actions that will reset homeostasis. Another way to say this is that our brains choose the emotions and behaviors we practice the most, because what we already do costs the least amount of energy. The more practiced the habit, the deeper the neurological pathway, the faster we can activate that emotional or actionable solution and return to homeostasis.

[19] Relate this to the real degradation, pain, suffering of the cross. This makes identification with Christ so much more real in everyday practice. I develop this in my current book project, Pauline strategies for community building.

[20] For the ways in which Paul re-interprets his physical and emotional suffering as an empowered choice and in service to his ministry, see Luis Cruz-Villalobos' fascinating discussion using a neuropsychological lens to read 2 Corinthians. (Cruz-Villalobos 2024). Villalobos sees Paul's example of establishing a coherent story about his own suffering on behalf of others ("altruistic coping," 116), as participation in Christ ("identifying with Jesus as a model of coping," 119), and as furthering the glory of God ("eschatological coping," 117). Thus by articulating his suffering, and metabolizing his suffering publicly, Paul develops a healthy, resilient nervous system and not only models this for the Philippians, claims Villalobos, but offers a clinical theological model for Christians today.Likewise, Matt O'Reilly argues that "the way Paul's account of his ministry frames his suffering as a benefit to the recipients" is Paul's strategy of apostolic leadership (80, (O'Reilly 2022)).

[21] "Woven together, suffering and joy create not just a theme but also a tapestry that serves as a backdrop for the entire letter" (270). (Bloomquist 2007).

[22] Just as Paul addresses shared mind, body and emotions in 1 Corinthians 12 and Philippians 2:1–5, so too in Romans 12. In all three passages, when Paul discusses the collective body of many members, he exhorts a practice of emotional solidarity across the body of Christ. "For as in one body we have many members and not all the members have the same function, so we, who

are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. . . Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. . . Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. *Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep*. Live in harmony with one another" (Romans 12:4–5, 9–10, 12–16). Here, Paul exhorts the whole community to practice reciprocal emotional habits AND reciprocal habits of sharing resources. Care for the body(ies) and care for the neurological stability (emotions) of the Christ body is paramount.

[23] "Most of us think of trauma as something that occurs in an individual body, like a toothache or a broken arm. But trauma also routinely spreads between *bodies*, like a contagious disease. . . .Its not hard to see how trauma can spread like a contagion within couples, families, and other close relationships. What we don't often consider is how trauma can spread from body to body in *any* relationship" (Menakem, 32).

[24] One way to "metabolize" emotional trauma is to cultivate what Menakem calls "resilience." Resilience, like trauma, can be shared between bodies. He writes,It manifests both individually and collectively. Sometimes it does take the form of a personal, individual act. Often, however, resilience is expressed communally to a group, family, an organization, or a culture. . . it moves *through* the body, and between multiple bodies when they are harmonized. It is neither built nor developed; it is taken in and expressed as a part of a larger relationship with a family, a group, a community, or the world at large. . ..

[25] In his book, *The Body Keeps The Score*, Bessel van der Kolk writes, "Being able to move and do something to protect oneself is a critical factor in determining whether or not a horrible experience will leave long-lasting scars" (e.g., trauma in the body)" (55).See also, (Zaraska 2020) https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/moving-in-sync-creates-surprising-social-bonds-among-people/ (accessed on 5 May 2024) and (McNeil 1997).

[26] Here the practice of welcoming home their "messenger and minister to [Paul's] need" (Phil 2:25) Epaphroditus, creates an opportunity for the Philippians to somatically experience joy upon delivery of the letter. As they welcome Epaphroditus, the Philippians rejoice at news from Paul and at receiving Epaphroditus whole and healthy back among them. Thus they share in Paul's practice of joy. "In the same way also you should rejoice and rejoice together with me" (2:18).

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Article

Paul's Self-Presentation in Phil 1:12–26

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Abstract: This article demonstrates how Paul's self-presentation in Phil 1:12–26 serves as an important exemplum to the Christian community, whereby Paul, in contrast to those who "proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition" (Phil 1:17), values the Gospel, and therefore values Christ above all things. However, Paul's *synkrisis* does not lead to self-boasting, but suggests that in regard to the Philippian community, "by his presence again [. . .] their boast might abound in Christ Jesus because of him" (Phil 1:26). This sincerity guides us to focus this article on the function of Phil 1:12–26 in preparing the exemplum of Christ in Phil 2:6–11. In order to reach our desired result, it is necessarily important to underline keywords that are constantly repeated in Phil 1:12–26, such as χριστός, κυρίος, καταγγέλλω, and καύχημα, which serve as a hinge between the first three chapters of the letter to the Philippians, in addition to προσκοπή and παρρησία.

Keywords: self-presentation; boasting; exemplum; christocentric; joy in adversity; suffering

1. Introduction

Self-presentation[1], as a persuasive tool[2], has emerged as a prevalent and critical aspect, illustrating the challenges and complexities that arise when individuals seek to articulate their identities within the context of faith.

Paul frequently uses self-presentation techniques in his letter to the Philippians, in which he emphasizes his status as a servant of God, his *topoi* of deeds, and his imprisonment[3] in order to achieve two primary purposes: to provide his addressees a Christocentric exemplum[4], helping them to endure their own suffering (Phil 2:6–11), and to acknowledge the Philippians' gift (Phil 4:10–20).

Comparing Paul's use of exempla with that of his contemporaries, such as Cicero, reveals both similarities and differences in their rhetorical styles. While both Paul and Cicero utilize exempla to support their arguments and convey moral lessons, they do so within the context of their respective audiences. Paul's use of exempla in his letters to the early Christian communities often draws from a place of biblical authority, reflecting his role as an apostle of Christ. In contrast, Cicero's exempla draw more heavily from classical literature and historical events, reflecting his background as a Roman statesman and orator. Despite these differences, both Paul and Cicero aim to persuade and instruct their audiences through the use of compelling examples that resonate with their listeners' values.

Additional references of exempla can also be found in Cicero's *Letters to Atticus* (Cicero 1999). In these letters, Cicero often employs exempla from history and literature to support his arguments and convey moral lessons. For example, Cicero might cite the actions of famous statesmen or historical events to provide guidance or encouragement to his correspondents.[5]

Notwithstanding the importance of the above-mentioned Greco-Roman context, our article studies the dynamics of Paul's self-presentation as an exemplum in Phil 1:12–26, a text that illuminates the reading of the whole letter. Yet, as we read Phil 1:12–26 in the context of the whole letter, we confront a problem: How can Paul echo his personal identity while he is imprisoned, a circumstance that might presumably be a hindrance to effective self-presentation? The current state of research on Phil 1:12–26 draws insights from notable

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scholars' monographs, highlighting the historical context of Paul's imprisonment as crucial for interpreting Phil 1:12–16.

On the one hand, Michael F. Bird and Nijay K. Gupta emphasize the political climate of the Roman Empire during Paul's time. They argue that Paul's imprisonment provided an unexpected opportunity for the advancement of the Gospel, as he continued to preach and write letters despite being confined[6]. On the other hand, Richard Cassidy meticulously examines the circumstances surrounding Paul's incarceration, drawing on historical sources and biblical scholarship to illuminate the context in which Paul wrote his letters. Through a thorough analysis of Paul's prison epistles, Cassidy explores how Paul's experiences shaped his theological outlook and influenced the content of his letters. He considers the rhetorical strategies employed by Paul to communicate with his audiences despite his confinement and contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between Paul's imprisonment and his epistolary correspondence[7].

However, historical issues and epistolography alone are not enough to completely enlighten this issue. For this reason, we seek to reply to the aforementioned question by applying a literary rhetorical analysis to discover the nuances of Greek terminology and linguistic devices used by Paul in Phil 1:12–26. We elucidate the underlying mechanisms through which Paul is able to boast amidst his imprisonment in order to determine the purpose of Paul in his relationship with the Philippian community, which is being urged to adopt a Christ-centered approach (Phil 2:6–11), valuing Christ above all other pursuits.

2. Persuasive Techniques and Relevant Keywords

The keywords repeated in Phil 1:12–16 enable us to accurately show that the nuances of Paul's language choices are essential to his rhetoric, for the implied meaning of these keywords go beyond their literal definitions and contribute to the overall Pauline message within the whole letter. Paul's extensive vocabulary helps the reader identify and understand his persuasive techniques[8]. Before referring to these constantly repeated terms, it is important to underline the key issues of persuasive techniques used in Phil 1:12–26.

In Phil 1:18, Paul employs *pathos* by showing his joy (χαίρω) at the proclamation of Christ, regardless of his circumstances. This evokes a sense of shared joy and unity with the Philippians, fostering a bond of affection and solidarity[9]. Enlightening in this area is Ryan Schellenberg's significant contribution to addressing core questions in Phil 1:1–26, which are particularly relevant to the theme of Paul's self-presentation in the context of imprisonment. One of the key questions addressed by Schellenberg is how Paul's experience of imprisonment shaped his understanding of joy. Schellenberg refers to the cultural and historical challenges faced by prisoners like Paul. Through a careful analysis of Phil 1:12–26, Schellenberg uncovers the paradoxical nature of Paul's joy, which arises not despite his suffering but precisely because of it. Furthermore, Schellenberg's exploration of Paul's self-presentation in Phil 1:12–26 sheds light on the complexities of Paul's identity as an apostle and a prisoner. Schellenberg examines how Paul navigates his dual roles, considering his imprisonment as an opportunity for the advancement of the Gospel while also acknowledging the limitations and constraints imposed by his circumstances[10].

Paul also enhances his *ethos* in Phil 1:20 by expressing his expectation and hope (ἐλπίς) that he will not be ashamed, demonstrating his confidence in God's faithfulness even in the face of adversity[11]. Russell B. Sisson's book section "Authorial ethos in Philippians: the *agōn topos* in Paul and Hellenistic moralists"[12] explores the concept of authorial *ethos* within the context of Paul's letter to the Philippians, particularly focusing on the use of the *agōn topos*, or the motif of struggle in Paul's rhetoric, by comparing Paul's strategies with those of Hellenistic moralists to understand how Paul establishes his credibility and authority. Furthermore, Paul's use of the *agōn topos* in Phil 1:12–26 can be seen in his depiction of his struggles and hardships as part of his service to Christ. Paul presents himself as engaged in a spiritual struggle, likening his sufferings to those endured by athletes striving for a prize (Phil 1:19–24). Therefore, by aligning his own struggles with the pursuit of heavenly

reward, Paul reinforces his authorial *ethos* and inspires the Philippians to persevere in their own faith.

In Phil 1:21, Paul employs *logos* by stating logical reasons and evidence to support his assertions: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain", providing the argument for his willingness to face death for the sake of Christ[13].

After having referred to Paul's persuasive techniques in Phil 1:12–26, we now concentrate on the keywords that play an important role in these techniques in order to convey Paul's message effectively:

1. Χριστός

The noun Χριστός occurs eighteen times in chapter 1 (Phil 1:1 [x2], 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 26, 27, 29), six times in chapter 2 (Phil 2: 1, 5, 11, 16, 21, 30), eight times in chapter 3 (Phil 3: 3, 7, 8 [x2], 9, 12, 14, 18, 20), and four times in chapter 4 (Phil 4: 7, 19, 21, 23).

Among the above-mentioned occurrences, we note that the frequency of the noun Χριστός is consistent throughout the letter, but it is more prevalent in the first and third chapters concerning Paul's self-presentation and exemplum. Although the noun χριστός is also related to addressing certain concerns that are relevant to the Philippian community to instruct them in terms of their faith and conduct, we focus on its association with Paul's self-presentation.

Paul asserts that he is a δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ (Phil 1:1), appointed (κεῖμαι) by God[14] to defend the Gospel (Phil 1:16) and chosen by Christ (κατελήμφθην ὑπὸ Χριστοῦ; Phil 3:12). Furthermore, he presents himself as relieved from distress by Christ (cf., Phil 1:18–19), as well as from shame, because Christ will be exalted in his body (Phil 1:20). Therefore, Paul's consistent portrayal of himself as an instrument of God validates his plea that God will reward the Philippians on Paul's behalf, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Phil 4:19).

Paul's depiction of his own suffering in Philippians stands in stark contrast to well-known social conventions[15]. In Phil 1:12–26, Paul highlights three specific *topoi* of deeds[16] he was able to accomplish despite his imprisonment, providing the foundation for his exemplum to the Philippians[17]. The three *topoi* of deeds that Paul was able to accomplish are as follows:

(1) "His imprisonment ἐν Χριστῷ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else" (Phil 1:13).
(2) Because of his imprisonment, Paul has "far more courage to speak the word (of God) without fear" (Phil 1:14).
(3) He states his intention to "remain in the flesh" (Phil 1:24), despite his desire "to depart and σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι" (Phil 1:23), because it is more necessary for the Philippians.

Moreover, in Phil 3:5–6, Paul emphasizes his extensive achievements within Judaism, including his ancestry and fervant adherence to the Law as a Pharisee[18]:

Types of Praise	**Phil 3:5–6**
Origin	circumcised the eighth day
	of the nation of Israel
	of the tribe of Benjamin
	Hebrew son of Hebrews
Education	as to the Law, a Pharisee
Deeds	as to zeal, a persecutor of the Church
	as to righteousness, which the Law can give, a blameless man

Yet, he breaks from social conventions and refuses to cling to these remarkable previous achievements, considering them to be σκύβαλα (Phil 3:8) in order to embrace the new values ἐν Χρίστῷ (cf., Phil 3:7–14). Finally, in Phil 4:11–12, Paul boasts that his αὐτάρκης

(self-sufficiency) became a (Christ-sufficiency): πάντα ἰσχύω ἐν τῷ ἐνδυναμοῦντί με (Phil 4:13)[19]. Hence, although his boasting aligns with established conventions, its intent diverges significantly: Paul's boasting serves as an exemplum of behavior in persevering and accomplishing deeds despite his imprisonment; it illustrates the willingness to set aside one's own achievements for the good of the community[20].

2. Κύριος

The name Κύριος[21] occurs two times in chapter 1 (Phil 1:2, 14), four times in chapter 2 (Phil 2:11, 19, 24, 29), three times in chapter 3 (Phil 3:1, 8, 20), and six times in chapter 4 (Phil 4:1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 23). The occurrences of κύριος in Philippians are connected with Paul's-self presentation and convey various aspects related to the previously studied term Χριστός[22].

The letter begins with the usual opening greeting that includes the formula κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (Phil 1:2) which is addressed to the recipients of the letter. Moreover, the genitive name κυρίου associated with Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is related to Paul's self-perception as δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ of Phil 1:1. In Phil 1:14, the trust of the community ἐν κυρίῳ is related to Paul's imprisonment.

In the pivotal hymn of Phil 2:6–11, the name κύριος is used explicitly in Phil 2:11, which declares that every tongue should confess ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς, a statement that underlines Paul's understanding of Christ's exemplum in κένωσις and aligns with Paul's self-presentation as δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ in Phil 1:1.

The remaining occurrences of κύριος in Phil 2 are related to three terms: hope (2:19), trust (2:24), and joy (2:29). In the introduction (2:1–5) to the hymn of 2:6–11, Paul urged the Philippians to have the same φρόνησις as Christ, to have the same love, and to be in accord (2:2). This unity is not to be achieved through "self-ambition" (Phil 1:17), but through humility, considering others to be "better than oneself" (2:3). The hope here lies in the transformation of the community. By imitating Christ's exemplum, there is a hopeful anticipation of a unified and harmonious life. On the other hand, trust is implicit in Christ's obedience to the point of "death on the cross" (2:8), the cornerstone of Christians' trust in God's plan of salvation. After Christ's obedience unto death, Paul declares that God "highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name" (2:9). The exaltation of Christ brings immense joy to believers because it is rooted in the acknowledgment of Christ's ultimate victory over death.

Furthermore, Paul provides Timothy and Epaphroditus as exempla of those who share in this hope, trust, and joy. Timothy is described as "genuinely concerned" for the Philippians (2:19–24)[23], and Epaphroditus, who almost died for the work of Christ, is a "brother, co-worker and fellow soldier" (2:25)[24]. Paul's mention of these two individuals demonstrates that Christian life, modeled after Christ's exemplum, is characterized by hope in God's purposes, trust in his providence, and a deep abiding joy that transcends one's circumstances[25].

Paul's use of κύριος in chapter 3 of Philippians emphasizes Paul's loss of everything compared to the surpassing greatness of τοῦ γνῶσαι αὐτόν (Christ). Not only is Paul concerned here, but also the believers who τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, and from there, they eagerly await the coming of κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν (3:20). The use of Κύριος here shapes Paul's self-presentation related to the eschatological hope of believers.

In chapter 4, Paul's use of Κύριος emphasizes various aspects of the believers' relationship with Christ. In the opening verse of the chapter, Paul exhorts the Philippians to "stand firm" (4:1) not in their own strength but in their relationship with the Lord. Then he appeals to a relational aspect of unity, in which believers can find common ground and agree in their shared commitment to the Lord (4:2). Moreover, "rejoicing in the Lord always" (4:4) directs the focus of believers away from external circumstances toward their relationship with Christ as the grounds for rejoicing, awaiting the coming of the Lord that is "near" (4:5).

3. Καταγγέλλω

Paul employs the verb καταγγέλλω to emphasize the central role of proclaiming the Gospel which is Christ himself (Χριστὸν καταγγέλλουσιν in Phil 1:17 and Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται in Phil 1:18).

In Phil 1:17, Paul uses the verb καταγγέλλω when discussing the problem of those who preach Christ out of self-ambition. He says, "οἱ δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας τὸν Χριστὸν καταγγέλλ ουσιν, οὐχ ἁγνῶς, οἰόμενοι θλῖψιν ἐγείρειν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου". Here, the term is used to describe the proclamation of Christ, but with a negative connotation. It suggests a self-centered motivation rather than a genuine proclamation of the Gospel.

In Phil 1:18, Paul contrasts those who preach out of selfish ambition with those who proclaim Christ out of goodwill. He says, "Τί γάρ; πλὴν ὅτι παντὶ τρόπῳ, εἴτε προφάσει εἴτε ἀληθείᾳ, Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω. Ἀλλὰ καὶ χαρήσομαι". Here καταγγέλλω is used to convey the act of proclaiming Christ, emphasizing the overarching importance of the message itself, even if the motives of the messengers differ[26].

Moreover, throughout the letter, Paul expresses his joy and gratitude for the partnership of the Philippians in the proclamation of the Gospel[27]. Despite his imprisonment, Paul sees the spread of the Gospel as an unstoppable force, and he encourages the Philippians to continue fearlessly announcing the message of salvation, knowing that God accomplishes his work despite man's lies, deceit, and ambition[28].

Hence, the verb καταγγέλλω reflects not just a communication of facts, but an active engagement in sharing the transformative message of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Thus, Paul acknowledges that the Gospel is advanced not only through his efforts, but through the collective commitment of believers. Therefore, by using the verb καταγγέλλω, Paul underlines the urgency of participating in the ongoing proclamation of the Gospel.

4. Καύχημα and Καυχάομαι

Καύχημα in the letter to the Philippians is strictly related to Christ (καύχημα ὑμῶν περισσεύω ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in Phil 1:26, καύχημα ἐμοὶ εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ in Phil 2:16, and καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ in Phil 3:3) and is insightful into Paul's discourse on Christian identity and values. A striking element of these occurrences is that the first (Phil 1:26) refers to the Philippians' καύχημα, the second (Phil 2:16) to Paul's καύχημα, and the third (Phil 3:3) to the καυχάομαι of Paul and the community together[29].

Phil 1:26	**Phil 2:16**	**Phil 3:3**
You	**I**	**We**
καύχημα ὑμῶν περισσεύω ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ	**καύχημα ἐμοὶ** εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ	**καυχώμενοι** ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

However, in these three occurrences, Christ remains at the center. In Phil 1:26, ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ comes between the Philippians (καύχημα ὑμῶν) and Paul (ἐν ἐμοί). So καύχημα here cannot designate the reasons for boasting, since they are expressed immediately afterwards (διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς παρουσίας πάλιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς)[30]. Rather, the boast benefits Christ, i.e., the Philippians' boasting is abounding in *what Christ has done and will do through Paul*[31]. Moreover, this is the only time that the noun καύχημα is combined with the verb περισσεύω, and the latter is followed immediately by ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, which indicates clearly that the real abundance is in the divine blessings that are proclaimed as καύχημα[32].

In Phil 2:16, Paul's motif of καύχημα is related to the beginning of the verse in which he boasts of the day of Christ because of the Philippians' modalities in being λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες. Furthermore, Paul's καύχημα here seems to motivate the Philippians to invite them to perfection, underlined by the expression οὐδὲ εἰς κενὸν ἐκοπίασα which constitutes the content of καύχημα.

Phil 3:3 deals directly with Christian identity and values. The verb καυχώμενοι refers to the characteristics of circumcision for those who are in Christ; for them, it is not a

physical circumcision, because Christians do not rely on worldly values, one's own efforts, or human achievements for salvation, but on a relationship rooted in a transformed heart through πνεύματι Θεοῦ.

Paul employs rhetorical strategies to frame his imprisonment in a positive way. He uses the term καυχάομαι. In Greek rhetoric, boasting was not always about arrogance but could also denote confidence and pride in one's accomplishments or situation[33]. By using this term, Paul indicates his confidence in God and the effectiveness of his ministry, even in chains. Moreover, Paul uses paradoxical language to convey his perspective on suffering and the advancement of the Gospel. For instance, he uses the term τὰ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ. This phrase highlights Paul's willingness to endure suffering for the sake of Christ and the Gospel, turning what might seem like a negative circumstance into an opportunity for glorifying God. Paul also reframes his imprisonment as an opportunity for the προκοπή. This term suggests forward movement or advancement despite obstacles. Paul sees his imprisonment not as a setback but as a means for the Gospel to advance further. His boasting is thus rooted in his conviction that God is working through his circumstances for the greater purpose of spreading the Gospel. Furthermore, Paul demonstrates throughout Phil 1:12–26 his trust in the providence of God. He uses the term προθυμία to express his readiness to face whatever comes his way. This eagerness stems from his confidence that God is at work for the advancement of the Gospel, regardless of his present circumstances.

5. Προσκοπή and Παρρησία

In Phil 1:12, Paul uses the term προσκοπή to describe the outcome of his imprisonment (εἰς προκοπήν). Grammatically, προσκοπή derives from the verb προσκόπτω, which means to progress or advance. Paul's use of this term suggests a forward movement or advancement despite obstacles, aligning with his theme of the Gospel's progress in the midst of adversity.

Paul also demonstrates παρρησία throughout the passage as he speaks openly and fearlessly about his imprisonment and impending death. For example, in Phil 1:20, he expresses his expectation and hope (ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ) that he will not be ashamed but will have sufficient courage (παρρησία) to exalt Christ in his body, whether by life or by death. This use of παρρησία highlights Paul's boldness and confidence in facing death for the sake of Christ. In this same line, P. Rogers argues how Paul's unwavering spirit of hope and profound faith serve an example of hopefulness in the face of adversity and as a powerful testament to the transformative impact of faith[34].

The terms προσκοπή and παρρησία both serve as a rhetorical strategy to emphasize his detachment from worldly concerns, his willingness to boast in Christ, and his courage in the face of death. In Plato's apology, Socrates demonstrates similar qualities of detachment, boasting, and courage in the face of death. For example, he boldly defends his philosophical pursuits and refuses to compromise his principles, even in the face of condemnation and death. Thus, Socrates demonstrates παρρησία by speaking openly and fearlessly about his beliefs[35]. Similarly, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, Socrates demonstrates his detachment from worldly concerns and his commitment to truth, using προσκοπή to describe the forward movement of the soul towards knowledge and wisdom[36]. However, Paul's use of προσκοπή and παρρησία functions not only as a mere detachment from worldly concerns, but as a paradoxical encomium that distinguishes Paul from his opponents, who may view suffering and death as shameful or defeating. So, by boasting in his imprisonment and facing death with boldness, Paul aligns himself more closely with Jesus, who endured suffering and death for the sake of others.

Paul's boast in Philippians also echoes the rhetorical strategies employed by Plutarch in his *De se ipsum citra invidiam laudando*, in which he reflects upon the art of self-praise without evoking envy[37]. Both Paul and Plutarch demonstrate a keen understanding of the delicate balance required in the act of boasting, utilizing it as a tool to convey virtuous character traits and noble intentions rather than self-boasting. But, in Phil 1:12–26, Paul applies boasting with finesse, intertwining his personal experiences of suffering and persecution

with his steadfast faith in Christ. By framing his imprisonment as an opportunity for the Gospel to flourish, Paul not only showcases his own courage but also invites his audience to partake in the triumph of the Gospel's message.

Similarly, Plutarch, in *De se ipsum citra invidiam laudando*, employs the art of self-praise with subtlety and sophistication. He avoids the pitfalls of vanity by focusing on commendable qualities and achievements that inspire admiration rather than resentment. Plutarch's discourse mirrors Paul's ethos of humility and selflessness, demonstrating how boasting, when wielded judiciously, can elevate both the speaker and the audience.

Although both respective approaches of Paul and Plutarch highlight the power of rhetorical strategy to inspire courage, virtue, and resilience in the face of challenges, Plutarch only navigates the delicate balance of self-praise without invoking envy, while Paul emphasizes the advancement of the Gospel amidst adversity and persecution, considering it a divine commitment to spread the message of salvation[38].

3. Paul's *Synkrisis* with "Self-Ambitious" Preachers

Therefore, the contrast between Paul's self-presentation in Phil 1:12–26 and those who "proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition" (Phil 1:17), highlights, on the one hand, that Paul's opponents are concerned with envy and rivalry, while, on the other hand, that Paul's self-presentation underlines the virtues and values integral to genuine service, particularly his emphasis on Christ[39], the Gospel[40], and selflessness[41].

An article by Christfried Böttrich, "Verkündigung aus 'Neid und Rivalität?': Beobachtungen zu Phil 1:12–18"[42], is highly relevant, since his analysis provides additional insights into the rhetorical dynamics of envy and rivalry among early Christian communities, focusing specifically on Phil 1:12–18. Böttrich examines how Paul's proclamation of the Gospel from a position of imprisonment could potentially provoke envy and rivalry among his contemporaries. Moreover, Böttrich underlines the importance of considering the socio-cultural context in which Paul's letters were written, studying Paul's strategic use of boasting in Philippians 1:12–26 within the broader context of early Christian communities characterized by envy and rivalry.

Similarly, N. Nikki[43] offers complementary perspectives on this theme. Niki studies the identification and characterization of Paul's opponents in Philippians, examining how their presence shapes Paul's self-presentation and leaves an impact on the Philippian community.

Taking into consideration the above insightful studies, we focus on Paul's response to opposition to the Philippian community, emphasizing his modeling of selflessness and subordination of personal interests for the greater good, serving as a counterpoint to the negative example set by those who are self-seeking.

In Phil 1:17, Paul acknowledges that there are individuals who "proclaim Christ with selfish ambition", possibly seeking personal gain or recognition. In contrast, Paul exemplifies selfless service. His primary concern is not self-boasting, but the advancement of the Gospel and the well-being of the community, emphasizing the importance of humility and selflessness. Paul's prohibition of self-seeking (μηδὲν κατ᾽ἐριθείαν, 2:3) recalls the negative example in 1:15–17 of those who proclaim Christ out of selfish motives (ἐξ ἐριθείας, 1:17). In 1:21–26, Paul also presents himself to the Philippians, in counterpoint to the negative example of those who preach Christ with self-seeking motives (1:15–18a), as a model of selfless subordination of his own interests to the work of the gospel[44].

Moreover, while some may proclaim Christ for personal gain, Paul focuses consistently on the Gospel. Throughout Phil 1:12–26, Paul rejoices in the progress of the Gospel (προσκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, Phil 1:12) while he is in prison. The advancement of the Gospel takes place not only through Paul's preaching of the Gospel (Phil 1:13, 16), but also through other Christians (Phil 1:14, 18). This expresses Paul's desire for Christ to be proclaimed (Phil 1:18). Consequently, the Philippian community is encouraged to prioritize the spread of Christ's Gospel above all personal ambitions, since Paul's entire perspective is Christ-centered. He sees his imprisonment as an opportunity for Christ to be magnified

(μεγαλυνθήσεται Χριστός), whether by life or death (Phil 1:20). This Christocentric focus contrasts with those who are driven by selfish ambitions. The Philippian community is urged to adopt a similar Christ-centered approach, valuing Christ above all other pursuits.

Despite facing imprisonment and uncertainty, Paul maintains a spirit of joy and rejoice (Phil 1:18). This joy is not based on his circumstances, but on his confidence in Christ. In contrast, those with selfish ambition may find their joy in personal achievements or recognition. The Philippian community is encouraged to find joy in Christ, irrespective of external circumstances.

Paul grapples the dilemma of whether to live or die, recognizing that either way, he belongs to Christ (Phil 1:21)[45]. His ultimate commitment is to the service of others, choosing to remain for the benefit of the Philippian believers (Phil 1:24–26). This sacrificial commitment stands in contrast to the self-serving motives of those with selfish ambitions. The Philippian community is challenged to embrace a sacrificial commitment to others in the name of Christ.

Certainly, in Phil 1:26, Paul expresses a specific purpose for his potential return to the Philippian community. This verse is part of his larger argument about his own circumstances, including the possibility of death (Phil 1:20–26). In this context, Paul is discussing the potential outcome of his situation, and he envisions that if he is released from prison and able to visit the Philippians again, "their boast might abound in Christ Jesus because of him" (Phil 1:26).

A noticeable nuance is found between two expressions: ἐν σαρκί (Phil 1:22, 24) and ἐν πνεύματι (Phil 1:27):

ἐν σαρκί	**ἐν πνεύματι**
ζῆν ἐν σαρκί (Phil 1:22)	ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι (Phil 1:27)
ἐπιμένειν [ἐν] τῇ σαρκί (Phil 1:24)	

However, it is important to remark that Paul does not live "according to the flesh" (κατὰ σάρκα), but that he lives "in the flesh" (ἐν σαρκί, Phil 1:22, 24). This is what justifies Paul's invitation to the Philippians to live "in one spirit" (ἐν ἑνὶ πνεύματι, Phil 1: 27)[46].

Paul is careful to avoid any form of self-boasting. Instead, his desire is that any boasting or glorification would be in Christ Jesus (ἵνα τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν περισσεύῃ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, Phil 1:26)[47]. This aligns with his broader theme of humility and exalting Christ above all else (cf., Phil 2:9). Therefore, Paul sees his potential return not as an opportunity for personal boasting but as a way for the Philippians to see and experience the work of Christ through his ministry.

The language used by Paul suggests a communal experience of boasting. The Philippians, as a community of believers, could find a collective reason for boasting in Christ because of Paul's return. This emphasizes the shared and communal nature of the community's experience. Consequently, Paul's envisioned return is not about personal acclaim, but about strengthening the unity and shared experience of the Philippian believers in their journey. In summary, the presence of Paul among them is seen as a catalyst for their collective boasting in Christ. So Paul's *synkrisis* with "self-ambitious" preachers can be summarized as follows:

	Paul	**Self-Ambitious Preachers**
Motives	Motivated by a genuine desire to see the Gospel proclaimed, even if by others, and rejoices in the spread of Christ's message	Driven by "selfish ambition", rivalry, and contentious spirit, seeking to add suffering to Paul's imprisonment

	Paul	Self-Ambitious Preachers
Response to adversity	Despite being in prison, Paul maintains a positive outlook on his circumstances as an opportunity for the Gospel to advance	Their goal is causing trouble rather than advancing the Gospel
Focus on others	Proposes a selfless Christological attitude based on love	Lack of concern for others, and their deeds contribute to contention
Unity versus division	Unity and mutual support setting an example of cooperation and humility	Division and strife, lack of unity

Similarly, Bird and Gupta compare Paul with his opponents, as well as Paul's competitors with his colleagues:

Competitors	Colleagues
Preach the Messiah (vv. 15, 17)	Preach the Messiah (v. 15)
From motives of envy and rivalry (v. 15)	From motives of goodwill (v. 15)
And selfish ambition and pretention (v. 17)	And love (v. 16)
Supposing (v. 17)	Knowing (v. 16)
To stir up trouble for Paul in prison (v. 17)	Paul is set to defend the Gospel

One can see in the above table that his "competitors" and "colleagues" preach the same "Messiah" but with different perspectives.

4. Paul's Self-Presentation and Christ's Exemplum

Phil 1:12–26 and 2:6–11 both contribute to the overall message of the letter. While Phil 1:12–26 introduces Paul's self-presentation in challenging circumstances, Phil 2:6–11 focuses on the exemplum of Christ's humility and exaltation. The two texts work together to emphasize key aspects of Christian living and service.

Phil 1:12–26 sets the tone by illustrating Paul's joy and positive attitude even amid suffering[48] and imprisonment. This joy is not based on external circumstances, but on his commitment to the Gospel even at the cost of personal comfort and death. This lays the foundation for understanding the selfless service was a model for the life of Paul.

In the context of the letter, Paul' self-presentation (Phil 1:12–26) and Christ's exemplum (Phil 2:6–11) follow the same rhetorical strategy:

	Phil 1:12–26	Phil 2:6–11
Pathos	Joy amidst imprisonment	Exaltation subsequent to κένωσις
Ethos	Paul's exemplum	Christ's exemplum
Logos	Argument based on discernement	Argument based on obedience

Paul's use of *Pathos* in Phil 1:12–26 is evident in his expression of joy amidst his imprisonment. Despite being in chains, he communicates a sense that invokes empathy among his addresses. The emotional resonance lies in Paul's ability to find joy, not in his favorable circumstances but in the advancement of the Gospel. Hereby, the Philippians are encouraged to consider their own responses to challenging situations.

Ethos is established through Paul's exemplum and his commitment to the Gospel. The Philippians are more likely to trust and be persuaded by someone who not only preaches but also lives out the principles he advocates.

In terms of *logos*, Phil 1:12–26 presents a logical progression of thought which moves from the introduction of Paul's imprisonment to the diverse motivations of preaching, Paul's response to these motivations, his internal struggle over whether to live or die, and ultimately his decision to remain for the sake of the Philippians. Throughout this progression, Paul maintains his focus on the overarching theme of the advancement of the Gospel, whether through his life or potential martyrdom.

On the other hand, in Phil 2:6–11, *pathos* is evoked through Christ's κένωσις and subsequent exaltation. Its emotional impact lies in the contrast between glory and the willing descent. The Philippians are invited not to personal suffering, as Paul describes himself in Phil 1:12–26, but to a profound adoration ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ (Phil 2:10).

Ethos is derived from the authority of Christ, who willingly humbled himself. Christ's exemplum becomes a paradigm for selflessness and obedience, enhancing the ethos of the passage and urging the Philippian community to adopt a Christ-centered approach.

As for *logos*, Phil 2:6–11 presents a logical progression based on Christ's obedience. The passage moves from Christ's incarnation[49] to his humility, obedience, exaltation, and the resulting universal acknowledgement of his lordship. This rhetorical progression not only highlights the theological significance of Christ's redemption, but also the cosmic impact of his κένωσις and obedience.

In conclusion, the rhetorical analysis of Phil 1:12–26 and 2:6–11 reveals Paul's intentional use of *pathos*, *ethos*, and *logos*. These rhetorical devices not only enhance the persuasiveness of the passages but also contribute to the broader theme of joy in adversity throughout his letter to the Philippians.

5. Conclusions

Paul's ability to convey his identity amidst adversity reveals his unwavering commitment to his mission. As we have already seen, several factors contribute to how Paul achieves his goal while incarcerated. He consistently emphasizes that the purpose of his life is Christocentric, shown by his deeds. This focus allows him to transcend the limitations of his physical circumstances and maintain a strong purpose.

Moreover, despite the challenges, he communicated a sense of joy that stems from his relationship with Christ. This deep-rooted relationship with Christ led him to maintain strong relational connections with the Philippians, in expressing his gratitude for their support and partnership in the Gospel. This continuous connection with the Philippians was crucial in shaping how he perceived himself and how he wanted to be perceived.

Paul consistently engaged himself in theological reflections, even in prison. This emphasis on theological depth reflects his intellectual and spiritual identity. Therefore, Paul's imprisonment was not a hindrance; it is instead interpreted positively as an opportunity for the Gospel to advance[50]. This optimistic perspective not only shaped his identity, but also communicated his trust in God's plan. In appealing to his exemplum, Paul reinforced his identity as someone who practiced what he preached, even in challenging circumstances. Notwithstanding these strategies, Paul acknowledged his vulnerability, which made him relatable to the Philippians.

Despite his status as a convict in a Roman colony, Paul strategically reframes his imprisonment not as a hindrance but as an opportunity for the proclamation (κήρυγμα) of Christ. By boasting in the face of adversity, Paul challenges conventional notions of power and success, asserting the superiority of spiritual values over worldly ones. This strategic use of boasting serves to underscore Paul's faithfulness to Christ and the transformative power of the Gospel, inspiring courage and confidence in his audience while highlighting the paradoxical nature of Christian virtue amid persecution.

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Notes

1 Self-presentation in the Greco-Roman world refers to the way individuals presented themselves to society, emphasizing certain qualities or characteristics to shape public perception. In ancient Greece and Rome, social standing and reputation were of utmost importance, and individuals often engaged in conscious efforts to project a particular image (cf. Gavrielatos 2017, pp. viii, 1–16). A classical example of ancient self-presentation is the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* (The Achievements of the Divine Augustus). The *Res Gestae* is especially significant because it gives an insight into the image Augustus portrayed to the Roman people (cf. Brunt and Moore 1983, 7th ed.). Seneca repeatedly presents Socrates as a role model and thus becomes a role model himself (cf. Seneca 1917, *Ep. Mor.*, 20, 34.35)

2 Although many studies discuss how Paul presents himself, only few analyze his self-presentation as a means of persuasion, such as Elliot (2004); Kraftchick (2008). These book sections explicitly declare their goal to investigate how Paul presents himself, yet they do not delve into the persuasive influence of his self-presentation. However, there are noteworthy studies that specifically concentrate on Paul's self-presentation as a persuasive tool. These studies can be seen as valuable contributions to this article: Holloway (2001) and Vos (2002).

3 Categories of self-presentation in the Greco-Roman world included origin (family, homeland, city, nation), childhood, formation, education, rhetorical skills (the ability to speak persuasively and eloquently was highly valued—public figures, such as politicians and philosophers, mastered their rhetorical skills to influence and win over the public), ethical values (emphasis was placed on moral and ethical virtues—philosophers like Plato and Aristotle discussed the importance of virtues such as wisdom, courage, and justice, and individuals sought to embody these qualities to enhance their reputation), public service and achievements (such as holding political office or contributing to the community as a way to enhance one's reputation—achievements in various fields, such as philosophy, literature, or military prowess, were also publically recognized). For more details, cf. (Pernot 1993).

4 An exemplum in the Greco-Roman world refers to a specific example or model that is used to illustrate a moral or philosophical point. Exempla were often employed in various forms of literature, speeches, and teachings to provide concrete instances that exemplified virtues, vices, or ethical principles. For example, Aesop, a legendary figure from ancient Greece, is famous for his collection of fables. These short stories often feature animals as characters and convey moral lessons. For example, the fable of "The Tortoise and the Hare" serves as an exemplum to teach the virtue of perseverance and the folly of overconfidence (cf. Jones and Rackham 1912). Another example is Epictetus' exempla to illustrate principles of virtue and self-discipline. For instance, he uses the example of a runner in a race to convey the idea that individuals should focus on their own efforts and actions rather than external circumstances (cf. Epictetus 1925).

5 For example, in L*etters to Atticus* (I, 15), Cicero references the actions of the Roman general Lucius Lucullus to illustrate the importance of prudent decision making in military affairs. Another example is Letter XXII, in which the Consul Quintus Metellus Macedonius is given as an exemplum of a virtuous and capable leader.

6 (Bird and Gupta 2020, pp. 48–58).

7 (Cassidy 2001).

8 Paul's letters exhibit a variety of persuasive techniques, drawing on rhetorical strategies common in the Greco-Roman world. Some of the techniques found in Paul's letters are as follows: *Ethos* (Paul's credibility by identifying himself as an apostle chosen by Christ), *Logos* (Paul frequently uses OT Scriptures to support his arguments and demonstrate the logical consistency of his teachings), and *Pathos* (Paul employs emotionally charged language to evoke a range of feelings, including joy, sorrow, gratitude, and love). Paul often includes personal narratives and anecdotes to elicit empathy and emotional engagement. These stories help to humanize the message and make it relatable to the experiences of the audience. In addition to *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*, Paul frequently uses imperatives and direct commands to reinforce his role as an apostle urging his audience to adhere to his message. Paul also repeats key themes, phrases, or ideas throughout his letters to reinforce their importance. Repetition serves as a rhetorical device to emphasize and drive home some specific points without ignoring Paul's frequent use of parallelism and antithesis which make his arguments more persuasive.

9 Aristotle, in *Ars Rhetorica*, II, 1,5, discusses the importance of *pathos* in persuasion, emphasizing the power of emotion to sway an audience. He explores the various emotions that can be invoked in an audience, including joy, which aligns with Paul's use of *pathos* in Phil 1:12–26.

10 (Schellenberg 2021, pp. 1–87).

11 Quintilian, in *Institutio Oratoria*, II, 15, 1–2, discusses the importance of ethos in oration, emphasizing the need for speakers to demonstrate integrity and sincerity to gain the trust of their audience. Quintilian explores the qualities that contribute to a speaker's *ethos*, such as honesty and moral character. Monographs like "Ethos and Narrative Interpretation: The Negotiation of Values in Paul's Letter to the Philippians" by Stephen E. Fowl offer in-depth analyses of the ethical dimensions of Paul's rhetoric in Philippians. Fowl (2005) examines how Paul's ethos as a faithful servant of Christ shapes his persuasive appeal to the Philippians, fostering trust and credibility.

12 (Sisson 2005).

13 Aristotle, in *Ars Rhetorica*, I, 2,1, discusses the importance of *logos* in persuasive discourse, emphasizing the need for speakers to present logical arguments supported by evidence. Aristotle outlines the three modes of persuasion, including *logos*, which relies on reasoning and proof.

14 The passive use of the verb κεῖμαι indicates that the subject is God and not Paul himself.

15 In the Greco-Roman world, social norms and attitudes towards suffering were influenced by various factors, including philosophical traditions, religious beliefs, and cultural practices, such as the following: stoicism, which emphasizes the acceptance of one's fate, endurance of suffering, and self-control despite external suffering; and epicureanism, which seeks to minimize suffering by pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain (cf. Gleason 1995). On the contrary, the function of suffering in Philippians encompasses other meanings for persecution, imprisonment, and personal struggles. Paul provides a unique perspective on suffering, urging the Philippians to view it through a lens of faith. As he writes in Phil 1:29, "ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν". This acknowledgment of suffering as a granted privilege challenges conventional views and sets the stage for a deeper understanding of its function. Rather than being a mere consequence of a fallen world, suffering in Philippians is presented as an integral part of the Christian journey, intimately connected to one's identification with Christ. The reality of sharing Christ's sufferings echoes throughout Philippians, reinforcing the idea that suffering is not out of purpose, but rather a transformative process. Moreover, contrary to worldly expectations, Philippians introduces the paradoxical notion of joy amid suffering. For more details on the subject, cf. (Bloomquist 1992).

16 The *topoi* of deeds in Greek rhetoric, as applied to Phil 1:12–26, highlight Paul's use of his past actions and experiences to bolster his credibility and authority as a messenger of the Gospel, despite his imprisonment. This rhetorical strategy is evident throughout the passage, in which Paul reflects on his circumstances and emphasizes the positive outcomes of his suffering for the sake of Christ. In ancient rhetorical handbooks, such as Aristotle's "Rhetoric", the *topos* of deeds is recognized as a persuasive device whereby speakers appeal to their past actions or achievements to establish credibility and persuade their audience. Aristotle discusses the importance of *ethos*, or the speaker's character and credibility, in effective persuasion, and the *topos* of deeds serves as a means of enhancing *ethos* by demonstrating the speaker's virtue and integrity through their actions. Contemporary biblical scholars, such as Gordon D. Fee in his commentary on the Philippians, acknowledge Paul's use of the *topos* of deeds in Phil 1:12–26. Fee highlights how Paul's recounting of his past actions and experiences serves to strengthen his credibility and authority as an apostle of Christ, despite his imprisonment. Fee emphasizes the thematic significance of Paul's suffering for the sake of the Gospel, arguing that Paul's willingness to endure hardship for the sake of Christ serves as a powerful example for believers. Moreover, Richard N. Longenecker, in his commentary on Philippians, notes the rhetorical skill with which Paul employs the *topos* of deeds in Phil 1:12–26. Longenecker highlights Paul's strategic use of his imprisonment as an opportunity to advance the Gospel's message, thereby demonstrating his commitment to Christ and his dedication to the mission of spreading the good news. Longenecker argues that Paul's willingness to endure suffering for the sake of the Gospel enhances his credibility and authority as an apostle.

17 Paul's "positive imprisonment in the presence of the Philippians is extremely relevant for Paul's argument in 1.12–14. His prior contact with the Philippians which showed that a *bona fide* apostle could be imprisoned, forms the basis for his justification of his current imprisonment" (Marshall 1993, 2nd ed.).

18 The table following the explanation is taken from Aletti (2005, p. 221), and translated from the original French by the author.

19 Cf., the monograph in Chaaya (2018, pp. 53–54).

20 For an explicit study on Phil 3:1–4:1, see the monograph of Bianchini (2006).

21 Paul's references to κύριος in Philippians are special and unique. The name is relevant to Christ (cf., Phil 2:11, 19; 3:8, 20) and Paul confesses that "Jesus Christ is Lord" in Phil 2,11 is the cornerstone of his proclamation of faith.

22 Paul's characteristic name for Jesus Christ is κύριος. The clearest evidence that Paul in his letter applied the name κύριος to Christ is in the hymn of Phil 2:6–11.

23 At the beginning of the letter, Paul is associated with Paul as being both δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Moreover, the adjective ἰσόψυχον applied to Timothy is a *hapax* in the New Testament and is analogous to that of the σύμψυχοι in Phil 2:2 (cf. Aletti 2005, p. 199).

24 Each of the three terms with which Paul describes Epaphroditus (ἀδελφός, συνεργός, συστρατιώτης) ties him to Paul's mission. ἀδελφός is one of Paul's favorite terms (it occurs 113 times in the Pauline homologoumena) for depicting those who accept his proclamation: the Gospel has created new bonds in Christ through faith. Epaphroditus is also described as συνεργός, which frequently designates a member of a group that assists Paul in ministering the Church. Furthermore, the term occurs again in 4:3, referring to Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement, and may designate the specific office that Paul entrusts with his charge to bring the good news of Christ to the nations. Therefore by mentioning that Epaphroditus is a συνεργός, Paul marks him as one he has commissioned to them. The Philippians sent to Paul an emissary in Epaphroditus; now Paul returns him to them as a συνεργο,ς. Finally, Paul describes Epaphroditus as his συστρατιώτης. The meaning of this term is difficult to determine. Outside Phil 2:25, it only occurs in Phlm 2. However, according to the direct context, it may be read in v. 27 that Epaphroditus' sickness was "to the point of death".

25 The exempla of Timothy and Epaphroditus serve various functions within the broader context of Paul's message. Timothy's exemplum underlines unity and concern for others, and Epaphroditus' exemplum underlines sacrificial service.

[26] In his commentary on Philippians, Gordon Fee remarks that Paul could pass easily from Phil1:14 to v.18b, based on the fact that Paul's imprisonment permitted the progress of the Gospel in which Paul rejoices (cf. Fee 1995, p. 124). It is true that the Gospel advanced notwithstanding Paul's imprisonment, but Phil 1:15–17 are essential in Paul's argument since "en redoublant d'audace, la plupart des frères se sont risqués à annoncer la Parole, voilà Pourquoi Paul a parlé de progrès dans l'Évangile" (Aletti 2005, p. 78).

[27] Jennings remarks that "Paul hardly refers here to his personal needs, but instead discusses the status of the shared Gospel mission" between him and the Philippians (Jennings 2018, p. 45). Likewise, Blois observes that "one striking element of Paul's presentation of his own circumstances, however, is that he speaks less about what has happened to himself and more about what has happened to the spread of the gospel, presumably with the intention of directing the Philippians' gaze *away from* the negative circumstances of his imprisonment and *toward* the progress of the gospel (cf., 1:12)" (Blois 2020, p. 114).

[28] (Aletti 2005, p. 79).

[29] Bouttier describes these three references by saying, "what unites [Paul] with the Philippians unites him with Christ. Paul's only "boasting" *in Christo* is expressed in the fact that henceforth, and equally, the members of Christ have become with him what he has become for the others. Consequently, *this mutual* "*glorification*" does not arise from any mutual complacence. . . The glory that they receive from each other comes not from any success, but from Christ alone, from Christ in them as in him" (Bouttier 1966, pp. 62–63, as cited by Blois 2020, p. 116).

[30] (Aletti 2005, p. 96).

[31] (Blois 2020, p. 127).

[32] (Aletti 2005, p. 96).

[33] Some examples illustrate that boasting was not always viewed negatively but could serve as a means of asserting authority, inspiring confidence, and enhancing persuasive power when employed with moderation and sincerity. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* acknowledges boasting as a rhetorical device that can be used effectively. He discusses the concept of μεγαλοπρεπεία, or magnificence, which involves boasting about one's achievements in a dignified manner. Aristotle suggests that boasting, when done appropriately, can enhance the speaker's credibility and persuasive power (cf. Aristotle 1926, Art Rhetorica II, 12, 8. Quintilian). He also recognizes the legitimate use of boasting in oration in *Institutio Oratoria*. He discusses how a speaker can employ boasting to establish authority and inspire confidence in the audience. Quintilian emphasizes the importance of moderation in boasting, cautioning against excessive pride or arrogance that could alienate the audience (cf. Quintilian 2002, Institutio Oratoria IV, 2, 1–3).

[34] (Rogers 1982).

[35] This recurring theme, through which Socrates demonstrates qualities of detachment throughout the dialogue of Plato is found in Plato (1966).

[36] *Ibid*.

[37] (Fowler 1936).

[38] See also the enlightening article of Smit (2014).

[39] Ἐν Χριστῷ (Phil 1:1; 1:13; 1:26; 2:1; 2:5; 3:3,14; 4:7, 19, 21), σύν Χριστῷ εἶναι (Phil 1:23).

[40] Τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (Phil 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15).

[41] Selflessness (Phil 1:22–24; 2:3–4, 6–7, 20, 21, 30).

[42] (Böttrich 2004).

[43] (Nikki 2019).

[44] (Ware 2005, pp. 221, 234).

[45] Ἐμοί at the beginning of Phil 1:21 is emphatic. Its force contrasts with those who proclaim the Gospel with impure motives (1:15, 17). "Paul's contrast with them is not self-centered, but Christ-centered" (Hendricksen 1962, p. 76).

[46] "The apostle speaks several times in negative form of a "life in the flesh" (cf., 2 Cor 10:3; Gal 2:20; Phil 1:22, 24; Philem 16), by which he expresses a negative judgment on normal human existence. In contrast, while Paul of course lives ἐν σαρκί (in the flesh), he does not live κατὰ σάρκα (according to the flesh; cf., 2 Cor 10:3). Fleshly people are characterized by self-centeredness and self-satisfaction, relying on their own abilities, making their own knowledge the standard of what is reasonable and real. A life κατὰ σάρκα means a life without access to God, a life imprisoned in what is earthly and transient (cf., Rom. 7:14b). Here σάρξ is the summary expression for a life separated from and opposed to God. The real acting subject of life is sin, which results in death (Rom 7:5, "While we were living in the flesh [ἐν τῇ σαρκί], our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" (Schnelle 2009, p. 285).

[47] "This introduces an allusion to Paul's discussion of the threat of judaizing tendencies in 3:2–10 (cf., 3:3, οι' καυχώμενοι ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), and this suggests that the instruction Paul envisages here will be focused upon this threat. By reasserting in 1:12–26 his role not only as a paradigm (1:13–14; 1:19–24), but also as a teacher (1:25–26), Paul lays the basis not only for his upcoming visit, but also for the direct exhortation which is to follow (1:27–4:9) in the letter, which must be a substitute for Paul's personal presence (1:27; 2:12) until his release and reunion with the Philippians (2:24). Thus, just as 1:12–18a are setting forth Paul's role as paradigm, preparing the way for the actual description of the example in 1:18b-26, so 1:18b-26 are setting forth

Paul's role as a teacher of the Philippians, preparing the way for his direct exhortation of them in 1:27–2:18 (Ware 2005, pp. 214–15).

[48] Few studies have emphasized the persuasive aspect of Paul's presentation of his suffering. One notable monograph on the topic is that of Gregory Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians*, in which he examines the function of Paul's suffering epistologically and rhetorically. Bloomquist argues that while Paul's suffering carries theological significance, it also contains a persuasive element. Bloomquist points out that Paul's suffering in the exordium serves as a captatio benevolentiae; which is a rhetorical technique to attempt to "endear them to oneself" (Bloomquist 1992, pp. 146, 193). Bloomquist suggests that Paul's consistent use of self-presentation aligns with the principles outlined in rhetorical handbooks which advise establishing a positive *ethos* with the addressee or community. Although Bloomquist correctly observes that Paul refrains from elaborating his suffering, he fails to highlight the contrast between Paul's approach and the guidance found in rhetorical handbooks (Bloomquist 1992, p. 148). For instance, ancient rhetoricians like Quintilian and Cicero often recommend presenting the specifics of one's suffering to sway the audience, citing examples such as Manius Aquilius, who revealed his scars to gain sympathy (Cicero 1942, *De or.* 2.195; Quintilian 2002, *Inst.* 2.15.7). Therefore, even though Paul typically uses his suffering in other letters to establish a positive connection with his addresses, he breaks away from this pattern in his letter to the Philippians. Paul purposefully leaves out specifics about his suffering in this letter to illustrate the idea that success is achievable despite adversity. While Bloomquist is accurate in noting Paul's tendency to present his suffering to foster community bonds, he appears to miss the significance of Paul's distinct approach to portraying suffering in his letter to the Philippians.

[49] "Si les premiers Pères l'ont interprété du Christ incarné, si le vocable morfh, dénote coporéité et visibilité, si d'autre part le participe u'pa,rcwn n'est jamais utilisé par Paul pour les énoncés concernant Dieu, cela signifie très probablement que ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων désigne la condition divine du Christ *incarné*—et non celle du préexistant. Non que le syntagme nie la préexistence: il n'en parle pas, car tel n'est pas son propos" (Aletti 2005, *Lettre aux Philippiens*, p. 154).

[50] The scholarly debate surrounding why Paul does not provide more details about his imprisonment in Phil 1:12–26 is multifaceted and has generated various hypotheses and interpretations. This debate is situated within the broader context of Pauline studies, biblical exegesis, and historical inquiries into the life and writings of the apostle Paul. Understanding the historical context of Paul's imprisonment is crucial for interpreting his silence on the matter in Phil 1:12–26. Scholars such as F. F. Bruce and N. T. Wright argue that Paul's reticence regarding his imprisonment may stem from the fact that he was in Roman custody rather than in a typical prison setting. In this view, Paul's status as a Roman citizen afforded him certain privileges and protections, which may have influenced his approach to discussing his imprisonment (cf. Bruce 1977; Wright 2008). Other scholars suggest that Paul's silence on the details of his imprisonment in Phil 1:12–26 may be a deliberate rhetorical strategy aimed at emphasizing the positive outcomes of his situation rather than dwelling on the negative aspects (cf. Fee 1995). This interpretation aligns with Paul's broader rhetorical approach in his letters, in which he often focuses on the themes of joy, perseverance, and the advancement of the Gospel in the face of adversity. Another perspective posits that Paul's decision not to dwell on his imprisonment in Philippians 1:12–26 may be motivated by pastoral concerns rather than historical or rhetorical factors. Scholars such as John Stott suggest that Paul's primary aim in writing to the Philippians was to encourage and strengthen their faith, rather than to provide a detailed account of his personal circumstances (cf. Stott 1999). Some scholars, such as M. Silva, propose that Paul's silence on his imprisonment in Phil 1:12–26 may be due to editorial decisions made by the compiler or editor of the letter. According to this view, the letter to the Philippians may have been edited or redacted to focus on specific themes or theological concerns, leading to the omission of certain details about Paul's imprisonment. However, by engaging with various perspectives and analyzing the relevant biblical texts, one can gain a deeper understanding of Paul's intentions and the context in which he wrote his letter (cf. Silva 1992).

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How Might Positionality Be Used in Biblical Studies? Philippians 1:27–2:4 as an Example

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Abstract: Using Philippians 1:27–2:4 as an example, this article will explore the role of positionality in biblical studies. Although the process of reflecting on one's positionality is more prevalent in empirical-based research, one's positionality is also relevant in text-based research, such as in biblical studies. This article will demonstrate this by observing the following: first, how some analyses of the collectivistic cultural context of Philippians have been inappropriately influenced by certain implicit individualistic perspectives; and second, how an interpretive lens derived from my positionality as a scholar from an explicitly collectivistic culture is able to highlight a mostly ignored intrinsic correlation between social relations and virtue.

Keywords: positionality; emic; etic; honor; shame; collectivism; individualism; Confucianism; face; Phil.1:27–2:4

1. Introduction

In her 2019 SBL presidential address, Gale Yee said, "The triad of gender, race, and class—my Chinese American ethnicity, my lower-class origins, and my female gender—have made deep marks on my interpretation of the biblical text, whether I consciously knew it or not" (Yee 2020, p. 7). Yee's statement demonstrates a self-awareness that her particular identity markers (her race, class, and gender) have influenced her engagement with the biblical text. Although she does not explicitly use the term, Yee's statement is essentially a brief acknowledgment of her positionality, a concept common in empirical research.

Andrew Holmes defines positionality as follows: "The term 'positionality' both describes an individual's worldview and the position they adopt about the research task and its social and political context" (Holmes 2020, p. 1). The researcher's worldview affects their ontological and epistemological assumptions as well as assumptions about human nature and agency (Holmes 2020, p. 1). As a researcher, having awareness of one's worldview as it potentially influences the research task—or one's "positionality"—is crucial when engaging in empirical research involving methods such as conducting interviews or participant observations. However, this positionality can also be valuable—even at a minimal level—to researchers who engage with ancient primary texts or inanimate objects because those texts or objects themselves represent, or were an integral part of, a social world. As a social being, the researcher still engages with that social world, even if it is mediated through an intermediary source such as an ancient text that was written by a person who once lived in the social world and evinced it. "Positionality, therefore, can be seen to affect the totality of the research process. It acknowledges and recognizes that researchers are part of the social world they are researching and that this world has already been interpreted by existing social actors" (Holmes 2020, p. 3).

In relation to the discipline of biblical studies, the same concerns apply. As social beings from a particular social location, the positionality of biblical scholars influences the manner in which they engage with the social world of the biblical text, the assumptions made about that social world, and possible implicit biases and blind spots that arise from those assumptions.

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Further, as the researcher engages with the social world of the ancient text, the related anthropological/sociological principles of the emic and etic perspectives should be considered in the reflection on one's own positionality. The emic perspective refers to the insider's perspective, where the researcher is either a member of the social world or has some close connection to it and thus has prior familiarity with idiosyncratic beliefs and behaviors from within that culture, resulting in the articulation of a more authentic, "thick" description of the culture.[1] The etic perspective refers to an outsider's perspective, where the researcher is not from that social world, has no prior knowledge of the culture, and thus is also able to maintain a distance from it. This distance or unfamiliarity affords the researcher some level of objectivity and the ability to ask sensitive questions about the culture being studied that an insider might think were taboo.

There are advantages and disadvantages of both perspectives, and the relative positions of the emic versus etic perspectives can be perceived as a continuum or even be a combination of both perspectives to differing extents (Holmes 2020, pp. 5–7).[2] However, interpretive bias and blind spots are pitfalls for both perspectives, with neither side exempt from making incorrect assumptions of the culture being studied. These issues necessitate the process of considering one's positionality as an honest effort towards mitigating those interpretive biases and blind spots, as well as placing oneself in the best position to observe all the aspects of the social world that are relevant to one's research project (Holmes 2020, p. 6; Jacobson and Mustafa 2019, p. 9).

In order to explore these questions around positionality, this study will first consider the honor–shame model[3] of Bruce Malina as an example of a body of scholarship that was inappropriately influenced by the positionality of its researcher—namely his implicit individualism—throughout the scholarship in question. Then, it will consider the positionality of *this* study's researcher and how aspects of my collectivistic cultural background—such as my emic understanding of collectivistic social sensibilities—have legitimate cultural coherency with the culture of the biblical text and, therefore, can be appropriately utilized to nuance Malina's existing models.

Finally, the nuanced understanding of honor–shame will be used to observe Philippians 1:27–2:4 in order to highlight and explicate aspects of group dynamics and honor–shame, which otherwise were omitted or insufficiently explored according to Malina's own models as well as the established reading. Given the accepted collectivistic nature of the cultures represented in the biblical text,[4] the cultural proximity of this researcher to the biblical text should legitimize this exercise to at least the same degree as Malina's models and probably even more.

2. Bruce Malina's Honor–Shame Scholarship as a Case Study in Implicit Individualism

Approximately 40 years have passed since the publication of Bruce Malina's watershed book *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural-Anthropology* (Malina 1981). Now in its third edition, this publication heralded the start of his utilization of cultural-anthropological models in New Testament interpretation and collaboration with a group of scholars who would eventually be known as the Context Group. Malina's significant contribution to New Testament scholarship must be acknowledged at the outset, not only for its introduction of social-scientific tools to aid with uncovering the social context of the biblical world,[5] but also for introducing these concepts and terminology into the wider church context (c.f., Georges and Baker 2016). Although his scholarship drew from the scholarship of cultural anthropologists and sociologists from the twentieth century, Malina relied on cultural continuity as a strong argument for the plausibility that cultural dynamics from antiquity can continue into modernity. In particular, the concept and vernacular expression of honor–shame—a key concept in collectivistic cultures, both ancient and modern—have been invaluable to Christian missionaries engaging in cross-cultural efforts to articulate the gospel message to group-oriented societies (c.f., Georges and Baker 2016). Today, scholars still continue to accept Malina's insights as part of the interdisciplinary toolkit of analysis,[6]

academic institutions around the world use *The New Testament World* as required reading;[7] its lingering impact should not be underestimated.

However, although Malina's strategies to acquaint himself with the foreign nature of the ancient Mediterranean were commendable and understandable, his comparisons and the scholarship that followed have now been criticized for their over-simplicity and generalization, as well as still being ethnocentric and anachronistic.[8] The criticisms themselves have mainly revolved around the issue of generalization as well as Malina's inappropriately rigid approach to applying his cultural "models" to the biblical text (c.f., Horrell 1996; Harvey 2016). Until now, no detailed analysis of his scholarship has been conducted regarding the presuppositions foundational to his cultural worldview, which led to those very issues.[9] With the benefit of hindsight and a reflection on my positionality as a scholar from a different cultural worldview than Malina's worldview, I have determined that the problematic issues with Malina's research reside in an implicit individualistic perspective associated with his US/Western background. He underestimated the extent to which his individualistic perspective affected his role as a researcher of another culture. This especially affected his understanding of the nature of social groups in collectivistic cultures and, subsequently, his understanding of honor and shame.

The problems observed with Malina's models that relate to his implicit individualism can be grouped into three main categories: 1. An individualistic understanding of boundary lines; 2. A simplistic understanding of honor–shame; 3. An omission of the face metaphor. Malina's publications are large in number, but his main work concerning the honor–shame model is *The New Testament World*. He also lays out his broader theories of model-making in *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation* (Malina 1986). My evaluation of Malina's scholarship will reference material in these two works.

2.1. An Individualistic Understanding of Group Boundary Lines

The foundations of Malina's model of honor–shame start with an individualistic understanding of group boundary lines. This individualistic understanding appears in Malina's *The New Testament World* introduction to his chapter on honor–shame. In the opening paragraph, he introduces the idea of boundary lines between social groups with a generalized, abstract picture of two hypothetical groups of people who encounter each other in a desert for the first time.

> Now imagine a group of people coming on the scene. With their hands in the supple sand, they start making lines to indicate to each other that this side is "my side", that side is "your side". Another group comes along, makes a line, and declares that this side is "our side", that side is "your side". The wind comes and covers over the explicit lines, yet all continue to act as though they were still there, implicit in the sand (Malina 1981, p. 27).

Malina continues to explain the role of these lines in constructing meaning and defining individuals and groups from each other. When applying this preoccupation with line drawing, he uses the first-person-plural pronoun "we",[10] and indicates that this preoccupation is something that extends back to one's ancestors.[11] However, Malina does not specify which culture he is describing, thus implying that he understands this line drawing to be culturally and temporally universal. The problem with Malina's description here is that this preoccupation with boundary lines between social groups is not a universal one held by both individualistic and collectivistic cultures but is, in fact, predominately an individualistic one, as it revolves around a concern for the self and personal agency, concepts about which collectivistic cultures are less concerned.[12]

In *Christian Origins*, Malina applies this same understanding of social groups and boundary lines to his description of groups operating within a collectivistic culture (Malina 1986, p. 37). He describes them as follows:

> … a proliferation of competing groups, each attempting to be self-contained, to win out over its competitors, to defend its gains, and to consolidate its holdings.

> Thus, there is strong concern in the respective groups about maintaining social boundaries, but the boundaries seem porous. The inside of the social body is under attack; there are informers, spies, or deviants present (Malina 1986, p. 38).

Malina's choice of terms ("self-contained", "win", and "defend") draws attention to the emphasis on maintaining each group's boundary lines. Malina observes that some lines are not solid, calling the boundaries "porous". Malina, this porosity is a bad thing, allowing the group to be vulnerable to external influences, all bad ones: informers, spies, and deviants. This need to maintain solid boundary lines between groups and an inherent sense of competition between groups are all markers of individualism.

In *The New Testament World*, Malina continues to apply this understanding of boundary lines to the first-century Mediterranean world. He says, "Now, in the first-century Mediterranean world, every social interaction that takes place outside one's family or outside one's circle of friends is perceived as a challenge to honor, a mutual attempt to acquire honor from one's social equal" (Malina 1981, p. 36). Although it may seem that family and friend groups are equally prioritized, later in the same discussion, it becomes clear that the family group is elevated above all other groups. Malina says, "A person can always trust his blood relatives. Outside that circle, all people are presumed to be dishonorable—untrustworthy, if you will—unless proved otherwise" (Malina 1981, p. 36). This understanding of group boundary lines forms the foundation for his understanding of honor–shame and influences the contours of his model of honor–shame.

2.2. A Simplistic Understanding of Honor–Shame

In conjunction with this individualistic understanding of group boundary lines, Malina also draws from the scholarship of various cultural anthropologists and sociologists, such as John Peristiany, Julian Pitt-Rivers, Mary Douglas, and Pierre Bourdieu, to build his model of honor–shame. For example, Malina discusses a means of gaining honor known as the "challenge-riposte" (or "challenge-response") game, a social phenomenon that he drew from Bourdieu's own observations of the Kabyle people in Northern Algeria (Malina 1981, pp. 33–46). (C.f., Bourdieu 1965, 1977). Based on his assumption of solid group boundary lines and an inherent competitive attitude between groups, Malina assumes that in collectivistic cultures, Bourdieu's "game" can be applied to *every* social interaction that occurs outside of the family or friend group and be "perceived as a challenge to honor" (Malina 1981, p. 36). This is problematic for a few reasons.

First, Bourdieu does not claim this game occurs with every social interaction. While honor challenges can occur between individuals or groups, they do not occur as regularly or frequently as Malina infers. He also observes a high level of respect between the two "players" in the game, a component that is, according to Bourdieu, inseparable from the challenge itself. He says, "Self-respect, respect for the rule, respect for one's opponent and one's offer to be respected by him—these are inseparable" (Bourdieu 1965, p. 204). This observation highlights the mutual respect and collegiality present between the two players. Bourdieu also devotes much of the essay to discussing the myriad ways in which honor is demonstrated in the Kabyle society, identifying twelve different Kabyle lexical terms that denote honor. The inclusion of this detailed lexical analysis demonstrates Bourdieu's recognition of the complex nature of honor–shame in this society, something which was lacking in Malina's works.[13]

Second, both solid group boundary lines and an inherent competitive attitude are characteristics more associated with individualism than collectivism (c.f., Triandis 1993, pp. 165–66). Thus, what Malina has effectively done is apply his implicit individualistic understanding of social groups to his application of honor–shame dynamics in collectivistic cultures. By not taking his positionality seriously enough, Malina underestimated the extent to which his individualistic perspective permeated his interpretation of the collectivistic social groups. In contrast, as will be demonstrated in Section 3, collectivistic cultures commonly have more porous, fluid group boundary lines and thus also have more collegial, cooperative attitudes between groups (c.f., Triandis 1993, pp. 165–66).

Malina also applies this strict understanding of social groups to his discussion of limited good. According to Malina, due to the limited nature of resources or "goods" in the first-century Mediterranean and the inherent competitive nature of the culture, any improvement in a person's resources or social position (including power or honor) would naturally be viewed as a "threat to the entire community" (Malina 1981, p. 89). Malina assumes this is the universal behavior in response to the shortage of a resource. However, this assumption is yet another presupposition arising from his individualistic perspective. His assumption of solid, clearly demarcated boundary lines leads to another assumption that any given interaction or negotiation for resources is a zero-sum game, isolated primarily between the two social groups involved in the negotiation. But in collectivistic cultures, the reality is much more complicated and nuanced. While the main negotiation appears to be primarily between two parties, their connections to other social groups not present are still significant enough to influence the negotiation to the extent that the actual negotiation is between more than two groups, and thus, the resources are really split between multiple groups. Here, contrary to individualistic sensibilities, it is possible for both parties physically present at the negotiation to reach an amicable agreement that benefits *both* parties rather than benefitting only one.

Notably, this is where the sociological concept of capital as developed by Bourdieu—whether it be in the form of concrete resources such as food, finances, or land, or in the form of symbolic social capital such as power, status, or honor—is a better framework for understanding the exchanging of financial or symbolic capital within a collectivistic culture (Bourdieu 1986). In fact, Bourdieu also describes an alternate version of the game where the challenge to honor was issued through the giving of gifts (Bourdieu 1965, p. 204).[14] Here, the lines between financial capital (an actual gift) and symbolic capital (an honor bestowed) are blurred. Where mutual gift-giving occurs, honor is mutually given and received, potentially resulting in a win-win.

2.3. An Omission of the Face Metaphor

Finally, Malina almost completely omits a significant feature of honor–shame: the concept of *face*, an embedded metaphor for a person's status, reputation, or presence, commonly recognized and analyzed in research on collectivistic cultures (c.f., Ting-Toomey 1994). In his section titled "How Honor is Displayed and Recognized", Malina appears to consider this metaphor as he discusses how one's body might represent a "sort of personalized road map of the social values of our society" (Malina 1981, p. 38). When applied to honor, Malina makes a statement that the head and face play prominent roles in this "symboled replication of the social value of honor" (Malina 1981, p. 38). However, in his explanation of this statement, he only understands that the significance of the face is located in its awareness of others. He says, "To affront someone is to challenge another in such a way that the person is, and cannot avoid being, aware of it" (Malina 1981, p. 39). Malina seems to refer to the fact that, as human beings, we see each other, and we recognize challenges made to our faces when we see them. Without further clarification, he continues to connect this insight to the Hebrew term for the nose ("the center of the face") and how it can be used to connote anger metaphorically (Malina 1981, p. 39). Although there is nothing problematic with this insight regarding the nose itself,[15] this constitutes his main discussion on a person's appearance and face. Thus, even though Malina demonstrates some general awareness that appearance and face play significant roles in social interactions, he stops short of grasping the full extent of that significance, namely how one's face and even one's general appearance can connote status or honor (or shame, the lack of honor).[16]

3. Confucianism as a Paradigm for an Explicitly Collectivistic Honor–Shame

I am of Chinese descent, but I was born and raised in Britain. My social location is drawn from both the Chinese and British cultures. British culture contains many elements of individualism. Chinese culture is a strongly collectivistic culture that has main-

tained cultural continuity since antiquity. My positionality has afforded me a cultural vantage point from which to recognize the implicitly individualistic aspects of Malina's understanding of collectivistic cultures, *and* it has also afforded me an emic understanding of collectivistic cultures. Thus, as a methodological exercise to counter this implicit bias present in Malina's scholarship, I have constructed an alternative, heuristic lens of interpretation from the explicitly collectivistic Chinese culture represented in Confucianism. My cultural proximity to the collectivism of the biblical culture affords a valuable perspective and insight regarding that culture, which was less explicit from Malina's perspective.

Notably, to guard against potential anachronism, the understanding of those Confucian concepts has been derived directly from the ancient primary source material rather than from modern secondary sources.[17] Therefore, this section will use Confucius's writings (and those of his disciples, one of whom was represented here) to provide a picture of social groups and social boundary lines that is present in an explicitly collectivistic culture such as Chinese culture. Out of this picture will emerge an understanding of honor–shame that is more nuanced and complex than the existing model of honor–shame put forward by Bruce Malina, as discussed in the previous section. Further, this Confucian understanding of honor–shame contains a robust version of the face metaphor, which was missing in Malina's model.

There are different strands of Confucianism, encompassing the writings of Confucius himself (551–479 BCE) (Ivanhoe 2000, p. 1) and philosophers that continued developing his thoughts afterward, among which is the most prominent disciple, Mencius (391–308 BCE) (Ivanhoe 2000, p. 16). Each strand has its own particulars as well as much coherence and convergence, especially between Confucius and Mencius (Tamney 2012, pp. 128–29). Thus, Confucian scholars are comfortable with the moniker "Confucianism" being used to describe their discipline as a whole. In light of this coherence, texts from the collective teachings of Confucius and Mencius will be employed in this chapter to build an understanding of the societal dynamics of their time and the mechanisms by which honor–shame considerations were formed.

3.1. A Confucian Understanding of Group Boundary Lines

The following passages will demonstrate the fluidity of boundary lines in Chinese social groups. Boundary lines can exist between geographical groups and class groups. Core Confucian virtues such as *ren* 仁 (translated as goodness, benevolence, or humanheartedness) and *yi* 義 (righteousness) can also operate in the background and have a considerable influence on how loyalties and respect between two persons (whether within the same social group or across two different social groups) can be expressed.[18] For example, in *Analects* 1.6, Confucius teaches the following:

> A youth, when at home [*ru* 入], should be filial [*xiao* 孝], and, abroad [*chu* 出], respectful to his elders [*di* 弟]. He should be earnest and truthful. He should overflow in love to all, and cultivate the friendship of the good (Legge 1861).

The Chinese concept of *xiao* 孝 (filial or filial piety) is a fundamental concept in Chinese thought and society, denoting the proper level of respect, care, and conduct towards one's parents.[19] The other concept that also appears in this teaching is *di* 弟 (respect for one's elders). *Di* itself is the Chinese character for a younger brother, and in this context is connoting the idea of being a good younger brother.[20] In this teaching, loving, collegial, respectful conduct is not only expected within one's family, one's inmost social group (*ru* 入 "at home"), but also towards any persons considered to be an elder in external social groups (*chu* 出 "abroad"). The term *chu* can refer to any location outside of one's home, ranging from one's immediate vicinity all the way to countries abroad.

The fluidity of social dynamics was not limited to geographical boundaries but class boundaries as well. In *Analects* 5.15, Zigong, a disciple of Confucius, questions the grounds for awarding the title *Wen* 文 (translated as "Cultured") to a government minister, Kong Wenzi ("Cultured Master Kong"). Confucius responds with this praise for the minister's conduct: "He was of an active nature and yet fond of learning, and he was not ashamed

to ask and learn of his inferiors! On these grounds he has been styled *Wen*" (Legge 1861). Confucius draws attention to the minister's propensity for learning to the extent that he was not ashamed to learn from someone of a lower social class. *Chi* 恥, one of a handful of terms denoting shame, is used here. Confucius dispels any concerns regarding interactions between classes or people of differing status. It is possible for someone of higher status to learn from someone of lower status without garnering shame. This is evidence of a society where class boundaries are not so simply delineated. In fact, those members of a higher class would not only interact with but also learn from members of a lower class, essentially placing themselves in a lower position, where they showed respectful deference to that person as someone more knowledgeable than them. Further, Confucius's words make a statement regarding what behavior is considered "cultured" or honorable.

3.2. A Confucian Understanding of Honor–Shame

Rather than understanding honor only in terms of gaining value or worth in the eyes of others (as per Malina and Pitt-Rivers[21]), Confucianism also recognizes a moral, ethical dimension to honor. As the following passages show, the teachings vary in their focus, such as either advising that honor without virtuous behavior is, in reality, shame or that the path to honor is behaving virtuously. But no matter the focus, the two components are closely connected in a causal manner. For example, in *Analects* 4.9, Confucius teaches, "A scholar-official who has set his heart upon the Way, but who is still ashamed of having shabby clothing or meager rations, is not worth engaging in discussion" (Slingerland 2003). The "way" (*dao* 道) is a key umbrella concept in Confucianism that encapsulates the human pursuit of "the foundation of a harmonious universe, a peaceful society and a good life", which includes aspiring towards all moral virtues taught by Confucius (Yao 2000, p. 140). Thus, here, Confucius highlights the incongruity between having a focus on the "way" and a desire to appear honorable and wealthy. Honor can only come via actual righteousness, not the mere semblance of it.[22] It also shows an underlying assumption that clothing (appearance) and food (a marker of wealth) represent one's level of honor, status, or reputation, which will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

In *Analects* 7.16, Confucius teaches on the futility of attaining honor via immoral means: "With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink, and my bended arm for a pillow; I have still joy in the midst of these things. Riches and honors acquired by unrighteousness are to me as a floating cloud" (Legge 1861). Confucius does not condone aspirations for wealth or status by any means necessary. In fact, he dismisses efforts to attain wealth or status by immoral (unrighteous) means, describing them as flimsy and unsubstantial as a floating cloud. Here, he sets up a standard of honor, which necessarily includes righteousness.[23]

Further, communities are maintained through physical manifestations of two core Confucian virtues, *li* 禮 (ritual propriety) and *he* 和 (social harmony), practiced through gift reciprocity. In his *Book of Rites*, 1.10, Confucius teaches the following:

> In the highest antiquity they prized (simply conferring) good; in the time next to this, giving and repaying was the thing attended to. And what the rules of propriety [*li* 禮] value is that reciprocity. If I give a gift and nothing comes in return, that is contrary to propriety [*li* 禮]; if the thing comes to me, and I give nothing in return, that also is contrary to propriety [*li* 禮]. If a man observes the rules of propriety [*li* 禮], he is in a condition of security; if he does not, he is in one of danger. Hence there is the saying, "The rules of propriety [*li* 禮] should by no means be left unlearned" (Legge 1885).

Over time, countless gifts or favors are given and received, and the members of that society become more and more mutually dependent on each other. "The unity of the intimate group depends on the fact that each member owes countless favors to the other members" (Fei 1992, p. 124). When you owe another person a favor (*renqing* 人情), you have to look for an opportunity to return a bigger favor (Fei 1992, p. 124). "So it goes, back and forth; the continuing reciprocation maintains the cooperation among people in the group" (Fei 1992, p. 125). This continual obligation to return favors is never fully settled, as that would

end the reciprocal relationship. "If people do not owe something to each other, there will be no need for further contact" (Fei 1992, p. 125). This ongoing cycle of gift reciprocity is the means through which ritual propriety and social harmony are cultivated and maintained, two Confucian virtues and bedrocks of the community. This gift cycle is similar to Bourdieu's symbolic capital. However, whereas the goal of Bourdieu's gift-exchanges is the gaining of honor, the *telos* of the Confucian cycle are the relationships themselves and the cultivating of the relationships within the community or between communities, not honor. Honor is one of the means to build up those relationships, with relationships as the end goal. Social interactions are not reduced to commodities. Relational beings are involved in those interactions and should not be reduced to parts of a transaction.

As shown in these examples, based on more fluid social groups, the dynamics of honor and shame manifest in more complex ways than envisioned by Malina. For example, honor can also be a commodity that is exchanged in a non-competitive, non-zero-sum manner, where reciprocity of honor-giving between parties can exist in a cyclical, never-ending arrangement in order to build and maintain relationships. In addition, honor–shame can function in conjunction with ethical behavior (as the public, outward dimension of ethical behaviors); they cannot be separated from each other as unrelated considerations because, as social beings, interactions between two humans always have social dimensions.

3.3. Appearance as Metaphor for Status and Honor

Finally, because social interactions are discerned through observation of the outward appearance, actions, and behaviors of the people involved, attention should be paid to any description that provides that information. As observed, Malina alludes to this concept, but he does not address it directly in his works at all. In modern academic research on collectivistic cultures, this has become known as the concept of face[24] and is a culturally-embedded metaphor for a person's status, honor, reputation, or presence. In modern discourse, this metaphor has largely been isolated to the actual face itself. However, in ancient Chinese texts, the metaphor can be broadened to any part of the person's body or clothing, their actions, behavior, and, in fact, any aspect of the person's being that is visible or on display.[25] In this present study, this broader version of the face metaphor will be labeled as the Confucian appearance metaphor. For example, in *Mencius* 4A14, Mencius describes the pupil of one's eye. He says the following:

> Of all the parts of a man's body there is none more excellent than the pupil of the eye. The pupil cannot be used to hide a man's wickedness. If within the breast all be correct, the pupil is bright. If within the breast all be not correct, the pupil is dull. Listen to a man's words and look at the pupil of his eye. How can a man conceal his character? (Legge 1861).

Here, Mencius understands the eye as an indicator of a person's character, whether it be wicked or good.

In the previous section, *Analects* 4.9 depicted clothing and food as metaphors for one's reputation. In particular, Confucius took the existing assumption that having good quality clothing and food equated with having honor but questioned the assumption that having the appearance of honor was enough when having virtuous behavior was more important. Confucius applies this same understanding in 8.21 and again in 20.2. In 8.21, he says the following:

> I can find no fault with [the legendary sage-king] Yu. He subsisted on meager rations, and yet was lavishly filial [*xiao* 孝] in his offerings to the ancestral spirits. His everyday clothes were shabby, but his ceremonial headdress and cap were exceedingly fine. He lived in a mean hovel, expending all of his energies on the construction of drainage ditches and canals. I can find no fault with Yu (Slingerland 2003).

Here, Confucius extols the merits of the sage-king Yu, who became known for his efforts to tackle flooding issues in China (Slingerland 2003, p. 85). Confucius points out that Yu was

modest regarding his own living conditions but lavish and generous regarding his ritual and moral duties to others. Each statement connects either Yu's behavior or appearance to his inner good, virtuous character, and by implication, his good reputation.[26] And thus, Confucius introduces and concludes this tribute with the same pronouncement: "I can find no fault with Yu". This can also be understood to imply that Confucius also sees himself as being unworthy to be counted as Yu's equal (Slingerland 2003, p. 85).

In conclusion, this section proposed an alternative paradigm to Malina's model of honor–shame, drawn from Confucianism, which represents the philosophy of ancient Chinese culture, a culture with strong collectivistic values and behavior. The Confucian paradigm, with its more complex social dynamics, can be considered a more persuasive alternative paradigm to provide more nuance and fill in the gaps of the current honor–shame model as put forward by Bruce Malina. In summary, the Confucian paradigm contains three components: 1. A more nuanced understanding of the underlying group dynamics, in particular, how boundary lines function; 2. More diversity and complexity in honor and shame manifestations; 3. The presence of a metaphor this study has labeled the "Confucian appearance metaphor"—a conceptually broader version of the face metaphor—a socially embedded metaphor for one's status or standing, which indicates one's level of either honor or shame.

This section has constructed this heuristic tool based on the social location of myself, the researcher of this study, as an exercise in culturally and methodologically countering the implicit biases associated with Malina's own social location.

4. Applying the Confucian Paradigm to Philippians 1:27–2:4

At this point, the Confucian paradigm for honor–shame, which is more alert to social dynamics in collectivistic cultures, will be applied to a reading of Philippians 1:27–2:4.[27] This passage provides the context to the famous Christ Hymn of 2:5–11, a passage rich with honor–shame dynamics. However, 1:27–2:4 itself also merits a close reading for its own honor–shame dynamics in terms of how Paul utilizes those social dynamics to add weight to his instructions to the Philippian church regarding their moral behavior. Where this reading differs or goes beyond Malina's reading (and the established reading) will be observed and noted.

In Philippians 1:27–2:4, Paul exhorts the Philippians to live a life worthy of the gospel, specifically living in harmony with one another, in love and humility. These exhortations can be considered simply moral or ethical ones, but they also contain honor–shame dimensions, which are important to the collectivistic Philippians.[28] Reading these verses (particularly 1:27 and 2:3) through the Confucian lens, the following observations can be made regarding the social dynamics of the Philippian church and various terms that have connotations of honor–shame. By paying attention to these connotations, the importance of community and relationships for the Philippian church, in Paul's words, is highlighted.

Beginning in 1:27, when viewed through the Confucian paradigm, the main verb πολιτεύομαι could be considered to be a Confucian appearance metaphor. The action inherent in this verb is on display for everyone to see. Further, the verb connects ideas of citizenship—a status that carries honor—with appropriate behavior that represents the church as a group following social norms distinct from outside groups.[29] In his analysis of this passage, Te-Li Lau also recognizes the citizenship allusions in 1:27, along with their associated honor–shame dynamics. He describes the social connotations of πολιτεύομαι in terms of the "ethos and demands of the body politic, discharging their responsibilities with honor, integrity, and sensibility", but also emphasizes the irony that those social norms are now the ones established by God, not by Roman Philippi and its "dominant cultural rhetoric" (Lau 2020, p. 125). Notably, although Malina also observes the civic obligations associated with the verb, he makes no comment on its honor connotations (Malina and Pilch 2006, p. 304).[30]

Modifying πολιτεύομαι is ἀξίως, which is related to ἀξίωμα, a term also synonymous with honor and reputation.[31] This connection with ἀξίωμα aids in understanding that in the whole phrase ἀξίως … πολιτεύεσθε (1:27), honor and reputation are embedded

in that visible, public behavior ("to live a life worthy of the gospel") instructed by Paul,[32] and thus one could view this phrase as a form of the Confucian appearance metaphor. This behavior has both moral and social (visible) dimensions, as becomes clear as Paul continues, describing the manner in which he is aware of this behavior, namely ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς … ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν. Paul is aware of this behavior because he is able to see it for himself or hear about it from others if he is away. The Philippians' behavior is not hidden but public, outwardly discernible (through sight and sound) to all. These two verbs of seeing and hearing may seem simple and innocuous, but in fact, they point to an important aspect of collectivistic cultures: the public dimension of any action. Knowing that their behavior is public and on display reminds the Philippians that their reputation and honor are at stake here, too.[33] And thus, it is not simply a matter of heeding Paul's teachings for their own personal growth; rather, their behavior also impacts their individual reputations and social standing within their community and their reputation as a group to outsiders.

Paul further fleshes out what this behavior entails in both 1:27 and 2:1–2, asking the Philippians to have a spirit of cooperation and collegiality in their conduct with one another.[34] He draws a social boundary line around the Philippians by challenging a group of opponents for whom the unified spirit of the Philippians is an indicator of their own destruction. Conversely, this same spirit is how the Philippians will recognize their salvation, which is from God (1:28). Paul explains that the basis for this is their belief in and suffering for Christ, which were given to them by God.[35] With the verb χαρίζομαι, connotations of favor and gift-giving can be understood (Hellerman 2015, p. 84).[36] The idea that suffering can be considered a favor or gift from God may be jarring to a modern Western audience. However, it is culturally coherent to a collectivistic audience who is comfortable with shameful sensibilities such as suffering for positive, constructive purposes.[37] For example, Paul's reference to suffering as a gift may also foreshadow his desire in 3:10 to participate in Christ's suffering, something he has already been reflecting upon, given his own current sufferings, which he references at the end of 1:29. Here Paul also repeats the same two verbs of seeing and hearing (εἴδετε … ἀκούετε) when he relates this back to the Philippians' awareness of his own suffering. Malina is also alert to the favor-granting connotations of χαρίζομαι, understanding it as a "patronage favor" from God (Malina and Pilch 2006, p. 305). However, he glosses over the cultural significance of suffering as a favor, instead commenting that the idea of suffering on someone's behalf involves a military metaphor. His reasoning for reading military connotations into this idea stems from Paul's use of the term ἀγών ("contest", "competition") to describe his current struggles, which itself carries athletic connotations. Essentially, Malina sees conceptual overlaps between the two metaphors to the extent that upon seeing the use of the ἀγών term, he leans into the conflict aspects of the term in order to reach his conclusion that the suffering must be a military metaphor. This is telling, given Malina's propensity to see all social interactions as challenges or competitions. In contrast, Joseph Hellerman does not conflate the two metaphors but supports the athletic metaphor, not as an idea connoting conflict, but rather as "the struggle of the sage toward virtue", a more constructive activity, attested in ancient moral discourse.[38] However, Hellerman does not discuss the shame connotations of Paul's mention here of suffering being "granted" to the believing community.

Moving on, in 2:1–2, Paul exhorts the Philippians to build a community characterized by unity and love for one another. In 2:3, Paul elaborates upon this instruction, cautioning the Philippians against acting with strife or with conceit (κατὰ κενοδοξίαν)[39] but instead with humility (τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ); they should consider (ἡγούμενοι) one another more significant than themselves (ἀλλήλους … ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν). When viewed through the Confucian paradigm lens, key phrases in this verse also carry metaphorical connotations related to one's appearance, which indicate issues of honor–shame implicit in them.[40] Firstly, κενοδοξία is derived from κενός (empty) and δόξα (glory, honor), while δόξα itself is derived from δοκέω (to appear, seem). Conceptually, this term denotes more than just "conceit" or "vanity", as it is commonly translated, but more accurately, the idea of "appearing empty", or "a vain or exaggerated self-evaluation".[41] Paul is warning against

striving for honor for the sake of honor itself.[42] This sentiment parallels Confucius's teachings against the mere semblance of honor, as discussed in the previous section.[43] This term also foreshadows Christ's self-emptying in 2:7 (ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν) and God's glory in 2:11 (δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός).[44]

Secondly, when Paul advises on the correct behavior towards one another, he uses the term ταπεινοφροσύνη, derived from ταπεινός (lowly) and φρήν (mind, thought). Not only is ταπεινός an explicit term related to honor–shame, but it is another term that foreshadows Christ's humiliation on the cross (2:8).[45] Via the LXX, ταπεινός also has conceptual connections with the Hebrew term עני (lowly, humble) in a number of passages, including prophetic passages that concern messianic expectation.[46] In these passages, a theme emerges regarding the lowly (or humble) being regarded positively by God or negatively by oppressors (Macaskill 2019b, pp. 65–66). This picture of the lowly (with strongly implicit shame) being regarded positively may seem contradictory, but when viewed through the Confucian paradigm, it parallels the positive, desired notions of shame in the Confucian texts. This positive trait also carried forward to ταπεινός through its usage in the LXX. Thus, in 2:3, Paul's use of the term ταπεινοφροσύνη also contains positive connotations. Its figurative meaning of lowliness (with the same strongly implied shame) as the correct attitude in 2:3 provides a stark contrast to κενοδοξία, as the conceptual opposite of a futile effort to gain honor or increase one's status, but instead the mindset of humility.[47] Thirdly, the verb that Paul uses in this instruction (ἡγέομαι), while an innocuous one in this context, becomes significant elsewhere in both Phil. 2 and 3.[48] In addition, as a verb related to the sense of sight (consider, regard) it plays its part in this appearance-focused, culturally loaded phrase. Notably, the appearance aspect is located in the grammatical object of the verb. As the object seen by the subject of the verb, the object is what is visible and, therefore, known by the subject. In this context, it is the other members of the community who are known by the Philippian audience who are seen and should be considered as better (or superior) than themselves.

At the end of 2:3, the participle ὑπερέχοντας also carries honor–shame connotations. In a literal sense, this verb indicates a spatial position of being higher than or above another object. Figuratively, this verb can indicate being in a higher (or superior) position of power or authority or indicate a superior quality or value.[49] Given the prevailing context of community-building and honor–shame, the meaning here is "being in a superior position of power or authority", which entails a superior status as well.[50] But the second meaning related to value cannot be dismissed entirely due to its base verbal cognate ἔχω (to have), which adds further meaning to that status as something of value to possess and leverage for honor. Here, Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus of capitals, specifically his symbolic capital, helps to understand ὑπερέχοντας as a commodity of sorts (c.f., Bourdieu 1977, pp. 179, 180; Also c.f., Barclay 2015, pp. 22–24). It is in this manner that, as something that contains the leverage for honor, this participle can also function as a Confucian appearance metaphor.[51] And thus, having just advised the Philippians not to strive for vain honor but rather to have an attitude of lowliness, Paul's use of this term carries much irony, as he teaches them to attribute the superiority of status (which they want for themselves) to one another *rather than* themselves (Hellerman 2015, pp. 101–2).[52] The remainder of 2:4 continues this advice in practical terms, not just to regard others as superior to themselves but also to place others' interests before their own, which is what Paul's understanding of humility entails.

Malina makes no comment on any of the honor–shame connotations in 2:1–4. However, he correctly understands the focus of Paul's exhortation here to be on "ingroup harmony". Unfortunately, his definition of humility is rather narrow and still inward-looking, betraying his implicit individualistic lens: "being satisfied with one's status in society, not striving for honor at the expense of others" (Malina and Pilch 2006, p. 305). In contrast, there exists an interesting conceptual alignment between Paul's definition of humility and the Confucian paradigm, in particular one of its core virtues, *ren* (goodness, benevolence, human-heartedness), with its focus on the "other" in interpersonal relations.[53] Paul's defi-

nition of humility, with his focus on others, concurs with the ideals of the Confucian relational self. Paul's instruction here also anticipates his presentation of Jesus's act of humility on the cross (2:5–11) as the ultimate act of putting others' interests ahead of his own.

5. Conclusions

This study has explored the task of positionality, probing its potential value and role in disciplines such as biblical studies that conduct text-based research. As it relates to the researcher's social location, the process of understanding one's positionality prompts the researcher to develop self-awareness regarding the various identity markers related to their social location. This self-awareness should lead to an awareness of how one's social location can illuminate or obscure the ways in which the researcher approaches the research task from beginning to end. In the case of biblical studies, where the task at hand may be an analysis of the social context of the biblical text, the researcher should be aware of how their own social location may impact how they observe that social context.

Bruce Malina's honor–shame model was a significant part of his pioneering use of social scientific tools, now considered his watershed contribution to New Testament scholarship. However, this study examined how the model revealed his lack of awareness regarding the influence of his social location of the modern West—along with its implicit individualism—on the ways in which he observed and analyzed the collectivistic social context of the biblical text. The consequence of this lack of awareness led to the construction of a model of what he claimed to be collectivistic honor–shame, which was inappropriately based on individualistic presuppositions regarding social boundary lines, leading to what is essentially individualistic honor–shame.

As a response, I reflected upon my own positionality as a scholar of Chinese extraction. Keen awareness of the overlaps in the collectivistic characteristics between Chinese culture and the social context of the biblical text led to the construction of an alternate, more nuanced paradigm of honor–shame drawn from ancient Chinese culture, represented in Confucianism. This paradigm corrected the issues besetting Malina's model regarding social boundary lines, leading to a more robust understanding of honor–shame, which included a correlation between honor–shame and virtues. The paradigm also included an alertness to how descriptions of a person's appearance or behavior can also implicitly communicate the person's status or honor. These descriptions were labeled the "Confucian appearance metaphor".

Finally, the Confucian paradigm was used to analyze Philippians 1:27–2:4 for its honor–shame dynamics. From the analysis, it became clear that Paul used vernacular expressions with honor–shame connotations in his moral exhortations to the Philippians in order to appeal to their honor–shame sensibilities and, thus, heed his advice. In particular, Paul framed the Philippians' suffering as a gift from God, not only to encourage them in their plight but also because Paul himself understood suffering in positive, desirable terms, as evidenced later in the letter (2:7; 3:10). These observations were more easily made with the aid of the Confucian paradigm, proving its effectiveness in analyzing the Jewish collective context of the Philippian epistle.

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Notes

[1] The term "thick description" was first coined by Gilbert Ryle but developed further and became more famously associated with Clifford Geertz (Geertz 1973). Geertz used this term in relation to having an emic understanding of a culture, its idiosyncratic

behaviors, and the motivations underlying that behavior (in contrast to a "thin description", which would only consist of surface-level observations of that behavior with no understanding of motivation or cultural significance). Geertz describes this culturally-idiosyncratic behavior as "a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular and inexplicit, and which he [the ethnographer] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render" (Geertz 1973, p. 10).

2 According to Holmes, although these two perspectives can be understood as a static dichotomy, a flexible continuum seems more likely (Holmes 2020, p. 7).

3 Malina's choice to use this term has not been without criticism, given that his application of such "models" in the biblical context differs from the application of models in modern empirical studies (c.f., Horrell 1996; Harvey 2016). However, for consistency's sake, this study will retain the term when referring to Malina's scholarship.

4 The cultures represented in the biblical text have become understood as collectivistic in nature, owing to their emphasis on the group rather than individuals, and their prioritization of family and kinship (including fictive), leading to collective honor and shame. For example, in the Hebrew Bible, Paul Joyce's work demonstrates how Israel should be understood as a collective unit (not as separate individuals) in Ezekiel (Joyce 1989). Also, Joel Kaminisky's study recognizes and analyzes the emphasis on the community as a whole in how YHWH relates to ancient Israel (Kaminsky 1995). This understanding has led to attention paid to the presence of honor and shame in those cultures as well (c.f., Laniak 1998; Wu 2016; Hwang 2017). In the New Testament, see the following studies on honor-shame which also rest upon this understanding: (Lawrence 2003; Hellerman 2005; Harvey 2016; Blois 2020; Lau 2020).

5 Regarding Malina's legacy, James Crossley comments, "More than any other New Testament scholar, Bruce Malina is responsible for bringing cultural/social anthropology into the study of Christian origins. His famous 1981 book, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, has proven to be hugely influential on New Testament scholarship and is often cited as one of the authoritative places to look for understanding the social world of the earliest Christians" (Crossley 2012, p. 175).

6 (C.f., Barclay 2015, p. 443, n29; Macaskill 2019a, p. 49, n9). However, Macaskill has since recognized the need to criticize Malina's model as part of the wider anthropological reassessment of honor-shame approaches while acknowledging that it remains influential in the field, see his recent essay (Macaskill 2024).

7 In Markus Bockmuehl's review of its third edition, he calls it a "celebrated twenty-year-old textbook classic" and acknowledges "the book's years of service among undergraduates in North America and beyond" (Bockmuehl 2002).

8 For his claims, see (Malina 1981, pp. 11–17). These criticisms have been meted out by such scholars as David Horrell (Horrell 1996), Louise Lawrence (Lawrence 2003), Zeba Crook (Crook 2004), and David Harvey (Harvey 2016).

9 (C.f., Crossley 2008, 2012). James Crossley does devote one chapter in each of these monographs to a discussion of what he has observed to be the problematic cultural influences on Malina's scholarship (namely imperialism and orientalist stereotyping of the Middle East, Crossley 2008, p. 112; 2012, p. 185), but his attention in each chapter is more towards exploring the origins of those influences than on the resultant problematic insights on the biblical text.

10 "We are all born into systems of lines that mark off nearly all our experiences" (Malina 1981, p. 27).

11 "Our ancestors passed down to us the set of lines they inherited, and thus we find ourselves in a cultural continuum that reaches back to the sources of our cultural heritage" (Malina 1981, p. 28).

12 Regarding the contrasting concepts of individualism and collectivism, this present study draws its understanding from Harry Triandis's work in cross-cultural psychology and his extensive work on these two concepts across different cultures (C.f., Triandis 1993). Triandis's individualistic self is a self that is defined as an independent entity with a mindset that places great value on one's own freedom, rights, and autonomy, prioritizing them over those of the group (Triandis 1993, pp. 165–66). As such, this self also values competition and is comfortable with confrontations between individuals or groups (Triandis 1993, p. 166). Triandis's collectivistic self, in contrast, is defined in terms of the ingroup and relationships, with a mindset that focuses on the needs of the ingroup over the individual. Security, obedience, duty, and ingroup harmony are valued and prioritized by this self (Triandis 1993, p. 166).

13 For this list, see (Bourdieu 1965, p. 209; Also c.f., Tan 2023, pp. 65–90) for more in-depth discussions of the differences between Malina and Bourdieu's work, and Peristiany, Pitt-Rivers and Douglas.

14 Also (c.f., Bourdieu 1965, p. 215) for a chart depicting the process of gift-giving as a challenge to honor.

15 BDB defines אף as the nose, nostril, face, and anger (BDB, s.v., אף).

16 David Harvey's recent work (Harvey 2016) acknowledges the significance of the face in honor–shame contexts; however, he narrows his focus to only the face itself (with his focus on the lexeme πρόσωπόν and its related cognates).

17 Although the consideration of my positionality was what first prompted this study of Confucian concepts, the analysis of the Confucian literature was conducted as a purely literary analysis, with every effort made to consider the material without imposing my own modern lens on it.

18 Mencius describes *ren* as man's peaceful abode and *yi* as a straight path for a man to follow (Mencius 4A10).

19 Filial piety plays a significant role in maintaining stability in a society. Where respect for one's elders extends to respecting traditions and rituals established by previous generations, any change to a society can only be gradual, thus resulting in a stable society. (Analects, 1.11; c.f., Fei 1992, pp. 130–31).

20 *Di* 弟 also appears in the noun *dizi* 弟子 which appears in the Analects, referring once simply to a youth (*Analects* 1.6), but more commonly, a disciple (c.f., *Analects* 6.3, 7.34, 8.3, 14.7) which leans further upon the concept of a younger person learning from an older person. Mencius also uses it twice (2A1.4; 2B10.3).

21 Although not explicitly cited, it is generally accepted that Malina's definition of honor takes its cue from Pitt-Rivers's oft-quoted definition (Malina 1981, p. 30; c.f., Pitt-Rivers 1965, p. 21).

22 Also see Mencius 7B83 regarding the futility and hypocrisy of disingenuous virtuous behavior.

23 C.f., Cua observes this connection, saying "In Confucius's view the established conventions concerning good behavior as requiring courtesy, deference, deportment, and ceremonies have no ethical significance unless they are justifiable in the light of *ren* and *yi*" (Cua 2003, p. 156). Further, Cua emphasizes the particular role of *yi*: "*Yi* provides the ethical standard of justification for the acquisition of honors, as it provides a standard for right and reasonable conduct" (Cua 2003, p. 157).

24 Following modern discourse, David Harvey refers to *face* in this manner (Harvey 2016, p. 47).

25 As a point of cultural proximity between Chinese and Greco-Roman cultures, also see Carlin Barton's discussion on faces in Greco-Roman culture, where she also observes the embodied manifestation of honor or shame more broadly than just in the actual face, but also in anything visible or on display, anything spoken, and in behaviors and actions (Barton 2001, pp. 56–87).

26 Statements that connect one's appearance to one's virtue can also be found in ancient moral discourse. However, this connection is missing in Malina's work.

27 Although this paradigm is being deployed as a heuristic tool due to its conceptual overlaps with the biblical text, a case can also be made for using it as a tool of historical analysis as well, due to the connections between the East and West in antiquity via the Silk Routes trade network. Second Temple Judaism scholarship, as well as scholarship from Classics and Ancient History, have each observed cultural and philosophical connections developed from the trade and economic connections of the Silk Routes trade network, which connected the West and the East (with one of the routes terminating in the city of Chang'an (modern-day Xi'an), the capital city of Shaanxi Province, China), (C.f., Reed 2009; Thorley 1969; Schiedel 2009). Thus, it is plausible that by the first century, the Apostle Paul was exposed to this cultural framework from as far east as China, whether directly via the travelers and tradesfolk traveling along the Silk Routes or indirectly through an accumulated cultural influence of the civilizations located east of the East Mediterranean.

28 Given Paul's choice of language, this passage has also been understood as political discourse (c.f., Vollenweider 2006, p. 458). Vollenweider also acknowledges the increased focus on the social context of the text from approaches such as cultural-anthropology and social history (Vollenweider 2006, p. 458).

29 Vollenweider makes an interesting insight that Paul's use of this verb, instead of the more generic περιπατέω, is intentional in its citizenship connotations (Vollenweider 2006, p. 459). Paul returns to this citizenship idea in 3:20 when discussing their heavenly citizenship. (Fee 1995, pp. 162–63); Hellerman recognizes the honor connotations of this verb (Hellerman 2015, p. 78); further, in his own monograph on Philippians, Hellerman also observes the honor elements in a selection of public inscriptions excavated in Philippi, demonstrating the importance of honor in the civic life of this colony (Hellerman 2005, pp. 88–109). Hawthorne does not explicitly use the term *honor* in his discussion of this verb, but he does state that this verb meant Greek and Roman rights, privileges, duties, and responsibilities (Hawthorne 1983, p. 55).

30 Similarly, these commentators do not acknowledge the status/honor aspects of this verb: (Fee 1995, pp. 161–63; Holloway 2017, p. 106; Bockmuehl 1997, pp. 97–98).

31 Lau acknowledges the honor connotations of this adverb, but does not extend the insight to the Confucian metaphor (Lau 2020, p. 125, n4). C.f., LSJ defines ἀξίωμα as 'that of which one is thought worthy, an honour', and also lists 'honour, reputation' as a second definition (LSJ, s.v., "ἀξίωμα").

32 Vollenweider observes that the standard set for the worthiness is the Gospel, saying, "Der Apostel nimmt dabei Bezug auf das *Evangelium*, das den Massstab der Würdigkeit vorgibt" (Vollenweider 2006, p. 459).

33 C.f., Gal. 6:12, where Paul uses the *hapax legomenon* and verbal cognate of πρόσωπον, εὐπροσωπέω "to give a good face" to draw attention to the hypocrisy of attempting to appear righteous through circumcision without actually obeying the law. Harvey's work recognizes the honor/status connotations of this public behavior, understanding πρόσωπον as "a synecdochical way of describing the person in terms of their social status or rank" (Harvey 2016, p. 82).

34 C.f., Standhartinger for a brief discussion of an implied contrast between the unity of the Philippians and a message of unity promoted by the imperial family via coinage (Standhartinger 2006, pp. 377–78).

35 It is generally accepted that the implied agent of the passive verb ἐχαρίσθη is God, from the previous sentence (Hellerman 2015, p. 84).

36 The NRSV also acknowledges this meaning, rendering the verb "grant this privilege". Also (c.f., Crook 2004, pp. 117–19; Chavel 2012, p. 15) for further discussions on divine gift-giving and benefaction in the biblical text.

[37] Also, c.f., Ezekiel 39:21–29, where the LORD God shames Israel (by hiding his face from them, delivering them into the hands of their enemies, and allowing them to fall on the sword) as a reminder of their sin, in order to draw them back his covenantal relationship with him.

[38] (C.f., Hellerman 2015, p. 86). Also, see (Arnold 2015) for an extended discussion on the athletic connotations in Philippians.

[39] A verbal form must be supplied or assumed here, either a participle (to continue elaborating upon what τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε entails) or an imperative (which would start a new sentence, but logically would still continue elaborating upon what was expressed in 2:2). Also, both κατ' ἐριθείαν and κατὰ κενοδοξίαν function adverbially, presumably to modify the missing verbal form (Hellerman 2015, p. 99).

[40] The term ἀλλήλους emphasizes the importance of relationships within the community, something also highly valued in Confucianism (c.f., Section 3.2). Barclay also observes the importance of relationship in Paul's writings, saying, "This articulation of mutuality (ἀλλήλους or ἀλλήλοις) occurs so frequently (32 times in the undisputed Pauline letters) that we are apt to overlook it, but it is a significant principle, and the product of careful reflection" (Barclay 2017, p. 120).

[41] BDAG, s.v., "κενοδοξία". (C.f., Barton 2001, p. 63, n151), where Barton observes a similar attitude present in Greco-Roman culture, citing Polybius, who says, "The man who would not, or could not, submit his *persona* to challenges was weightless" (Polybius 3.81.9). Here, "weightless" is synonymous with "empty".

[42] Lau recognizes the honor connotations of this term, saying, "This quest for social honor is ill-founded. It is empty and vain (2:3), as they are looking for honor where it cannot be found" (Lau 2020, p. 126). Also see 2 Cor. 5:12. Utilising the lexical term πρόσωπον for its status connotations (similar to the Confucian appearance metaphor), Paul describes opponents of the Corinthian church as ones "who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart" (τοὺς ἐν προσώπῳ καυχωμένους καὶ μὴ ἐν καρδίᾳ). This is a criticism of the opponents' concern over how their outward conduct reflects their status and reputation while ignoring what is in their hearts.

[43] C.f., Confucius's claim in *Analects* 8.21 that the truly virtuous individual will not be ashamed of having "shabby" clothing, etc. Notably, Malina's model of honor–shame is not alert to these nuanced expressions of honor that are present in the Jewish collective context within which Paul is operating.

[44] Hellerman opines that "it is not by accident that the two parts of the compound (κενός + δόξα) appear in vv.6–11 to describe the kind of self-emptying that is the precisely opposite of κενοδοξία" (Hellerman 2015, p. 99), also (c.f., Fee 1995, pp. 186–87, n68). Oakes also observes the social significance of this term, defining it as "pride in one's high (social) position" (Oakes 2001, p. 183). In his monograph, Oakes demonstrates some alertness to status considerations, but such insights are surprisingly few in number, given his focus on the social make-up of the Philippian community.

[45] BDAG, s.v., "ταπεινός", L&J, s.v., "ταπεινός".

[46] The term עני is rendered as ταπεινός in the LXX a total of 17 times (Isa. 14:32, 26:6, 32:7, 49:13, 51:21, 54:11, 66:2; Jer. 22:16; Zeph. 3:12; Ps. 17:28, 71:4, 81:3, 87:16; Job 24:9; Prov. 3:34, 16:19, 30:14). (C.f., Macaskill 2019b, pp. 63–67).

[47] Becker recognizes the significance of this theme of lowliness, not just in this passage, but expanded to the first two chapters of this epistle, "The semantics of lowliness of Phil 1–2 makes itself felt in the spheres of theology of the apostolate, Christology, and ecclesiology" (Becker 2020, p. 82).

[48] In Phil. 2:6, (2:25), 3:7, and 3:8 (twice).

[49] BDAG, s.v., "ὑπερέχω". Oakes also adds that it carries the sense of "more important" rather than "more virtuous" (Oakes 2001, p. 186).

[50] Few, if any, commentators observe the status connotations of this verb (c.f., Hawthorne 1983, p. 70).

[51] Later in the letter, Paul leverages this term again, with similar meanings, first in Phil. 3:4 (ἔχων) and then in 3:8 (τὸ ὑπερέχον). In 3:4, Paul repeats the same base verb ἔχω from the participle ὑπερέχοντας in 2:3, which this study determined signaled connotations of symbolic capital implicit in its verbal meaning "to have", and therefore by default also carried status connotations as well ("having high status"), making interpretation of ὑπερέχοντας a verbal form of the Confucian appearance metaphor plausible. Both of these aspects can be applied here to the participle ἔχων in 3:4 as well. In this verse, the implicit status (or honor) refers to two lists that Paul is about to give in 3:5–6. Macaskill draws attention to the meaning of the verb, preferring the synonyms 'to possess' or 'to own' thus making Paul a "possessor" or "owner" of the contents of the two lists, which emphasizes the commodity connotations implicit in the metaphor even further (Macaskill 2019a, p. 44). The two lists consist of Paul's own privileged background and accomplishments, which, until now, Paul, as the "owner" of them, had leveraged to increase his status and honor. Then, in 3:8, the substantival participle ὑπερέχον can also be interpreted to be functioning as the Confucian appearance metaphor, carrying connotations of status and honor in their meaning, by way of representing the symbolic capital that *is* status. In a conceptual contrast to the symbolic capital implicit in Paul's list of honor-laden accomplishments, which he previously "owned", Paul now applies an extreme, emphatic version of the same verb to what is to follow. Paul considers the ownership of what is to follow to be of superior quality and value and, along with it, superior status compared with what he owned before (BDF §263.2 observes that the verb (used as an abstract noun) is more concrete and graphic than its cognate noun ὑπεροχή. Also (c.f. Hawthorne 1983, p. 137). Macaskill renders it "hyper-having" as a clever way of retaining the ὑπερ- prefix and emphasizing its meaning (Macaskill 2019a, p. 45).

[52] Also c.f., Barclay's discussion of this phrase in (Barclay 2017, pp. 120–25), where he relates the posture of humility to Christ: "whatever investments are made to one another in mutual self-giving are triangulated by, and incorporated within, the relation of each party to Christ or God" (Barclay 2017, p. 122). "The Christian 'self' is not only given here an encouraging example: it is reconstituted in its identity, meaning and goals. Since its whole system of 'symbolic capital' is now stripped down and rebuilt by allegiance to Christ (3:2–11), the interests of the 'self' are hereby redefined" (Barclay 2017, p. 124).

[53] This aligns with Jewish social relations, which Barclay highlights in this insight: "Instead of losing honor by thus giving it to others, the ethic of reciprocity means that believers are bound together in relationships where everyone's responsibility is to give honor to everyone else" (Barclay 2015, p. 510).

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Article

Schēma: A Semantic Puzzle—Some Hermeneutical and Translational Difficulties about Philippians 2:7d

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Abstract: The occurrence of the term *σχήμα* in Phil 2:7d is analyzed in comparison with two other crucial Pauline occurrences: 1 Cor 7:31 and Phil 3:21 (here as a semanteme included in the verb *μετασχηματίσει*). This comparative study aims to provide a revision of the current interpretation of the word as designating the outward, sensory, accidental appearance in which Christ's human nature was manifested to those who dealt with him. This traditional reconstruction is unsatisfactory in two respects: (1) it is tributary to a substantialist ontology that identifies corporeality as a mere spatial extension, unrelated to historicity and (2) it is fraught with highly problematic theological, potentially docetic, implications. As an alternative, the term *σχήμα* is here interpreted within the framework of the great Pauline theology of history: as a temporal–eschatological marker designating the peculiar temporal state of transience and suffering corruptibility inherent in physicality and corporeal life. This change also clarifies the conceptual articulation of *σχήμα* with the parallel expression *μορφὴν δούλου*. According to this interpretation, contrary to the prevailing view, the locution "slave form" does not designate 'the' or 'one' 'human form' but the 'creature form', as cosmic submission to temporal finitude.

Keywords: Philippians (epistle); Paul; *σχήμα*; *μορφὴν δούλου*; time

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1. Introduction

The pericope commonly referred to as the Christological hymn[1] of Philippians 2:5-11, a text of great exegetical and theological importance, is at the center of an intense interpretative debate and of ever new translation proposals. The main challenge is the handling of a field of lexical indeterminacy carved out by the use of a particularly laborious terminology, in which Judaic–Old Testamentary and classical, mainly Hellenistic, semantic codes intersect. An auroral and magisterial station in that process of the inculturation of the proclamation of the historical Jesus, of which Paul is the protagonist and first apostle (Penna 2002, p. 57),[2] the pericope reveals a dizzying genealogical–etymological complexity, entrusted to the formulation of a message of revolutionary novelty and originality, a bearer of some of the founding elements of a Trinitarian Christology (cf., Martin and Dodd 1998). The tension between the stratigraphic acuity of the lexical analysis and the broad theological perspective required by this handful of verses makes its reading and translation particularly difficult, inviting the interpreter to the very exercise of humility that is the main object of the appeal to the Christians of Philippi in which the pericope is embedded. No overall interpretation, no translation of Philippians 2:5-11[3] has yet arrived at an undisputed, universally accepted, and acceptable solution and version. It is therefore "regarding others as more **significant** than ourselves" (2:3)[4] that this paper focuses on a specific lexical question, in the hope that such an analysis, while not providing new answers, will offer a useful critical key to further our understanding of this essential text.

2. An Elusive Word: σχήμα

The main objective of this reflection is indeed to reconstruct the peculiar semantic value that the Greek term σχήμα (*schēma*) (2, 7d)[5] assumes in the Pauline corpus, to show that only through this comparative study can we determine its correct interpretation and translation in the body of the pericope.

Two converging options in the extensive exegetical literature on Phil 2:5-11 have so far undermined an adequate understanding of this word. First of all, there has been a clear conceptual subordination of it in relation to the term μορφὴ (*morphē*)*:* the meaning of *schēma* is thus often 'deduced' from the interpretation of the former (in its main semantic core of "appearance, visible form"), sometimes even being reduced to a second-degree, weak synonym, in a misleading reading of the text.[6] Second, it is not taken into account analytically (it is often barely mentioned) the Pauline occurrence of the word in 1 Cor 7:31, in a collocation of very strong semantic poignancy, commensurate with its conceptual significance in Philippians 2:7d, and consistent with the use of the semanteme (incorporated in the verb *metaschēmatizei*) in Phil 3:21 and Rom 12:2 (*syschēmatizei*).

An eloquent symptom of this exegetical chiaroscuro is the translational uncertainty associated with the locution σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος, attested by a discrepancy and variability of solutions that make this and the (much more studied but still not fully resolved) expression ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων (2, 7c) a real linguistic *crux*.

3. The Interpretation of σχήμα as "Outward Appearance"

Schēma, which the Latin of the Vulgate translates respectively with the term *habitus* in Phil 2:7d and with *figura* in 1 Cor 7:31, is a rare and 'cultured' term,[7] gravitating in the philosophical and rhetorical area,[8] whose import into New Testament Greek therefore has a 'technical' density that cannot be underestimated. The fact that Paul uses it in parallel as an identifying qualifier of the world and of the human being ("schēma of the cosmos" in Corinthians, "schēma of man" in Philippians), a general designation of a (physically marked) 'phenomenological form' common to both, seems intriguing and surprising. It suggests that such a pairing is indicative of a precise semantic connotation which is unexpressed and even concealed in current translations. With a philological background strongly conditioned by the substantivist–ontological categories of classical metaphysics,[9] they read the term simply as *external appearance*;[10] *visible aspect*;[11] a sensory, material *mode of manifestation*[12] (TDNT 1971, p. 956), possibly in contrast to an abstract, conceptual notion of form.

The insurmountable difficulty associated with the exegetically unsatisfactory determination of *schēma* as the *outward appearance* of the *human nature-form* of Christ (of the '*natural*', 'earthly' *nature-form* of the world?) is that it conceals and implies an insidious separation between the human, substantial nature of Jesus, and his accidental, "empirical manifestation", as the vector of Jesus' identification as a human being by other human beings. This split reappears insistently in translations, lexicons, and commentaries and is clearly the fruit of an ontological pre-comprehension, of a substantivist stamp,[13] not free from a residual dualistic bias, and exposed to undesirable docetic drifts.[14] Based on this lexical interpretation, the original text does indeed seem to circumscribe an intersubjective space of the identification of Christ's humanity as *outward appearance*, which runs the risk of reading the "similarity" (*homoíōma*) invoked in the previous locution in a misleading way, that is as a parallel, an analogy, and not as the denotation of an essential sharing of human nature. If the text does say that Jesus was "identified as man in his outward appearance", then it seems to suggest that this coming into the world "in the likeness of men" means a similarity and not an identity.[15]

The risk is not merely hypothetical. There are plenty of examples of translation disasters caused by this semantic interpretation, such as the unfortunate version adopted by CEI (2008) (and accepted by BG, the Italian edition of the *Jerusalem Bible*): "diventando simile agli uomini. Dall'aspetto riconosciuto come uomo" ("becoming like men. From the

aspect recognized as man", *m.tr.*), in which it is literally written that the Son of God did not become man but became "like men", having (at least) their "aspect". *Does he look like us* or *is he one of us*?[16] To say that someone *has the aspect of a man* (that he looks like a man) does not imply that he might not be a man? The insidiousness of camouflage, which the semanteme also connotes in Pauline usage[17] (the pagan idea of a God who takes on human appearance, like the ancient gods who visited the earth), is strongly evocated here, barely countered by exegetical distinctions that are not entirely effective.

See, for example, how TDNT entangles itself in this difficulty, by referring, in a *petitio principii*, to various exegetical commentaries (recalled in the footnotes: from Dibelius to Käsemann and Lohmeyer) for which it is supposed to provide the philological basis. It explains in a convoluted form that the "outward appearance" is not to be seen as separate from the rational, inner essence or, worse, as a disguise of it: "The reference is to His whole nature and manner as man. In this respect, the outward "bearing", which He assumes corresponds to His inner being" (TDNT 1971, p. 956). If we are thus reassured that the meaning of the text is that Jesus was a real man and not just apparently so (he was not merely "taken" to be a man because of his outward appearance), it remains to explain why Paul[18] would have used the awkward circumlocution *σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος* to assert this, rather than a more straightforward formulation. The argument spirals into a tautological circularity of frustrating inconclusiveness: "There is special stress on the fact that throughout His life, even to the death on the cross, Jesus *was in the humanity demonstrated by His earthly form*. The εὑρεθεὶς expresses the truth that this fact could be seen by anybody, σχήμα does not merely indicate the coming of Jesus, or His physical constitution, or the natural determination of His earthly life, or the shape of His moral character. It denotes the «*mode of manifestation*»." (ibid., p. 956, *m.e.*). What does it mean to say that Christ's humanity was "*demonstrated* by His earthly form"? Should it not rather be said that Christ's humanity "consists" in having the earthly form of a man? In what sense then does man's being not coincide with "the mode of his manifestation", which is designated by the word *σχήμα*?

4. The Occurrence of *σχήμα* in 1 Corinthians 7:31

In the light of these considerations, and of the relevant and theologically sensitive problems associated with the translation of *schēma* as "outward appearance, visible aspect, mode of manifestation", we must ask ourselves whether this lexical interpretation is not vitiated by a fundamental misunderstanding and whether it is not necessary to radically reconsider the semantic value of the Greek term in Pauline usage. A comparative analysis is therefore recommended, starting with a comparison with the parallel verse 1 Cor 7:31, which concludes the famous sequence of the *ὡς μὴ: as not*, opened by verse 7:29 on the eschatological coming to an end of time:

29 Τοῦτο δέ φημι, ἀδελφοί, ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν- °τὸ λοιπὸν ἵνα καὶ

Hoc itaque dico, fratres: tempus breve est: reliquum est, ut

I tell you, brothers, the time is running out. From now on

31 παράγει γὰρ τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.

præterit enim figura hujus mundi.

For the present fashion of world is passing away.[19]

When Augustine, commenting on this text, emphasizes that for the Apostle, "it is not the nature of the world that is passing away but its figure" ("Figura enim praeterit, non natura"),[20] the reader is perplexed to ask what is the nature of the cosmos that does not pass away in the fulfilment of the Parousia, in the passing (in the coming to an end) of time (of the *καιρὸς*). Can one speak of the *physis* of the cosmos as such (of its "imperishable essence") freed from its, already ceasing, "natural appearance"? Can one speak so, given the biblical perspective, which presents creation, unlike the Greek cosmos, as an evolutionary process with a historical profile, rather than as an unchanging mythical/physical entity? In the

Bible, the cosmos is a manifestation of the dynamics of a profound transformation of the creature through the intervention of both the Creator[21] and the creature itself. As a matter of fact, human choices also have a radical effect on the state of creation: fallen in the fall of the "earthly man" Adam, redeemed in the gift of himself by the "heavenly man" Christ Jesus (1 Cor 15: 45–49), who inaugurates and makes possible the coming of the Kingdom of God and the messianic recapitulation of all things in the Son of God made man.

No, the "*ceasing figure of* the cosmos" cannot be biblically reduced to a mere "external manifestation", a visible appearance, an accidental form of an unchanging essence, as if the coming of the Parousia implied nothing more than a restyling, a superficial change that does not affect the profound reality of beings, of creatures. The term *σχήμα* must therefore have a denser meaning than the commonly intercepted one of "external appearance", a meaning that is highlighted by the opening verse of the eschatological discourse on the *as not*. If "the time is running out" (*ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος*), is coming to an end (whereby the countdown of its passing away has begun, by reckoning what is left of it: *τὸ λοιπὸν*), that which "is passing away" (*παράγει*) is nothing other than the passing away itself, time itself as passing away (*σχήμα*). What is "*fading away*" is not the visible, "sensory aspect" of the world but the temporal condition of creation as a "passing away, disappearing", as a condition of being exposed to the end which affects all finite beings.

5. The Creaturely Condition and Its Redemption

We have some intertextual evidence that the Pauline use of the term and semanteme *σχήμα* innovatively privileges (in a kind of semantic neologism) the denotation of the dimension of becoming, of the passage and change of time, with its corrupting charge, inherent in the finitude of creatures, their contingency, and their exposure to loss and diminution (as the vector of evil). Although not absent from the semantic horizon of the letters (cf. 2 Cor 11:13–15), the connotation (generally prevalent in non-Pauline occurrences of the term) of the *external*, material, accidental *appearance* as opposed to the substantial, rational, and therefore unchanging nature (*ousía*, as manifested in the *morphē*) of entities is therefore secondary.

A crucial confirmation comes from the comparison with the Pauline description of the cosmic condition of creatures as radical contingency: the condition of that which is changing, passing, disappearing,[22] subject to the law of corruption, which is together the law of death and sin.[23] No creature is necessary; nothing that is and happens in the cosmos is necessary: everything can end; everything does nothing but end, become different, become less, decays in the corrosive power of evil, which is not a positive entity but a condition of subtraction and decline. Precisely this radical contingency is the sign of the creaturely finitude, which qualifies the cosmos and the human being in the sign of corruption, of mortality. Aristotle says so,[24] expressing a classical, pagan, vision; the Bible says so (in the sequence of the sapiential texts, from Job to the Psalms to Ecclesiastes). Paul says so, when, in Romans 8:18–23, a cosmic fresco of extraordinary power, he describes creation as "suffering" the end and corruption, as being subject to becoming as a fatal engine of decay. Becoming, as the source of decline and destruction, 'reigns', even to the point of subjecting creatures to the supreme condition of slavery, that of death ("wages of sin", Rom 6:23), in which the subject loses the availability of the indispensable condition for being considered as a subject: its status as a living being.

> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us. For creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made *subject to* ***vanity***,[25] not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope *that creation itself would be set free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God*. We know that all creation is groaning in labour pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (*m.e.*)

Even if not linearly interpretable, the correspondence of this grandiose eschatological picture with the scenario presented in 1 Cor 7:31, Phil 2:5-l1, and 3:21 is undeniable. In fact, the authentic meaning of these three Pauline pages can only be grasped by reading each text in the light of the other two. Romans 8:18–23 makes explicit the temporal sense of the passing away, of the passing away of *this world*, as the passing away of transience, as the stigma of becoming, the crucial dimension of the enslavement not only of human beings but of the whole cosmos to the power of evil, to the morally and physically destructive dynamic of corruption.[26] The whole creation (*πᾶσα ἡ κτίσις*) "was made subject to vanity" (*τῇ γὰρ ματαιότητι ἡ κτίσις ὑπετάγη*), to the dynamics of consumption (of corruption) inherent in temporal becoming, and hopes to be liberated from this slavery *(ἐλευθερωθήσεται ἀπὸ τῆς δουλείας τῆς φθορᾶς: ipsa creatura liberabitur a servitute corruptionis in libertatem gloriae filiorum Dei*), which constitutes the *figura*/the *schēma*/the actual phenomenological form of the world. The universal creaturely hope is, therefore, that evil and endings, as subservience to the corrupting power of finitude, will disappear, that the passage of time and the creaturely powerlessness it implies will pass away, thanks to that *redemption of bodies*[27] which is brought about as adoption as children of God. In this eschatological perspective, hope, not only human but cosmic, is the overcoming of one's *schēmatic* condition of creaturely subservience to decay. It is hope in a "victory" of life over death, which is produced as the universal and definitive establishment and recognition of the sovereignty of Christ, the Risen One, over death:

> Because of this, God greatly exalted him
> and bestowed on him the name
> that is above every name,
> that at the name of Jesus
> every knee should bend,
> of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
> and every tongue confess that
> Jesus Christ is Lord,
> to the glory of God the Father.
>
> (Phil 2:9-11)

> [The Lord Jesus Christ] will **refigure** our **body of humiliation** to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself.
>
> ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι ⌜αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.
>
> (Phil 3:21)

When the *schēmatic* time (the fallen time of subjugation to sin and death) will have passed away because the fullness of time, the Parousia, has been reached, then "all things, all creation, every knee, every tongue", will submit to that God who by becoming a creature (by incarnating as a man, dying, and rising again), has overcome sin and death and set creatures free from them.

It is indeed evident that what Romans 8:21 as Alain de Lille in his famous Carmen Omnis mundi creatura. calls "corruption" (decay: *φθορᾶς*, *corruptionis*), as a synonym for "*vanity" (vanitas: ματαιότητι*), is the "death" of Phil 2:8, as the epitome of evil, as the culmination of that emptying humiliation, which is being the world and being in the world with the "status of a slave" (*morphē doulou* of Phil 2:7b),[28] in a state of submission to loss and corruption. Redemption for Paul is liberation, in full fidelity to the vision of the biblical God as the liberator, and, just as biblically, it cannot be understood metaphysically but only historically.

On the Judeo-Christian horizon, evil is not a metaphysical entity but a historical–eschatological process, inscribed in *schēmatic*, pre-messianic temporality. The creaturely form of slavery (*μορφὴν δούλου*) cannot be thought of as a form in the Platonic–Aristotelian sense, as a rational architecture of being, but as a *pre-historic* universal state, mysteriously emerging between a present of destitution and a future of liberation (*vanitati enim creatura subiecta est, non volens sed propter eum, qui subiecit, in spem, quia et ipsa creatura liberabitur*) and coming to fulfilment as the "redemption of our bodies". Liberation is not the Platonic emancipation of the immortal soul from the mortal body, of the idea from matter, of the rational form from the empirical appearance. It is not the exit of the individual from the physical world and its cosmic end ("it is not the world that is passing away but a figure of it", a temporal dimension of it, a form of happening). Redemption, as liberation, is realized as *bodily metaschēmatization*. It is the transformation of the condition of the *body-schēma*, a "carnal", animal body, humiliated by creaturely bondage (*τῆς ταπεινώσεως*) into a sovereign, spiritual, glorious body (*τῆς δόξης*), reshaped (*σύμμορφον*) by a condition of power (*ἐνέργειαν*) that frees him from submission, to make him filially participant in the cosmic sovereignty of the Son of God (*τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι ⌜αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα*):

> So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown corruptible (*ἐν φθορᾷ*); it is raised incorruptible (*ἐν ἀφθαρσίᾳ*). It is sown dishonorable (*ἐν ἀτιμίᾳ*); it is raised glorious (*ἐν δόξῃ*). It is sown weak (*ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ*); it is raised powerful (*ἐν δυνάμει*). It is sown a natural body (*corpus animale: σῶμα ψυχικόν*); it is raised a spiritual body (*corpus spiritale: σῶμα πνευματικόν*). If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one. So, too, it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became (*ἐγένετο: factus est*) a living being (*εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν*),"; the last Adam a life-giving spirit (*εἰς πνεῦμα ζῳοποιοῦν*). But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly. Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one (*εἰκόνα τοῦ χοϊκοῦ*), we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one. (*τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου*).
>
> (1 Cor 15:42–49)

If the *schēma hōs anthrōpos* is creaturely part of the *schēma tou kosmou*, then the messianic transformation of the *schēma hōs anthrōpos* brings about a transformation of the *schēma tou kosmou* itself, namely, precisely its passing, its fading away as *schēma.* The whole of creation awaits "the redemption of our bodies" (*τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν τοῦ σώματος ἡμῶν*), which makes them "conform" (*summorphon*) with that of the Risen One and operates as a transfiguration (*metaschēmatizei*) of the "natural body" (*schēmatic, ψυχικόν*), "sown corruptible, dishonourable and weak") into a "spiritual body" (*πνευματικόν*), which "raises incorruptible", free from the destructive power of transience.

It is therefore in the light of this combined reading of its occurrences in the Pauline texts that we can grasp the authentic meaning of the word *schēma* in the Philippian pericope. It does not denote a visible aspect, an external appearance, but an intrinsic '*physical condition*' of being part of the world, of being in the world (of "being born") as a human being. *Schēma* is not the body (*soma*), nor its mere outward appearance, but the pre-messianic temporal condition of physicality (of man and the cosmos), to which Jesus subjected himself and which he eschatologically redeemed through his resurrection. Corporeality cannot be reduced to pure spatiality (*res extensa*) but must be recognized phenomenologically as temporality, a historical processuality capable of eschatological self-transcendence in the form of the new (glorious) temporality instituted by the Parousia. At the Second Coming of Christ as the expected Savior (3, 20), the process of redemption already initiated by his Resurrection will be finally and perfectly completed: the *schēmatic,* "caducous, enslaved" spatio-temporal present form of the world and of the human being, which is already receding, will then definitively overrun.[29]

6. Creatural Form, Human Condition

5τοῦτο ⸀φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ⸂Ἰησοῦ,	5 Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus,
6 ὃς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων	6 Who, while subsisting in the form of God,
οὐχ ἁρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο	did not regard equality with God
τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ,	**a booty to keep for himself.**
7ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν	7a Rather, he emptied himself,
μορφὴν δούλου λαβών,	7b taking the form of a slave
ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος-	7c **and in being born, in human likeness**,
καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος	7d **found in the human condition,**
8ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν	8a he humbled himself,
γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου,	8b becoming obedient to death,
θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ-	8c even death on a cross.[30]
(NA 28, p. 606)	

Jesus, has always been (*hyparchōn*)[31] God: he has always had a divine status. *Morphē* means here the form as the primary manifestation of being, its intrinsic "order", a general status that qualifies its manifestation.[32] But when he was *born* as a man, when he was "made" man ("in similitudinem hominum *factus*", as the Vulgate translates), he assumed the form, the condition, of a slave (the one who is submissive, who must "obey" those who are stronger than him). He assumed the form, the status, of a creature.

Morphē doulou therefore does not yet designate the incarnation into man.[33] This point is the subject of the utterance of 7c and 7d, as the emphatic reiteration of the word *anthrōpōs* makes clear, and it is conveyed by the binomial *homoiōmati* and *schēmati*. *Morphē doulou* denotes the general precondition of the incarnation as a human being, which is that of the spoliation of the divine statute in its eternity, and the acceptance of the statute, the creaturely form, of flesh (*sarx*) enslaved to the pre-messianic temporal law of caducity and the corruption of time, which is the *schēmatic* condition, the formal architecture of the cosmos in its contingency and finitude.

Kenotic emptying is "not to keep eternity as the supreme freedom (the intangibility of one's own life) for oneself" as a precious and exclusive "booty". It is to renounce it in order to enter the cosmos, the totality of creation that does not "include" its Creator,[34] in its temporal dimension of "suffering", vulnerability, loss, powerlessness, and decay. The eternal, the "ante saecula genitus", enters "in the days of the flesh",[35] as the Letter to the Hebrews says. He learns the obedience proper to the condition of a slave, stripping himself of his condition as Son, submitting to all that this *skhēmatic* and earthly dimension of temporality entails: "In the days when he was in the flesh, he offered prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered" (Heb 5:7–8).

Thus, the *ante saecula genitus* is *genitus* ("is made" in a birth) "in human likeness", to find himself subdued in the earthly condition of a temporal carnal body (*skhēma*), "body of death" (*σώματος τοῦ θανάτου*) (Rom 7:24), "body of humiliation" (3:21), body of submission to that temporal *skhēmatic* condition which is proper to the *world* (*cosmos*), which is its *figure:* its phenomenological, physical, and historical form. This is why the text does not simply say, as we would expect, that Jesus was born in a human body (*soma*) but specifies that in being born, he came to find himself and therefore "to be found" (*heuretheis*)[36] in a *skhēmatic body*. This is a pre-messianic body, the form of the body that is the object of our natural, earthly experience (the form in which we know each other). It is a transitory form, destined to be transfigured (*metaskhēmatizei*: 'to come out of the *skhēma*'), shedding the humiliation of servitude to assume the glorious form of the sons of God (3:21).

It is precisely for this reason that the text literally emphasizes the parallel between the incarnation of Jesus and the creation of man, choosing the key term of *likeness* to describe the mode of generation, to highlight that salvation is a second creation. If, of all creatures,

the human being was "made in God's image, after God's likeness" (Gen 1:26),[37] the God who incarnates makes himself a *creature* in the "likeness of men", choosing to "be made" like them,[38] to "be born as a human being".[39] For Paul, the incarnation of Jesus constitutes the generation of the new Adam: whose creation is a *figure* (*typos*) of the incarnation of Jesus, the Messiah (the *new* and *last* Adam), in the parallel gesture in which God "makes the human beings" (after his likeness) and "becomes man" ("makes himself after human likeness"). By accepting to be born as men are born, Jesus accepts to die as men die, submitting himself to the cosmic law of time and sin. In this way, however, the *schēmatic* body in which He became man receives from him the life-giving (victorious over death) and sanctifying (victorious over sin) power of the Eternal. The risen Christ transfigures (*metaschēmatizes*) the flesh, the "form of the servant", the "body of humiliation", into the likeness (*summorphon*) of the form of God, the form of the Eternal (of glory). Through his incarnation and resurrection, Jesus Christ frees creatures from bondage and works a second creation: the first man, the *earthly* man (*animal body*: *skhēmatic*), is buried (dies) and is reborn as the *second man*, the *heavenly* man (*spiritual* body).

7. Conclusions

The conditions of the life of the human being, of all the human beings (their *figure*, the '*schēmatic' body* of their "days of flesh"), of all creatures,[40] are transformed (*metaschēmatized*) in the Risen One through their salvific incorporation into the conditions of the life of the Son of God (who abolishes all servitude, Jn 15:15).[41] In the union with the Risen One, the *figure of man* (the *schēma* in which Jesus *found himself in the world as a human being*) *is passing away* exactly like the *figure of this world* (the shortening of time), in a common eschatological "transformation" (*metaschēmatization*). The Risen One is, actually, already the *Parousia*: the messianic overcoming of the *figure of this world* through the establishment of the Kingdom of God, the "world that is to come", according to the traditional rabbinical distinction, accepted by the early Church.[42] This 'new world', the Kingdom of Heaven, will last "in the ages of the ages" (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων): a 'forever' that does not mean an indefinite duration as an unlimited protraction of time passage but the incorruptible actuality of the present ("subtracted from the *schēmatic* subtraction" of its actuality). The Kingdom of God is not a reign of pure spirits: at the Parousia, the *figure of this world, the schēmatic form of creaturely temporality*, ceases, not because corporeality fades but because its temporal form is transformed, gloriously enlivened by communion with divine eternity. The presence of the Lord is given as a presence that coincides with itself, that establishes the fullness of time as the fullness of a present, whose actuality is not *schēmatically* articulated in relation to the past and the future but is definitively fulfilled in itself.

The *schēma*, the bodily form in which Jesus became man through incarnation, is not the mere "outward appearance", empirical, of a substantial and unchanging nature, but the changeable temporal condition that defines the pre-messianic existence and therefore the essence, of the human being and of the cosmos (τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ*: huic seculo*) before Redemption starts its saving work of a second creation. Creaturely enslaved to evil and death, to the physical and moral corruption, *schēmatic* corporeality is the transitional human and cosmic condition, awaiting the redemptive coming of the Kingdom of God, of the Parousia: the glorious communion of all creatures with the Eternal.

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Notes

1 It is a matter of controversy among exegetes whether the combination of the seven verses in question, often graphically transcribed as a poetic unit (beginning with Lohmeyer's proposal in 1961), is really a hymn, possibly of liturgical origin and incorporated by Paul into his own letter but not entirely by his own hand, or whether it is rather an encomium or a true confession of faith with a catechetical or liturgical profile. For all the exegetical information and discussions that are recorded without specific reference to sources in this paper, which is selectively devoted to the in-depth study of a particular lexical issue, I refer to the exhaustive critical–bibliographical summaries elaborated in (O'Brien 1991; Martin 1997; Reumann 2008; Fewster 2015; Bird and Gupta 2020). For a glimpse of new exegetical and historical–critical perspectives marked by feminist and postcolonial keys, see (Marchal [2014] 2017).

2 The Greek of the pericope has such major lexical and syntactical anomalies as to suggest the hypothesis (albeit a minority one) that the text handed down in the Pauline epistle is a translation of a pre-existing Aramaic original (cf., Fitzmeyer 1988).

3 For the sake of fluidity, the acronym Philippians is omitted in subsequent mentions of individual verses from the second chapter of the epistle.

4 All Scripture quotations (except for alterations marked in bold) are from NABRE; the Latin version occasionally quoted is from VC.

5 The division of the pericope into verses is a matter of some controversy among exegetes, who provide different reconstructions of its metrical form. In some editions, the locution *καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος* is included in verse 2, 8, in others in 2, 7. Here, I adopt the criterion of NA28 (from which all quotations in Greek are taken), citing it as 2,7d.

6 Cf. the choice of the translation of Bird and Gupta (2020, p. 71), who (similarly to the ESV) literally assimilate μορφὴ and σχήμα, translating both with the term "form": "who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form". Under the single heading "Form, Substance", NIDNT (Brown 1975, vol. I, pp. 703–10) "examines three words which may be translated as form:
eidos, *morphē* and *schēma*" (p. 703), highlighting their common semantic value of "visible appearance". Thus, "morphé is instanced from Homer onwards and means form in the sense of *outward appearance*" (*m.e.*, p. 705). This meaning is also literally attributed to *schēma*, presented as "*outward appearance*, form, shape" (*m.e.*). In this synonymization, the more robust 'empirical' connotation of *schēma* with respect to *morphē* prudently goes in the background, and the peculiarity of the term is absorbed by the *caveat* urging not to interpret it literally, because its correct understanding must be historicized: "In studying the Gk. word, one has to beware of the modern outlook which would relate *schēma* merely to external things, implying that the essential character was something different. To the Gk. mind, the observer saw not only the outer shell but the whole form with it." (p. 709). The hermeneutical unease inherent in this reductive equation is confirmed by the problematic choice of condensing the translations of *ἐν ὁμοιώματι* and *σχήματι* into the same word: "being born in the likeness [*schēmati*] of men." (ibid.) and its illustration: "This does not refer to the moral character of this earthly life (Lohmeyer), or to the appearance of Jesus (Dibelius), or to the fact of his humanity, but to the way in which Jesus' humanity appeared (Käsemann), as anyone could see. This is the force of *heuretheis* («being found»)." (ibid.) The distinction between "the fact of Jesus' humanity" and "the way in which this humanity appeared" is uniquely obscure. It complicates, rather than clarifies, the understanding of the Pauline text.
More differentiated are the respective entries in TDNT (1971, vol. VII, pp. 954–58) and BAGD, p. 872, which introduce an autonomous entry for *schēma* and do not erase its semantic autonomy but maintain its conceptual dependence on the notion of *morphē*. BAGD enunciates the double meaning of the following: "1 the generally recognized state or form in which someth. appears, outward appearance, form, shape of pers." and "2 the functional aspect of someth., way of life, of things" (ibid., p. 872) but without thematically problematizing the connotation of *exteriority*. TDNT points out the 'sensory' dimension: "*σχήμα* always denotes the outward form or structure perceptible to the senses and never the inward principle of order accessible only to thought. [...] it always ref. to what may be known from without" (p. 954), but it leaves its adoption in the text equally unexplained and binds itself in a hermeneutical impasse to which I will return later.

7 For a comprehensive survey of the occurrences of the term *schēma* in classical literature and the Bible, in addition to the already mentioned BAGD, NIDNT, TDNT, cf. the corresponding entries in the LSJ (1843) and in the ancient but always valuable (Grimm and Wilke 1889; Trench [1858] 1880; Vincent 1887). The classic Auerbach ([1944] 1984) is also indispensable. For an interpretative overview, see the review in (Reumann 2008, p. 351): "in appearance. *schēma*, esp. since Lft. 127–33, changeable outward shape, contrasted with *morphē* (6th sphere) inner essential form. Michaelis 38, appearance versus essence. Further study suggested a less sharp contrast and a wider range of meanings for both terms. G. Harder, NIDNT 1:703–14 treats both under «form»; Braumann 709, avoid such distinctions between outer (shell) and inner (essential character). W. Pöhlmann, EDNT 3:318 lists other contrasts to be avoided (e.g., Loh. 1928, nature and «history»)".

8 In the philosophical field, the word is articulated in two basic semantic cores. On the one hand (see, for example, the occurrence in Plato: "limit of solid" *Menon* 75a–76a (https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0178:text=Meno:section=76a, accessed 22 March 2024), it has the sense of *figure* as the designation of "sensible form" ("form that defines a body", as Dante sums up with his usual verbal felicity, cf. *Convivio* III IX 6). On the other hand, it has the sense of "structure": a form, a logical or more generally rational architecture, which is prominent, for example, in the Aristotelian terminology of the "figure of the syllogism" and the "structure of the comedy". Between these two semantic domains lies the meaning of *schēma* in the classical,

Greek and Latin, rhetorical tradition, which generally refers to the deviant processes of stylization and transgression of common speech described in the *elocutio*, the art of *schēmata* (figures) and *tropes* (stylistic manipulation and alteration of the semantic values of words), cf. Auerbach ([1944] 1984, pp. 11–28) and Genette (1966). The semantic value of the term in the rhetorical area may seem completely alien to Pauline usage (which is generally unambiguously traced back to the meaning of figure as sensible form), but in fact, it may help to reconstruct it more adequately. In its rhetorical sense, *schēma* generally designates the deviant processes of stylization and transgression of ordinary discourse, intercepting a peculiar "mobility" of meaning that can deviate from conventional lexical meanings by producing new semantic constellations. This connotation of mobility does not appear directly in philosophical usage, which tends to identify a structural (*schēmatic*) or sensible (figural) unity, but it is fundamental to the Pauline appropriation of the term.

Indeed, the hypothesis proposed here is that in 1 Cor 7:31; Philippians (2:7d and 3:21) and Rom 12:2, the philosophically pre-eminent connotation of the form of a sensible entity converges with the rhetorically marked connotation of mobility, coming to designate the exquisitely temporal dimension (passage, becoming) of the sensible form: its constitutive mutability.

9 Crucial here is the conceptual framework established by two seminal works such as (Trench [1858] 1880) and (Lightfoot 1878). For (Trench [1858] 1880, sct. LXX, pp. 261 ff.), the incarnation of the Son of God is in the *morphē* of a man, and *skhēma* simply denotes "the outward facts which came under the knowledge of his fellow-men", those who had personal contact with Jesus (hence *skhēma* has a "*superficial* character"). "The *μορφή* then, it may be assumed, is of the essence of a thing. We cannot conceive the thing as apart from this its formality, to use «formality» in the old logical sense; the *σχῆμα* is its accident, having to do, not with the «quidditas», but the «qualitas,» and, whatever changes it may undergo, leaving the «quidditas» untouched, the thing itself essentially, or formally, the same as it was before". The same synonymic assimilation is made by Lightfoot (1878, pp. 127ff.), who devotes a short chapter to "The synonimes *μορφὴ* and *σχῆμα*". On the one hand, Lightfoot captures the pivotal dimension of the term, which identifies the sensible dimension not as exteriority but as mutability, pointing out that in the *New Testament*, "This word retains the notion of instability, «changeableness» quite as strongly as in classical Greek" (ibid., p. 130), but on the other hand, this temporal nature is 'sterilized' by him in an interpretation closed within the dualistic–substantialist horizon of Greek metaphysics: "Thus in the passage under consideration the *μορφή* is contrasted with the *σχήμα*, as that which is intrinsic and essential with that which is accidental and outward. And the three clauses imply respectively the true divine nature of our Lord (*μορφὴ* Θεοῦ), the true human nature (*μορφὴν δούλου*), and the externals of the human nature (*σχήματι ὡς ἄνθρωπος*)." (ibid., p. 133). From a cultural–historical point of view, Lightfoot's reading, like all those that follow it, is based on the hypothesis of a high degree of 'philosophical Hellenization' of the Hebrew Paul that is a more speculative than historically proven hermeneutical proposal: "we need not assume that St Paul consciously derived his use of the term from any philosophical nomenclature. Yet [...] the speculations of Alexandrian and Gnostic Judaism formed a ready channel, by which the philosophical terms of ancient Greece were brought within reach of the Apostles of Christ." (ibid.).

10 The linguistic choice of two biblical translations fundamental to modernity is exemplary: the *schēma* of 2,7d is translated by the gestural–corporeal "Gebärden", in contrast to the abstract "Gestalt", by Luther (LB) ("und nahm Knechtsgestalt an, ward gleich wie ein andrer Mensch und an Gebärden als ein Mensch erfunden": "and took upon himthe form of a servant, and was made just like any other man, and was found in his bodily expression as a man", *m.tr.*), while in the *King James Bible* (KJB), it is rendered as "fashion" vs. "form" ("took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man") (a translation that is taken up in Martin 1997, p. 163).

Lightfoot (1878, pp. 112–13) strongly emphasizes the connotation of "external semblance" (erasing the connotation of mutability, which he had correctly pointed out): "In the present the opposition is between what He *is* in Himself, and what He *appeared* in the eyes of men; hence", the terms *σχήμα*, *ὁμοιώματι*, and *εὑρεθεὶς* are thus "all expressions implying external semblance". In line with this interpretation, see NABRE: "found human in appearance"; (Penna 2002, p. 43): "diventando partecipe degli uomini, / e, trovato all'apparenza come uomo" ("becoming a partaker of men, and, found in appearance as a human being", *m.tr.*); (Reumann 2008, p. 333): "born in humanity's likeness, and, in appearance perceived as a human being"; (Ehrman 2014): "And coming in the likeness of humans./ And being found in appearance as a human".

11 (BJ): "Devenant semblable aux hommes et reconnu à son aspect comme un homme" ("Becoming similar to men and recognized as a man by his appearance", *m.tr.*); (Fabris 2000, p. 104): "trovato nell'aspetto come uomo" ("found in the aspect as a man", *m.tr.*).

12 "Erscheinungsweise" is the translation suggested by Käsemann (1950, p. 339). In analogy to NDNT, Dunn (1998, p. 76) problematically translates *schēma* as a synonym for *homoíōma*: "and became in the very likeness of humankind. And being found in likeness as a human being". O'Brien (1991, p. 211) cuts the exegetical Gordian knot with a radical simplification that eliminates the term from the translation: "and being born like other human beings. And being recognised as a man".

13 Whether explicit or implicit, this bias is always at work, even in "functional" exegesis, which challenges the pericope's claim to elaborate a doctrinal Christology (for this reading, see Cullmann 1963).

14 On this point, cf. (Martin 1997, p. 203ff). It is difficult to share the position of Marchal ([2014] 2017, pp. 17–18), for whom the need to sweep away possible docetic resonances of the pericope is an anachronistic preoccupation of contemporary exegetes.

15 Cf. Martin (1997, pp. 207ff.), followed by O'Brien (1991, pp. 231 ff.), who in translating *σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος* as "appearance of a man" defends the view that this expression not only does not weaken but, on the contrary, strengthens the affirmation of Jesus' full human identity: "It states, without equivocation, the reality of His humanity" (ibid., p. 207).

16 In the Note to the verse (p. 2796), the BG defends this twofold linguistic choice in detail: "v 11.—*becoming like men*: there is no intention to attenuate the humanity of Jesus (Gal 4:4; Rom 1:3; 9:5; Heb 2:17). But if he was not different, he could not save us. He who was "living" (2 Cor 4:10–11) raised up those who were "dead" (Rom 6:4; Col 2:13). He did not need to be reconciled to God (2 Cor 8:9), whereas all others did (2 Cor 5:1819).—*By his recognized appearance as a man*: even though his way of being is different, Christ shares the human nature common to all men." (m.tr.). However, the argument is not without ambiguities: the equivalence of the predicate "to be *like men*" and "*to be a man*" is not at all obvious and the "nature" of an alleged diversity, which cannot be "of nature" (if Jesus, as recognized in the Nicene symbol, "shares human nature, common to all men") but is presented as functionally necessary ("if he was not different, he could not save us"), remains entirely indeterminate and equivocal. If the postulation of an ontological diversity of the man Jesus is anti-Nicene (Jesus is true God and true man), the postulation of a purely moral diversity is not Christologically permissible, because the man Jesus "did not need to be reconciled with God". So, the question remains: does this double messianic power (of life and of communion with God) make him different as a man (*different from men*, only *similar to them.* In which case it is a difference of "nature")? Or does it make him different just as an individual (in this case, it is an eschatologically constitutive historical difference) who, through his own death and resurrection, initiates the possible transfiguration of all human beings into a new form of humanity (raising them to be "the sons of God", Phil 3:21)? The assertion that "his way of being is different" is then simply a tautological repetition of the statement, leaving the fundamental question of its content unanswered.
While avoiding the trap of translating the noun "likeness" with the adjective "similar" ("coming in human likeness"), NABRE problematically opts (as already noted) for the insidious (docetic) lexical choice of "appearance": "and found human in appearance". The New English Version of the *Jerusalem Bible* (RNJB) and ESV avoid these problems by adopting a non-literal and anodyne synonym translation of *schēma* to *morphē* (respectively: "born in human likeness and found in human shape"; "being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form"). Similarly, the *Einheitsübersetzung* (EU), the standard version of the German-speaking Catholic Church, opts for a free translation: "[wurde] den Menschen gleich./Sein Leben war das eines Menschen" ("[he became] equal to men / His life was that of a man", m.tr.), relegating the literal one to the footnote ("wurde den Menschen gleich / und der Erscheinung nach ganz als Mensch erfunden").

17 See the hammering iteration of *metaschēmatizei* with the meaning of *masquerade* in 2 Corinthians 11: 13–15 ("For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, who masquerade as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan masquerades as an angel of light. So, it is not strange that his ministers also masquerade as ministers of righteousness"). In this triple occurrence, the semantic connotation activated is that of the sensible form as a visible manifestation, as an exteriority, which allows for the fraudulent exploitation of appearance as an illusionistic effect. This negative connotation of the sensible form as exteriority, to which Paul also resorts, is in direct contrast to the positive connotation that the semanteme assumes in Phil 3:21 and Rom 12:2, where the sensible form does not denote outward appearance but a mutability that is eschatologically sublimated into spiritual (Rom 12:2) and bodily transfiguration (Phil 3:21).

18 Or the author/s of the pericope attributed to him, included in that collection of Pauline texts that some exegetes believe to be the Epistle to the Philippians. On the question of the discontinuous and composite structure of the letter, which may therefore be read as an assemblage of textual fragments (possibly three epistolary bodies), (cf. O'Brien 1991, pp. 47ff., 206ff.; Reumann 2008).

19 "For the world in its present form is passing away" (NABRE).

20 "The whole classical tradition was very much alive in St. Augustine, and of this his use of the word *figura* is one more indication. In his writings we find it expressing the general notion of form in all its traditional variants, static and dynamic, outline and body; it is applied to the world, to nature as a whole, and to the particular object; along with *forma, color,* and so on, it stands for the outward appearance (*Epist*., 120, 10, or 146, 3); or it may signify the variable aspect over against the imperishable essence. It is in this last sense that he interprets I Cor. 7:31: *Peracto quippe iudicio tune esse desinet hoc coelum et haec terra, quando incipiet esse coelum novum et terra nova. Mutatione namque rerum non omni modo interitu transibit hic mundus. Unde et apostolus dicit: praeterit enim figura huius mundi, volo vos sine sollicitudine esse. Figura enim praeterit, non natura (De civitate Dei,* 20, 14). ("When the judgment shall be finished, then this heaven and this earth shall cease to be, and a new heaven and a new earth shall begin. But this world will not be utterly consumed; it will only undergo a change; and therefore the Apostle says: The fashion [figura] of this world passeth away, and I would have you to be without care. The fashion *[figura]* goes away, not the nature.") [Trans. John Healey, Everyman edition. London, 1950, Vol. II, p. 289.]" (Auerbach [1944] 1984, p. 37).

21 In so far as (1) creation is not instantaneous but gradual: the ontological architecture of the cosmos is transformed in the different days—stages—of the creative action of God; (2) creation is not God's last word on cosmos: this is said with the resurrection of his Son, as the condition of the universal and definitive establishment of his sovereignty.

22 On the need to think of the *cosmos* as an "*eschatological* concept", more temporal than spatial, material, see (Bultmann 1951): "Now this means that "cosmos"—used in the above sense—is much more a time-concept than a space-concept; Nor, more exactly, it is an *eschatological concept*. It denotes the world of men and the sphere of human activity as being, on the one hand a temporary thing hastening towards its end (I Cor. 7:31), and on the other end, the sphere of anti-godly power under whose sway the individual who is surrounded by it has fallen." (ibid., p. 256). While Bultmann emphasizes the temporal (and not substantivist–metaphysical, as in the Greek philosophical tradition) nature of the Pauline notion of the *cosmos*, pointing out that Paul uses the expression "this world" as a synonym for "this time", he nevertheless does not resist reinstating the term *schēma*, carefully chosen by Paul to avoid this metaphysical identification, as "essence": "The present is characterized by the sentence: «the *schema* (essence) of this

world is passing away»" (I Cor.7: 3b). /.../ «This world» can also interchange with «this age» (αιών). /. . . / «The *schema* of this world» (I Cor. 7: 31) is «the present evil age » of Gal. 1: 4». (ibid.). For Paul, not all the present is *schēmatic* but only the present of the pre-messianic time, which is subject to sin. The notion of sin is linked by Paul (and by John) to that of the world as the historical and eschatological condition of man, because it implies an "understanding of man's situation as an enslavement to power for whose dominion he nevertheless is himself responsible" (ibid., p. 257).

23 "For the law of the Spirit, which gives life in Christ Jesus, has delivered you from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

24 Temporality is not the direct cause of the corruption of entities but its agent (cf. Aristotle 1930, Physics IV 12–13): "A thing, then, will be affected by time, just as we are accustomed to say that time wastes things away, and that all things grow old through time, and that there is oblivion owing to the lapse of time, but we do not say the same of getting to know or of becoming young or fair. For time is by its nature the cause rather of decay, since it is the number of change, and change removes what is." (IV 12, 221a-b) "In time all things come into being and pass away [...]. And this is what, as a rule, we chiefly mean by a thing's being destroyed by time. Still, time does not work even this change; even this sort of change takes place incidentally in time". (222b).

25 NABRE has "futility", but I follow (KJB) and other translations which choose the traditional term "vanity".

26 The argument presented here takes up the Adamic analogy for the Philippian Jesus evoked by Dunn ([1980] 1989, 1998) in terms of "enslavement to corruption and sin" and "submission to death". However, it does not embrace the interpretation of the synonymous use of *morphē* and *eikōn* nor the opposition between the man Jesus and the man Adam in terms of the temptation (victoriously resisted by Jesus) to violently "appropriate" equality with God, in a key that reads the claim of pre-existence as uniquely human. (For a discussion of the Adamic parallelism thesis and the question of pre-existence, see O'Brien 1991, pp. 264ff.; Martin 1997, pp. 99ff.). Cf. (Marchal [2014] 2017, pp. 20–21), for a radically alternative reading to the one proposed here. For this author, the pericope (Philippians in general) has nothing to do with the power of sin and death: "Sin, in fact, is a major preoccupation of this section of Romans [5:12–21], whereas it is not even a minor topic in this or any part of Philippians!".

27 Liberation from "this body of death", the flesh (*σὰρξ*), which enslaves to the "law of sin" (Rom 7:23–25), in the establishment of the sovereignty of the "law of the Spirit" (Rom 8:2), which makes "slaves of God" (Rom 6:20–23).

28 On the corresponding entry, (Spicq 1994) notes that it is "wrong" to translate *doulos* as "servant", because it is a technical designation not of a service function but of a social status of "proprietary" subordination.

29 In Rom 12:2, the temporal connotation of the semanteme is clearly activated, with the indication that the spiritual *metamorphosis* (*μεταμορφοῦσθε*) produced by the conversion is realized as de-*schēmatization, de-figuration* (*μὴ ⸀συσχηματίζεσθε*): detachment from the temporal form of the present world (*τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ: huic seculo*): "*Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed* by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (*m.e.*).

30 It is impossible to recapitulate here the endless exegetical discussion on the reasons for the possible alternative translation and interpretation choices for each individual term in the pericope. Since the specific objective of this paper is to determine the meaning of the word *σχήμα*, only the translation issues directly related to this point will be briefly analyzed here, and the NABRE translation will be adopted, modified only in the locutions of verses 6a-b and 7c-d, which are highlighted in bold. In my opinion, the Latin translation of the VC, which I quote for comparison, remains illuminating for a correct interpretation of the pericope:

"Hoc sentite in vobis, quod et in Christo Iesu:

qui cum in forma Dei esset, non rapinam arbitratus est esse se aequalem Deo,

sed semetipsum exinanivit formam servi accipiens,

in similitudinem hominum factus;

et habitu inventus ut homo,

humiliavit semetipsum factus oboediens usque ad mortem,

mortem autem crucis."

31 ὃς ἐν *μορφῇ* Θεοῦ *ὑπάρχων*—without discussing the merits of the alternative interpretations (cf. Reumann 2008, pp. 333ff., for an analytical review of all the thorny exegetical, theological, and lexical issues inherent in these verses), here I adopt Vincent's old choice: "Being in the form of God (ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων)
Being. Not the simple εἶναι to be, but stronger, denoting being which is from the beginning. See on James 2:15. It has a backward look into an antecedent condition, which has been protracted into the present. Here appropriate to the preincarnate being of Christ, to which the sentence refers. In itself it does not imply eternal, but only prior existence."
(Vincent 1887, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/philippians/2-6.htm, accessed 22 March 2024).
The question of whether this locution can be read as a Pauline assertion of either a consubstantial or similar divine pre-existence of Jesus is the subject of an open and extremely sensitive debate, theologically highly significant (for the thesis of divine similar pre-existence, with different nuances, see Dunn [1980] 1989, 1998; Martin 1997).

32 The exegetical and theological–philological reconstruction of the term *μορφὴ* occupies a prominent place in the studies of the pericope (cf. the critical–bibliographical survey in O'Brien 1991, pp. 215ff.; Martin 1997, pp. 99ff.; and Hawthorne 1998).
From my point of view, it is essential to avoid the parasynonymic assimilation of *σχήμα* and *μορφὴ*, which obscures the crucial point that *doulos* is not referring to the human being but to the creature in general. As I have tried to show in the previous section,

"taking the form of a slave" means entering "the sphere" (cf. Reumann 2008) of the cosmos, assuming the status of a creature, by incarnating as a human being: being born (*γενόμενος*) in the pre-messianic bodily form (*schēma*) of a human being. In other words, "the form of a slave" does not yet denote the assumption of the *human form* (the birth into the *schēma*, the carnal body of man, expressed in 2, 7c-d) but its precondition in the emptying of the Creator into the creature.
In summarizing the reasons for the translation choice of *morphē* as "sphere", Reumann (2008, p. 344) quotes a summary by H.J. Kuschel, which is also useful in illuminating some of the qualifying points of this reflection: "As Kuschel 606 n 46 put it, "Anyone who decides . . . for «appearance» . . . runs the risk of reading into the text a contrast between changing «external appearance» and a permanent «inner being.». . . Anyone arguing that this is a statement about Christ's nature» runs the danger that such a statement about Jesus «can be misunderstood in physical-real terms». Anyone for status, position (Schweizer) «will hardly find a parallel in other New Testament writings" (Gnilka 113–14). Anyone for «divine glory» (Schnackenburg 1970, p. 315) overlooks the fact that in the hymn «the obedient one only received this status after the humbling and not before». Kuschel, Käsemann, and Translation opt for sphere (realm, place and relationships)". Avoiding the Gnostic implications associated with his interpretation, Käsemann's (1950, p. 321) concluding formulation is, in my view, convincing: "Unter μορφή ὑεον bzw. δούλου ist dann einfach die himmlische bzw. irdische Daseinsweise zu verstehen".

33 As postulated, instead, by the majority of exegetes, who also give different interpretations to this identification of the slave as the form of the human being, in an arc of readings that are distributed between the Adamic parallel, the biblical figure of the Just Sufferer, and the evocation of the Servant of Isaiah (for a bibliographical overview of the different readings, cf. O'Brien 1991, pp. 224ff.; Martin 1997, pp. 169ff.; Reumann 2008, pp. 335ff.; Marchal [2014] 2017, pp. 21ff. for new exegetical proposals).
In partial agreement with the hypothesis put forward here, Käsemann's (1950) interpretation identifies bondage precisely as a condition of cosmic subjugation, but on the one hand, he charges it with a mythical, mystery component, of a Gnostic and Hellenistic matrix, which does not belong to the Pauline text. On the other hand, he insists on the identification of the *doulos* as a human being and not as a creature in general. By emphasizing (in direct controversy with Lohmeyer 1961) the soteriological–kerigmatic (not purely ethical) dimension of the pericope, within the cosmic horizon of the exaltation of Christ as "Pantokrator", Käsemann overshadows the redemptive significance of the exaltation of the Son elevation, which takes place precisely through his resurrection. The "Knechtschaft durch die Mächte" ("Bondage by the powers") referred to by Käsemann (1950, p. 345) plays a distinctly secondary role for Paul, because for him, the absolute power that enslaves creation is physical and moral death, the epitome of transience, insofar as it is the vector of corruption that is consummated as sin and erosion, the cessation of life. It is "the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2) that enslaves the human beings and from which Christ sets them free (Rom 6:20–23). Only in this framework can we understand why the kenotic humiliation of the One who, being equal with *God*, made himself equal with the creature, exposing himself to death, is the condition of his exaltation. The Christ, as the Risen One victorious over death, in his capacity is recognized by all creatures as the "Pantokrator", who establishes a new lordship, one of freedom and not of bondage ("I no longer call you slaves [...] I have called you friends", Jn 15:15).

34 As noted above, it should not be forgotten that when Paul speaks of *kosmos*, he is using a Greek term to give it a meaning which is specific to the Jewish–biblical tradition. On the difference between the Greek concept of the *kosmos* as a totality unified by rational laws, encompassing heaven, earth, and all living beings, including humans and God, and the Testament concept, see again Bultmann (1951, pp. 254ff.). The *Old Testament* "does occasionally speak of the «all» and, much oftener, of «heaven and Earth»—but always in such a way that God himself is not included in it, but is always distinguished from it as the Creator. In this restricted sense, Hellenistic Judaism took over and used the term «cosmos», and it is in this sense that the New Testament, inclusive of Paul, uses it. /.../ However, «kosmos» does not always mean «earth» as the mere stage for man's life and living but oftem denotes the quintessence of earthly conditions of life and earthly possibilities. It embraces all the vicissitudes included between the pairs of polar terms «life. . .death», «things present . . .things future» (I Cor. 3: 22). Accordingly, human life in its worldly aspects, in its hustle and bustle, in its weal and woe, is a «dealing with the world» (I Cor. 7: 31)—and as the antithesis to the «affairs of the world», the «affairs of the Lord» hover in the background (7: 32–34; see §22)" (ibid., p. 254). The opposition between the *kosmos* and its Creator (as a division between the dominion condition of sin and the holiness of God) is central for John, who repeatedly proposes it; cf. the passage in 1 Jn 2: 15-18, which is a kind of paraphrase of 1 Cor 7: 29–31, and which invites not to " love the world or the things of the world", [...] for all that is in the [...] is not from the Father but is from the world. Yet the world and its enticement are passing away".

35 ὃς ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς: *in diebus carnis suae*. (Heb 5: 7)

36 In the light of these passages from *Philippians* and 1 *Corinthians*, the extent of the debt that the existential analysis of Heidegger's *Being and Time* owes to the Pauline theology is evident. To "be found" (*inventus*, in the *Vulgata*) in the temporal figure (*skhēma: habitus*) of man is, in Heideggerian terms, *Being-in-the-World*, to dwell in the world (Heidegger [1927] 1977, sct. 12), as *Dasein* (the being to which the world opens as *Attunement*, §29), the being whose essence consists in its existence (§9). To be *skhēma hōs anthrōpos* is to be part (transcendent in the permanent anticipation of death) of the *skhēma tou kosmou*: the essential constitution of *Dasein* is *Being-in-the-world* (§28) in the dismissal ("falling and throwness", §38) of facticity, finding itself exposed to contingency, subject to the condition (*cosmic, worldly*: intrinsic to temporal finitude) of *Being-toward-Death* (§§46-5). *Dasein* as *Being-in-the-World* transcends itself, *surpasses itself* (*Being-ahead-of-itself*) in its openness to annihilation as the most authentic condition of being.

37 The *Septuagint* translates the original Hebrew term using the same semanteme as Paul: "Then God said: «Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness (ὁμοίωσιν)»". The Vulgate lexically emphasizes the parallelism by translating the two

different Greek verbs of Gen 1:26 (Π*οιήσωμεν*) and Phil 2:7c (*γενόμενος*) with the same term, "*facere*": "ait faciamus, hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram"; "in similitudinem hominum factus". The Vulgate model is followed by Martin (1997, p. 163), who translates the following: "and *was made* in the likeness of men" (*m.e.*). Reumann (2008, p. 349) recalls that "-ma [stands] for the result of an action". (For a philological–exegetical discussion of the term, see Martin 1997, pp. 199ff.).

[38] This concept is reiterated literally in Heb 4:15: Jesus is a high priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses, because he was "one who has *similarly* (based on his likeness with us) been tested in every way, yet without sin ("temptatum autem per omnia *pro similitudine* absque peccato": "πεπειρασμένον δὲ κατὰ πάντα καθ' ὁμοιότητα χωρὶς ἁμαρτίας", *m.e.*).

[39] It is important to stress that the semanteme of *homoiōsis* and *homoíōma* is different from *mímēsis*: it expresses a similarity, an analogy, which is not established by imitation but by participatory assimilation. It does not denote iconic parallelism but processual proximity. In this interpretive key, the Adamic reference does not pass through the equivalence of *morphē* with *eikōn* (image) but through the notion of *likeness* (κατ᾽ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ᾽ ὁμοίωσιν) and is not specified in a human dramaturgy of temptation (which Jesus, in contrast to Adam, resisted, cf. Dunn [1980] 1989, 1998) but in a soteriological view of God's self-giving in the incarnation.

[40] The pericope expresses with eloquent clarity and solemn jubilation the universal, cosmological, and not merely human dimension of the Redemption: all creatures bow before the sovereignty of the One who has freed them—"every knee should bend".

[41] "I mean that as long as the heir is not of age, he is no different from a slave, although he is the owner of everything, but he is under the supervision of guardians and administrators until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were not of age, were enslaved to the elemental powers of the world (*ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου* ⌜*ἤμεθα δεδουλωμένοι*. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" So you are no longer a slave but a child (*ὥστε οὐκέτι εἶ δοῦλος ἀλλὰ υἱός*), and if a child then also an heir, through God." (Gal 4:1–7).

[42] The "world to come" (*Olam Ha-Ba*) is a key concept in Hebrew eschatology to denote the coming of the Messiah (a central proclamation in Isaiah, cf. especially: Is 2:11, 25, 51–53) and the condition of the resurrected (cf. Is 26:19 Hos 6:1–3; Ezek 37:1–14; Job 14:13–15). In the *New Testament*, the contrast "between this age and the age to come" is formulated as a "temporal" difference, retained in the Latin translation but often deleted in translations that spatialize the original Greek *aiōn* into *world* and thus "disfigure" the temporal condition referred to. Cf. *τῷ αἰῶνι οὔτε ἐν τῷ μέλλοντι*: *in hoc saeculo neque in futuro* of Mt 12:32 ("either in this age or in the age to come"). See also Lk 20:35 and Eph 1:21.

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Article

Developing Christ as Consolatory Example in the Christ Encomium

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Abstract: While Paul Holloway's scholarship on Philippians has been important, his classification of Philippians as a letter of consolation has gained relatively little traction. Interestingly, however, Holloway follows Karl Barth in labelling a large section of the letter, Phil 1:27–2:16, a 'hortatory digression', which could be seen to diminish the extent of consolation in this part of the letter. In this article, I seek to develop Holloway's work to argue that the Christ encomium in Phil 2:6–11 has elements of consolatory discourse that relates to other parts of the letter. Phil 2:6–11 illustrates and exemplifies how comfort (παράκλησις), consolation (παραμύθιον), and joy (χαρά) can be derived by individuals and communities in the face of opposition or destitution (cf. Phil 1:27–2:4). I propose that Christ undergoes a form of voluntary desolation in 2:6–8 but then receives something different from consolation in his glorious exaltation and the bestowal of the divine name. Although Paul and the Philippians will not receive universal worship like Christ, they can imitate him by following in this trajectory of becoming like God, thus receiving divine consolation and transformation.

Keywords: consolation; Philippians; joy

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1. Reading Philippians as an Ancient Letter of Consolation

It is impossible to know for certain whether the apostle Paul, along with his associate Timothy, set out to compose a letter of consolation to the community in Philippi. We do know, however, from ancient rhetorical handbooks that such letters existed (Malherbe 1988, p. 33) and, on a more popular level, that shorter notes of condolence were exchanged between individuals in antiquity (Chapa 1998). The hypothesis that Philippians bears the hallmarks of a letter of consolation is a promising one. Paul, writing in restricted circumstances from prison,[1] offers perspectives on how grief (λυπή) can be replaced with joy (χαρά). The apostle repeatedly expresses his own joy in the Lord (Phil 1:18; 2:17; 4:10) and encourages the Philippians to rejoice (2:18; 3:1; 4:4). He also articulates the joy he feels towards the Philippians (1:4; 4:1) around the joy that he wants the Philippians to experience through progress in the faith (1:25) that will contribute to his own joy (2:2). Although Paul does not use the Stoic categories of passion (πάθος) and 'good-emotion' (εὐπάθεια),[2] it is well known that grief and joy, respectively, were key terms within these categories, which justifies seeing Paul as interacting in some way with broader ancient philosophical ideas.

The foremost advocate of Philippians constituting a letter of consolation is Paul Holloway, who, in his recent commentary (Holloway 2017, p. 2) and a growing number of articles, contends that Philippians is 'first and foremost a letter of consolation'. Yet, Holloway's proposal has gained relatively little traction. Other scholars who interpret Paul within an ancient philosophical context have come to the same conclusions as Holloway. Hans Dieter Betz views Philippians as a *praemeditatio mortis* with some consolatory aspects but contends that 'they are associated with more comprehensive issues' (Betz 2015, p. 133), and Troels Engberg-Pedersen focuses almost exclusively on παράκλησις as related to exhortation and moral progress (Engberg-Pedersen 2000). From a different direction that challenges situating Paul within an ancient philosophical and consolatory tradition, Ryan Schellenberg has argued that Paul's experience is closer to that of prisoners longing to see

their community again than the internalised Stoic joy that a heroizing Christian tradition has seen in Paul since Acts (Schellenberg 2021).

While I dissent from some of Holloway's finer points of exegesis—notably that the Philippians became indolent out of grief for Paul's imprisonment—I agree that there are several places where Paul employs modes of consolation. One part of the letter where Holloway's proposal could be strengthened, however, is with reference to Phil 1:27–2:16. Holloway follows the theologian Karl Barth and others in seeing Phil 1:27–2:16 as a 'hortatory digression' (Holloway 2017, p. 83). Holloway argues that Paul's remark in 2:17 about his probable death—'if I am also poured on top of the sacrifice of your faithfulness (εἰ καὶ σπένδομαι ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν)'—represents the reality or the 'frank assessment' (Holloway 2017, p. 104) for which the Philippians are prepared in these verses via exhortation. While exhortation was an important later stage of the overall practice of consolation, looking past the earlier necessary stages of sympathy and comfort attenuates a consolatory reading.

In what follows, I assess whether we can identify more consolatory aspects in parts of Phil 1:27–2:16, especially the Christ encomium in Phil 2:6–11.[3] Holloway has joined other scholars in seeing this passage as paradigmatic (e.g., Hurtado 2004) and has highlighted how *exempla* were frequently deployed in ancient consolation literature (Holloway 2017, p. 115). If further notions of consolation can be found to unify this section and connect it to other sections of the letter, then I suggest that this will strengthen the thesis that the letter to the Philippians has consolation at its heart.

2. Phil 1:27–2:5: Consolatory Discourse before the Christ Encomium

Having narrated his own circumstances in Phil 1:12–26, the apostle turns back to his addressees. Paul's desire, even while 'absent (ἀπών)' (1:27), is that the Philippians become unified in spirit and soul in the face of 'those who oppose (τῶν ἀντικειμένων)' (1:28).[4] To reach this rhetorical goal, some degree of consolation is expedient so that the Philippians do not become 'frightened (πτυρόμενοι)' (1:28). The apostle advances three initial arguments that are intended to move the Philippians away from such fear.

Firstly, he offers an apocalyptic-oriented 'proof' (ἔνδειξις) that God will judge between the opponents and believers: the former will face destruction; the latter, including the Philippians, will face salvation (1:28).[5] Secondly, Paul prepares the Philippians for future trials: in Phil 1:29, suffering is described in terms of something gifted (ἐχαρίσθη) for the sake of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). It is to be expected that allegiance to Christ (τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν) will entail suffering for Christ (τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν). Thirdly, the Philippians face the same sort of contest or conflict (ἀγών) as Paul (1:30). Although their situation might not be as severe and ongoing as Paul's,[6] it is serious and comparable, and so the apostle sympathises with and comforts them.

While these three arguments combined provide evidence of consolatory rhetoric, such rhetoric is not expressed explicitly in conventional terms of consolatory discourse. In Phil 2:1–2, however, Paul employs highly distinctive consolatory discourse as he strengthens his appeal: 'if, therefore, there is any comfort in Christ (παράκλησις ἐν Χριστῷ), any consolation of love (παραμύθιον ἀγάπης), any fellowship of spirit, compassion and mercy, fill up my joy (πληρώσατέ μου τὴν χαρὰν) so that you may have the same mindset'. In other words, Paul directly associates conformity to Christ with comfort and consolation.[7] If this is apprehended, the community in Philippi will be united and filled with the spirit, which will, in turn, bring joy to an afflicted apostle.

Paul's resulting exhortation in Phil 2:2–4 then logically flows from divine consolation; he comforts and strengthens the Philippians by redirecting them to consolation in Christ. While there are parallels to Stoic paraenesis,[8] Paul's narrative is rooted in divine consolation rather than any sage-like qualities belonging to Paul. The question, then, is whether this consolatory discourse is picked up in the resulting Christ encomium: Christ is undeniably an example like Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus in this passage, but can he be viewed as a consolatory example?

3. Phil 2:6–8: Voluntary Desolation of Christ via Isaiah

The encomium is prefaced by an exhortation to the Philippians to 'have the same mindset (φρονεῖτε)' among themselves as in the example of Christ Jesus that follows on from the consolation that is found in him (2:5). I submit that the example of Christ extends the ethic of the preceding teaching: just as the Philippians ought to be 'considering (ἡγούμενοι) others as surpassing themselves' (2:3), Paul relates how Christ 'did not consider (ἡγήσατο)' his own mode of being equal to God as something to be held too tightly (2:6).[9]

Instead, Paul goes on to narrate how Christ divested himself of divine attributes and took on the appearance of a slave (2:7). Then, again in continuity with the 'humility' (ταπεινοφροσύνη) that had earlier been enjoined upon the Philippians (2:3), Paul relates how Jesus 'humbled himself (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν)' (2:8). Through Christ's dramatic assumption of a human appearance[10] and his obedience in undergoing not only the logical end of the ἄνθρωπος, viz., death, but 'a death by crucifixion' (2:8), Paul represents what I call Christ's *voluntary desolation*.[11]

To substantiate this reading, we must establish whether there are any meaningful precedents for such an act of desolation. The operative term here, naturally, is 'humility'. As Eve-Marie Becker has successfully shown in her work on humility, although Paul introduces a neologism with the word ταπεινοφροσύνη, the wider ταπειν- word-group was taken up by a variety of writers in antiquity (Becker 2020, pp. 53–65). It is mostly in line with the writers of the LXX and Plato, however, that Paul endows this word-group with a positive ethical sense. Humility is something relational—as she puts it: 'a tool of interaction, which is to be conceptualised with reference to the *individual*' (Becker 2020, p. 59)—and consequently it is something that can be fomented and exemplified.

While I do not think that there are any particular allusions to the Hebrew Bible in this first part of the narrative, Deutero-Isaiah is noteworthy for its occasional ταπειν- language. At the start of Isaiah 40, Jerusalem famously receives consolation; indeed, according to the LXX, she is assured that 'her humiliation has been fulfilled (ἐπλήσθη ἡ ταπείνωσις αὐτῆς)' (Isa 40:2).[12] The only other instance of the noun ταπείνωσις in Deutero-Isaiah appears in the servant-song at Isa 53:8, where the prophet narrates how 'in humility, his judgement was taken away (ἐν τῇ ταπεινώσει ἡ κρίσις αὐτοῦ ἤρθη)'.[13] While the Philippians text does not explicitly mention judgement, the notion of Christ Jesus giving up his divine agency to relate to the condition of the ἄνθρωπος can be likened to the servant who was carried off to death for the people. In Deutero-Isaiah, however, this death is distinctly for Israel; there are two passages where the people of Israel (Isa 49:13) and Jerusalem (Isa 54:11) are humbled but receive a degree of divine consolation that is displayed elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.[14]

This brief survey of Deutero-Isaiah highlights how consolation can naturally succeed humiliation or destitution. Moreover, in the case of the suffering servant, humility can represent an act of voluntary desolation that leads to death. While the Christ encomium in Philippians does not mention the concept of sin, let alone a transfer of sins, there are certainly parallels between what the suffering servant undergoes for Israel and what Christ undergoes for humanity. In short, even if it is not explicit, Jesus' divine self-transformation is presented as an act of voluntary desolation that aligns with some of Israel's salvation history as portrayed in Isaiah. What happens, however, when Paul *does* allude to Isaiah in the second part of the encomium narrative? Is voluntary desolation met with a degree of consolation?

4. Phil 2:9–11: Christ's Glorious Exaltation and Gift of the Divine Name via Isaiah

In his voluntary divestment of his divinity and act of desolation, Jesus descends further than any incarnated being because his starting point is higher. The messiah is returned, however, to this position in 2:9–11. Holloway himself recognises the different agents who effect these transformations: 'Christ initially effects his own transformation; however, his change back to a divine form is effected by God' (Holloway 2017, pp. 122–23). The ques-

tion that arises, however, is whether there is anything consolatory in the second part of the narrative.

While the account is deliberately laconic, Christ's voluntary desolation is only temporary: he dies physically on the cross, and then because of this, through a process of divine sublimation, 'God hyper-exalted (ὑπερύψωσεν) and gifted him (ἐχαρίσατο) the name above every name' (2:9). The language of χαρίζω evidently recalls Phil 1:29, where the Philippians were comforted that 'it was gifted' (ἐχαρίσθη) to them to suffer on behalf of Christ. This additional semantic link between 1:27–2:5 and 2:6–11 highlights how some degree of imitation is desirable and indeed possible,[15] but in 2:10–11, it is reinforced that Christ bears the divine name and receives universal worship and acknowledgement (2:10–11), which sets him above and apart from the Philippians.

In Phil 2:10–11, there is a more definite allusion to Deutero-Isaiah, specifically Isa 45:23, and the rewriting of a narrative about the exaltation of Jesus Christ. It is worth laying out the passages in tandem:

> Isa 45:23, LXX: οἱ λόγοι μου οὐκ ἀποστραφήσονται ὅτι ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ καὶ ἐξομολογήσεται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τῷ θεῷ
>
> My words will not be returned because every knee will bend to me and every tongue will confess to God.
>
> Phil 2:10–11: ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός.
>
> So that in the name of Jesus, every knee might bend of those in heaven, on earth, and under the hearth, and every tongue might confess, 'Lord Jesus Christ', to the glory of God the father.

While many parts of Deutero-Isaiah contain underlying elements of grief that justify viewing them as consolatory passages, Isaiah 45 focuses on the glory of the God of Israel. Indeed, in Isa 45:25, the prophet remarks that 'from the Lord all the seed of the sons of Israel will be justified and in God glorified (ἐν τῷ θεῷ ἐνδοξασθήσονται)'. So, in Phil 2:10–11 too, the conclusion of the narrative centres 'on the glory of God (εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ)' alongside universal acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord. Notions of joy (χαρά) are noticeably absent; instead, we encounter glory (δόξα).

This leads to the conclusion that there is less consolation in the second part of the Christ encomium. Yet, if, in Paul's narrative, Christ is the source of comfort and consolation (2:1), then it does not follow that he should be the recipient of consolation; Christ merits and receives something different, and that is glory.[16] It is Paul and the Philippians, however, who are the recipients and envoys of consolation. The apostle turns to the effects of Christ's example—including its consolatory elements—in the next section of the letter.

5. Phil 2:12–16; 3:20–21: Christ's Example for the Philippians: Transformation and Consolation

Becker notes how '[a]n ethos that is grounded in a success story and is developed with special rhetorical shaping spurs the reader to imitation (*imitatio*)' (Becker 2020, p. 70). This is precisely what takes place in Phil 2:12–16 when Paul moves from the exaltation of Christ to the ethical conduct of the Philippians in the absence of the apostle (and Christ). While the Philippians will not receive worship like Christ, who has been restored to the divine form by God, they are called to imitate Christ in their ethical conduct and, in doing so, become like him and conform to the divine image as children of God. As George Van Kooten notes, 'Christ appears among the believers, in the likeness of a visible human being, in order to render assimilation to him possible' (Van Kooten 2008, p. 212).[17]

Through Christ's example, the Philippians are to assume active responsibility for their salvation, but this is in collaboration with the agency of God (θεός … ὁ ἐνεργῶν), who provokes the appropriate action in the believer (2:13).[18] By imitating Christ, the Philippians can participate in his resurrected life both now and in the future. The manifestation of

this is transformed ethical conduct, including doing everything 'without grumbling and disputes' (2:14). The apostle goes on to elucidate how obediently following the example of Christ leads to present transformation (2:15):

> ἵνα γένησθε ἄμεμπτοι καὶ ἀκέραιοι, τέκνα θεοῦ ἄμωμα μέσον γενεᾶς σκολιᾶς καὶ διεστραμμένης, ἐν οἷς φαίνεσθε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ
>
> So that you might be blameless and pure, unblemished children of God amid a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like luminaries in the cosmos.

The temporal emphasis in Phil 2:15 is unequivocally present. While some scholars see allusions here to Deut 32:5[19] and Dan 12:3,[20] Paul is describing the current commencement of a future transformation, which these texts do not perform in precisely the same way. Holloway surmises that 'in Phil 2:15 the promise is that Christ-believers can begin to experience angelification already in this life' (Holloway 2017, p. 134). Read this way, Paul exhorts the Philippians towards a future cosmological transformation,[21] which can be started in an imperfect, even oppressive, age and world. The gentile Philippians can accordingly also receive present comfort and consolation through receiving divine pneuma along with the seed of Abraham.[22]

In short, whether Paul is present or absent, the exemplary narrative about Christ that he supplies in Phil 2:6–11 is designed to provide sympathy for any destitution the Philippians experience, as well an exhortation to imitate and begin to become like Christ insofar as they are children of God. Yet, on these verses—and indeed all of Phil 1:27–2:16—I disagree with Holloway, who states that they primarily function as 'a request for consolation' (Holloway 2017, p. 102) on Paul's part. While there is some coordination of joy between Paul and the Philippians in Phil 2:17–18—'I rejoice and rejoice with you all; in the same way, rejoice and rejoice with me (χαίρω καὶ συγχαίρω πᾶσιν ὑμῖν· τὸ δὲ αὐτὸ καὶ ὑμεῖς χαίρετε καὶ συγχαίρετέ μοι)'—the apostle is more concerned with establishing a network of consolation with the exemplary Christ at the centre. Paul and the Philippians can subsequently bring consolation to one another, but in Phil 2:14–16, Paul portrays the mutual and conjoint consolation that can be derived through the transformation effected by Christ.

In the following sections of the letter, the apostle goes on to draw upon more *exempla* as part of his consolatory narrative: Timothy (2:19–24), Epaphroditus (2:25–30), and himself (3:4–14). These *exempla* culminate in a final vision where notions of transformation and consolation resurface in continuity[23] with the Christ encomium in Phil 3:20–21:

> ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει, ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὐτῷ τὰ πάντα.
>
> Our citizenship belongs in the heavens, from where we are eagerly awaiting a saviour, Lord Jesus Christ, who will transfigure the body of our humiliation, making it conformable to the body of his glory, through the agency that also enables him to subject all things to himself.

In the face of sources of opposition in Philippi that aggrieve both Paul and the Philippians, Paul constructs a narrative of consolation that borrows language from earlier in the letter with relation to the exemplary Christ and casts him once more as the agent of transformation.[24] This time, however, there is a vision of some degree of glory for those who await the saviour, Lord Jesus Christ, and it is fitting that soon after these verses, discourse relating to joy (4:1, 4:4) resurfaces. Logically continuing where the encomium left off, the messiah emerges as an agent of transformation, which is consoling for Paul and the Philippians in their present circumstances.

6. Conclusions

Overall, in the foregoing discussion, I have contended that Phil 2:6–11 (the Christ encomium) portrays Jesus Christ as a consolatory example. This is in keeping with the consolatory discourse that has already appeared in the letter, particularly in Phil 2:1–2, where notions of comfort (παράκλησις), consolation (παραμύθιον), and joy (χαρά) all feature. The main reason that the messiah can be seen as a consolatory example is on account of his voluntary desolation. His act of self-transformation from divine to human form involves humiliation (ταπείνωσις). While there are neither assured allusions nor echoes to Deutero-Isaiah in Phil 2:6–8, it is instructive to see how Israel experiences humiliation but then receives a degree of consolation in her affliction and how the suffering servant in his humiliation has a divine prerogative, viz., judgement, taken away.

While the gifting of the divine name to Jesus recalls one of Paul's earlier consolatory arguments to the Philippians—namely, that it was gifted to them to suffer for Christ's sake (1:29)—there is admittedly less consolation in the second part of the narrative of the encomium. Since Christ is the source of consolation, there is no real need for him to receive consolation; instead, he is set above and apart from the Philippians as the Lord Jesus Christ and is glorified. In Phil 2:10–11, there is an allusion to the end of Isaiah 45, which emphasises the glory of the one God of Israel.

So, although Christ receives glory instead of consolation for his voluntary desolation, in the encomium, he provides a consolatory example for Paul and the Philippians. This is precisely what the apostle elucidates in Phil 2:12–16: amid opposition, the Philippians can become like God qua children of God through obedience and right ethical conduct and begin to be transformed into angelic and pneumatic form. Then, at the parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul narrates how he and the Philippians will undergo a total transformation from the body of humiliation to one that conforms to the glory of Christ (Phil 3:21). This consoling vision only makes sense in the light of the Christ encomium in which Christ, in human form, humbles himself, but is then exalted by God. Even if there are limits to the concept, I hope to have developed some arguments in favour of seeing consolation at the heart of the narrative and argument of Philippians. Yet, whether this makes it an entire letter of consolation is still hard to quantify.

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Notes

1 I maintain that his imprisonment is in Rome, but I do not think that it affects my argument if it is in Ephesus, Caesarea, Corinth, or elsewhere.

2 On these categories, see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.116, and Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.6.13–14.

3 In this discussion, I remain agnostic about whether this is a hymn or not, but I shall refer to it as an encomium that was composed by Paul. In doing so, I draw upon (Basevi and Chapa 1993, p. 356): 'Phil. 2.5–11 should be viewed as an encomium of Christ which demands a poetical form and has the function of a profession of faith'. Holloway (Holloway 2017, p. 116) refers to '2:6–11 as a piece of elevated prose produced by Paul precisely for the exhortation of Phil 2:1–16'. While I consider the first part of this statement to be probable, I shall also argue that there is a more consolatory component in this section.

4 While my reading does not maximise unity as the purpose of the letter, it is an important feature, as Phil 4:2–3 confirms (see (Peterlin 1995)).

5 This sort of attitude is in line with broader Jewish apocalyptic literature, e.g., 4 Ezra 7.131 (NRSV): 'there shall not be grief at their destruction, so much as joy over those to whom salvation is assured'.

6 As (Von Gemünden 2015, p. 237) argues in her work on the affect of joy in Philippians: 'Trotz einer für die Gemeinde und noch deutlicher für Paulus schwierigen Situation'.

7 I view παράκλησις and παραμύθιον as related terms that belong to a similar semantic field. The latter term more consistently comes closer to 'consolation' as in, for example, 'the consolatory speech' (ὁ παραμυθητικὸς λόγος) known from the rhetorical handbooks (see Menander Rhetor, 413.3). The former term has a still-broader variety of meaning covering both consolation and exhortation (as well as more besides). I render it here as 'comfort' to bridge those terms: etymologically, comfort requires both a consoling presence and hortatory strengthening, which I consider to be the case in this context.

8 Thus (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, p. 217), 'the kind of community to which all of Paul's *paraklēsis* is directed … is nothing but an ideal community of friends, as the philosophers conceived of this'.

9 For a comprehensive treatment of the phrase τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ, see (Fletcher-Louis 2020).

10 Eastman (Eastman 2017, p. 130) comments how 'Christ "im-personates" Adamic humanity on the stage of human history'.

11 I see a similar exemplary move in the voluntary destitution represented by Christ's poverty as narrated by Paul in 2 Cor 8:9. On the deliberate compactness of this example, see (Mitchell 2017, p. 131); on the intended social effects of Christ's rich poverty, see (Barclay 2023).

12 Significantly, this differs from the MT: מֻלְאָה צְבָאָהּ ('her warfare has been accomplished').

13 For further reference, see (Becker 2020, pp. 68–69).

14 (Bockmuehl 1997a, p. 21 n. 56) draws attention to a 'rich tradition of Jewish interpretation according to which God personally identifies with the suffering and affliction of his people', drawing on texts such as Exod 3:7f. and Isa 63:9.

15 Note how Epaphroditus in a later narrative in the letter imitates Christ: Just as Christ was obedient 'unto death (μέχρι θανάτου)' (2:8), Epaphroditus also 'approached unto death (μέχρι θανάτου)' (2:30). For further reference, see (Holloway 2017, p. 143).

16 This state of affairs is conceivably comparable to the Gospel of John: Jesus promises the distribution of χαρά to the disciples (Jn 15:11; 16:20–24; 17:13) but memorably is focused on the δόξα that he will receive from or with the father – notably in Jn 17:5. On the consolatory aspects of the Farewell Discourses, see (Parsenios 2005).

17 Like Van Kooten, I am sympathetic to the notion that Paul is participating in a discourse of 'becoming like God' that, although Platonic in origin, was taken up by other ancient philosophers and intellectuals. On the *topos* of 'becoming like God', see the excellent discussion by (Reydams-Schils 2017).

18 For further reference, see (Eastman 2017, p. 149): 'the divine agent has come near to energize them in the midst of their struggles'.

19 On issues with textual transmission, see (Bockmuehl 1997b, p. 156). Holloway (Holloway 2017, p. 134) is informative on how mapping Israel in Dt 32:5 onto this verse is inapposite and supersessionist.

20 The difference between φωστῆρες and ἀστέρες (Dan 12:3) is significant, and Daniel 12 speaks of transformation exclusively in the age to come.

21 Engberg-Pedersen (Engberg-Pedersen 2015, p. 303) provides a perceptive remark about the relationship between paraenesis and cosmology: 'The paraenesis (cognitive) *appeals to* the *pneuma* (both cognitive and material) that they already possess. And the aim is to bring about their final bodily transformation' (emphasis provided in the original).

22 For a comprehensive survey of how stars were viewed as divine in ancient Jewish and Graeco-Roman philosophical traditions, see (Thiessen 2016, pp. 140–47).

23 For a recent argument suggesting that Phil 3:20–21 is another liturgical fragment that originally followed Phil 2:6–11, see (Fletcher-Louis 2023, pp. 6–8).

24 For an analysis of how Phil 3:20–21 represents a moment of climactic consolation in the letter, see (Muir 2022).

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The Word of Life and the Simultaneous Presence of Scriptural Allusions: Resonances of Phil 2:12–18 with Deuteronomy, Deutero-Isaiah, and Daniel

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Abstract: In recent scholarship on Philippians, there is renewed interest in Paul's use of Israel's Scriptures. While the separate textual interactions between Phil 2:12–18 and its evoked texts have been explored in detail by McAuley and others, this article attends to the simultaneous presence of the allusions to Deuteronomy, Deutero-Isaiah, and Daniel as a contribution to a coherent overall pragmatics, which does not, however, reduce the allusive force of scriptural passages. Attention to the composite nature of Paul's scriptural intertext discovers the motif of the word of God as a central concern of the evoked texts, which has implications for the interpretation of the word of life in Phil 2:16.

Keywords: echoes of Scripture; composite intertextuality; word of God; gospel vocation; Deuteronomy; Daniel; Deutero-Isaiah; Paul

1. Introduction

Scholarly interest in Paul's use of Israel's Scriptures is alive and well, producing a plethora of readings attuned to possible resonances of Paul's arguments with this or that portion of Scripture as well as generating heated debates about methods, criteria, and sometimes taxonomy.

While such endeavours have often focussed mainly on Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Galatians, more recently Philippians too has been probed with a view to echoes and allusions to the Old Testament.[1] That initially Philippians might seem like an unpromising candidate for such treatments, given its notorious lack of explicit citations of Scripture, has not deterred such investigations, and perhaps even spurred them on.[2]

While the allusion in Phil 1:19 to Job 13:16 has been recognised by many interpreters, not least since its forceful exposition by Hays, more recently, Phil 2:12–18 has attracted readings in the light of Israel's Scriptures.[3] Given its recognisably scriptural language, this should perhaps not be surprising. Philippians 2:12–18 has even been described as exhibiting a "sudden and profuse influx of echoes from the OT, which is unlike anything else in the Pauline corpus."[4] A few years ago, McAuley devoted an entire monograph to the passage and its various intertexts (including Deut 32:5)[5] and in an article Allen has suggested further links to the song of Moses.[6] Others have been less struck by the effect of the putative echoes. Yet, the question that arises for the interpretation of Phil 2:12–18 is the following: how does the supposed presence of the alluded scriptural texts shape the overall pragmatics of the passage?

Four sets of issues concerning method are up for debate.[7] First, where (e.g., in Philippians) do such scriptural resonances occur?[8] How can they be detected and by what criteria can they be defended? Second, to which scriptural passage or passages does any proposed locus of resonance point? And how can general use of the language of Old Greek traditions of Israel's Scriptures be distinguished from concrete allusions? Third, how much of any scriptural passage that putatively resonates should be taken into consideration (let us call this metaleptic scope)?[9] And at what level of meaning should the metaleptical potential be

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located (further words in the co-text, themes, narratives, etc.)?[10] Fourth, for which aspect of the proposed overall interpretation are these resonances deemed to be relevant? Is the interpretation focused on the thoughts of the author (communicative intent or the thought process in the composition) or on the properties of the text itself or on its reception among its first or later readers?[11]

When it comes to a passage such as Phil 2:12–18, however, the simultaneous presence of several scriptural resonances can give rise to further interpretative considerations, which have not hitherto been sufficiently explored. Namely, do the various resonances interact with each other in their meaning contribution?[12] Do the further co-texts of the textual units to which allusion is detected stand in relations to each other that might enhance a reading of the alluding text?

These questions require a preliminary remark on method. Metaleptic meaning contributions from allusions can have a recognisable effect on the overall pragmatics of a passage. Sometimes, considerations of the overall pragmatics are used as criteria for determining the metaleptic scope of allusions. For instance, McAuley sees the theme of suffering as an important aspect of the overall pragmatics of Phil 2.12–18 and uses this as a criterion to determine the metaleptic scope of the alluded-to texts.[13] McAuley uses a model of rhetorical situation and "exigencies" and then discusses the effect of the allusions given the reconstructed rhetorical situation. This is a step forward, because it notices how the detection and effect of an allusion forms part of the overall pragmatics. For McAuley, Paul's argument in Phil 2:12–18 aims at opposing a view of suffering which sees it as contrary to God's will for Christ followers in Philippi. But making these reconstructed rhetorical "constraints" the criterion for determining how much of the original context of the alluded-to passages impinges on the reading of Philippians seems problematic. For this might, first, filter out potential meaning contributions from a recognised allusion that go beyond or stand in tension with the postulated pragmatics (just as an illustration might not be a great fit for the point it is adduced to clarify). Second, the determination of the overall pragmatics is not always separable from the contributions of metaleptic meanings. Third, intertextual relations between texts can range widely and go beyond what an author or a given audience envisaged or was able to realise.

Rather, it seems preferable, as I wish to propose here, to distinguish between the allusive–intertextual relations and their (literary) metaleptic meaning potential, on the one hand, and the postulated selective activations that contribute to an interpretation of the text containing allusions, on the other. In terms of method too, it seems preferable to separate the probing of metaleptic potential (which is based on textual relations) from the selection of the metaleptic scope to be brought in as a contribution to a specific interpretation of Phil 2:12–18. At least in principle, the textual exploration of metaleptical potential could command easier agreement from scholars, insofar as a certain literary relation between texts is concerned, than a correlation with a pragmatic situation that selects for activation only some of these elements.

This theoretical division is not meant as a neat separation of what is in practice interwoven. But it might help to avoid turning explorations of subtler echoes immediately into discussions about what Paul or his audiences might have recognised or not.[14] What Paul meant or what some audience understood is, of course, the crucial issue for an interpretation of an alluding text such as Phil 2:12–18. But different interpretations could agree on the metaleptic landscape (or parts of it at least) without agreeing on the paths Paul or some reconstructed audience might have taken (or not taken) within it.

In this paper, I will do the following. First, I will walk through some of the main allusions of Phil 2:12–18 to Deuteronomy, Deutero-Isaiah, and Daniel that have been discussed by McAuley and others, and explore their metaleptic potential (Section 2). Second, I will discuss the composite intertext that results from attending to the relations between the alluded-to texts in their wider contexts and their interaction (Section 3). Third, I will correlate these observations with suggestions about a coherent overall pragmatics of the

passage (Section 4), in which the motif of the word of God and an overall vocational constellation are made central.

2. Analysis of the Echoes in Phil 2:12–18 and Exploration of Their Metaleptic Potential

We begin with a discussion of the allusions to Scripture in Phil 2:12–18, recapitulating some of the results of McAuley and Allen, while adding further observations. In particular, I will draw attention to the motif of the word of God.

2.1. Phil 2:10–11

We will include, however, Phil 2:10–11 because of the close connection between the song of the Messiah (Phil 2:6–11) and our passage (Phil 2:12–18).[15] For our purposes here, the question of authorship is not directly relevant; functionally, the hymn is fully integrated by Paul into a broader context (Phil 1:27–2:18).[16] The lexematic links to the language of the hymn have often been noticed; for instance, ὑπηκούσατε in Phil 2:12 takes up ὑπήκοος in Phil 2:8.[17] Now, if Paul did not compose the hymn, then the allusion to Isa 45:23 in Phil 2:10–11 is also not his decision; yet, without question, Paul is aware of the echo of the Isaiah passage in the language of Phil 2:10–11, and by drawing on the hymn he also adopts, as it were, its metaleptic heritage.[18]

The first allusion, then, that McAuley investigates, and which is well known and studied by scholarship on Philippians, is the universal acclamation of Jesus as Lord in Phil 2.10–11 (πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ; πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσηται), which alludes to Isa 45:23 OG:

> By myself I swear (κατ᾽ ἐμαυτοῦ ὀμνύω), 'Verily (Ἡ μὴν) righteousness shall go forth from my mouth; my words (οἱ λόγοι μου) shall not be turned back (οὐκ ἀποστραφήσονται), because to me every knee shall bow (ἐμοὶ κάμψει πᾶν γόνυ) and every tongue shall acknowledge God (ἐξομολογήσεται πᾶσα γλῶσσα τῷ θεῷ).'[19]

With this allusion to a decidedly monotheistic passage, it seems that the wider literary frame of Isa 40–55 is already evoked. We note here in particular, however, the statement about the words of God and their efficacy: οἱ λόγοι μου οὐκ ἀποστραφήσονται (Isa 45:23) (though they do not appear in the allusion marker in Phil 2:10–11).

2.2. Phil 2:12

The next allusion McAuley discusses is in Phil 2:12.[20] He sees in the language of Phil 2:12 (μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου) a probable allusion to Ps 2:11 (δουλεύσατε τῷ κυρίῳ ἐν φόβῳ καὶ ἀγαλλιᾶσθε αὐτῷ ἐν τρόμῳ). But this case is much less sure, as the collocation is commonly used by Paul,[21] could point to various scriptural contexts,[22] and is used in different senses.[23] Hence, we will not consider it further for our purposes.

2.3. Phil 2:14

An important scriptural resonance, however, occurs in Phil 2:14 (χωρὶς γογγυσμῶν).[24] As is often noted, this harks back to a tradition about "murmuring" of the people of Israel in the desert against their leaders, especially Moses. The lexemes γογγυσμός and γογγύζειν occur frequently in the Exodus narrative. Often, a lack of water to drink is the immediate cause of murmuring,[25] for instance in Exod 17:3 (ἐγόγγυζεν ἐκεῖ ὁ λαὸς πρὸς Μωυσῆν).[26]

The murmuring is sometimes directed towards the leaders of Israel, but this indirectly implies the Lord, for instance in Num 14:27 (ἃ αὐτοὶ γογγύζουσιν ἐναντίον ἐμοῦ, τὴν γόγγυσιν τῶν υἱῶν Ισραηλ, ἣν ἐγόγγυσαν περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀκήκοα), where the Lord has heard the complaint against Moses and Aaron. But it can also directly be used as a complaint against God, such as in Num 14:29 (ὅσοι ἐγόγγυσαν ἐπ᾽ ἐμοί). The wider co-text contains the motifs of the name, of glory, and the Lord making an emphatic statement (Num 14:21 [ἀλλὰ ζῶ ἐγὼ καὶ ζῶν τὸ ὄνομά μου καὶ ἐμπλήσει ἡ δόξα κυρίου πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν]). The name and the glory are also important for Phil 2:10–11.[27] But, in particular, we should note the similarly emphatic statement of Isa 45:23 (to which Phil 2.10–11 alludes).[28]

In the reminiscence of the wilderness murmuring of Psalm 105:25 (ἐγόγγυσαν ἐν τοῖς σκηνώμασιν αὐτῶν), the motif of the word of God occurs in the co-text (οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν τῷ λόγῳ αὐτοῦ [Ps 105:24], cf. οὐκ εἰσήκουσαν τῆς φωνῆς κυρίου [Ps 105:25]).

The language of murmuring is also used in a context of disobedience, as a contrast to obedience to the word of God, and even trusting in a false word, for instance in Isa 30:12 LXX (Ὅτι ἠπειθήσατε τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις καὶ ἠλπίσατε ἐπὶ ψεύδει καὶ ὅτι ἐγόγγυσας καὶ πεποιθὼς ἐγένου ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ). In such a context, the language of sonship for the members of the people of Israel is put in question, as can be seen in Isa 30:9 (λαὸς ἀπειθής ἐστιν, υἱοὶ ψευδεῖς), in the co-text of Isa 30:12.

The language of sonship is used in Exod 4:22 in particular with regard to the people of Israel brought out from Egypt (Υἱὸς πρωτότοκός μου Ισραηλ). The term sonship in this sense is used normatively, with regard to maintaining a standard of obedience, which can in a sense be revoked, as might be the case in Deut 32:5 LXX (to which Phil 2:15 alludes).

In the same way, a connected passage, Isa 29:24 LXX, makes it clear that the contrast to murmuring is obedience (οἱ δὲ γογγύζοντες μαθήσονται ὑπακούειν). As the prophet speaks concretely about those who want to return to Egypt (Isa 30:2), he draws on the Exodus traditions, and calls in doubt the application of the language of sonship (Οὐαὶ τέκνα ἀποστάται [Isa 30:1]). Part of the cluster of motifs in the textual vicinity is the fear of God and the sanctification of the name of God (Isa 19:23: τὸν θεὸν τοῦ Ισραηλ φοβηθήσονται; ἁγιάσουσιν τὸ ὄνομά μου).

2.4. Phil 2:15

We will only mention in passing certain of the minor allusions proposed by scholars; for instance, in the statement ἵνα γένησθε ἄμεμπτοι (Phil 2:15), some have seen reference to Abraham in Gen 17:1 LXX (γίνου ἄμεμπτος).[29] More suggestive might be the frequent use of the language of ἄμεμπτος in Job as a characterisation of Job himself, which is interesting in view of his not complaining against God even though he is sorely tried. This makes him a kind of contrast figure to the people murmuring in the wilderness. In Wis 16:21, Aaron is allusively characterised as a blameless man (ἀνὴρ ἄμεμπτος), which looks back to the episode in Num 16:41–50, following the challenge to the leadership of Moses and Aaron cited above.

We now turn to one of the major literary allusions in our passage, which has often been discussed.[30] The words of Phil 2:15 (τέκνα θεοῦ ἄμωμα μέσον γενεᾶς σκολιᾶς καὶ διεστραμμένης) recall Deut 32:5:

> ἡμάρτοσαν οὐκ αὐτῷ τέκνα μωμητά, γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη
>
> "blemished children, not his, have sinned, a generation, crooked and perverse"[31]

The extent of the alluding text is debated, but the formulation γενεᾶς σκολιᾶς καὶ διεστραμμένης clearly evokes γενεὰ σκολιὰ καὶ διεστραμμένη in Deut 32:5 LXX. A similar formulation also occurs at Deut 32:20 LXX (γενεὰ ἐξεστραμμένη ἐστίν), where the application of the language of sonship is similarly cast in doubt (υἱοί, οἷς οὐκ ἔστιν πίστις ἐν αὐτοῖς).

Furthermore, the use of the language of τέκνα θεοῦ ἄμωμα in Phil 2:15 contrasts with the οὐκ αὐτῷ τέκνα μωμητά of Deut 32:5. Some manuscripts of Phil 2:15 read ἀμώμητα instead of ἄμωμα, offering a more direct contrast to the wording of Deuteronomy, though the two variants are semantically close.[32] The variant can be interpreted as an adaptation to strengthen the link to Deut 32:5 and hence as evidence that ancient readers recognised the allusion.[33] It is also possible, that the variant is a result of a different *Vorlage*, the action of memory, or due to the transformation from a negative statement into a positive one. The addition of θεοῦ to τέκνα seems to make explicit what on one possible reading of Deut 32:5 is in contrast with οὐκ αὐτῷ [sc. θεῷ, SD, cf. θεός in Deut 32:4 as the subject] τέκνα. It also perhaps expands the sense of sonship as a metaphor for the people of God implicit in Exod 4:22.

2.5. Phil 2:16

The allusion in Phil 2:15 is to the song of Moses in Deut 32, one of the more well-known passages towards the end of the Pentateuch.[34] This is not the only resonance, however. Phil 2:12–18 also resonates at further points with the song of Moses, as Allen (2017) already observed. For the language of λόγον ζωῆς in Phil 2:16 overlaps at multiple points with the language used after the song of Moses in Deut 32, which will be worth considering in more detail. In Deut 32:46–47, the following exhortation is enjoined by Moses:

> "Pay heed with your heart to all these words (ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους) that I am testifying against you today, which things you shall command your sons, to guard and to perform all the words of this law (πάντας τοὺς λόγους τοῦ νόμου τούτου). 47 Because this is not an empty word for you (οὐχὶ λόγος κενὸς οὗτος ὑμῖν), since it is your very life (αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν), and through this word (ἕνεκεν τοῦ λόγου τούτου) you shall live long in the land into which you are crossing over the Jordan there to inherit."[35]

Here, the words spoken by Moses in one day, according to the literary setting of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut 1:3), including the Song of Moses (Deut 32:1–43), are to be kept and held on to. The words of this law—or, in a summative phrase, this word (λόγος … οὗτος; τοῦ λόγου τούτου [Deut 32:47])—are identified as the very life of the hearers, that according to which their life is to be lived (αὕτη ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν [Deut 32:47]). The phrase λόγος ζωῆς as applied to this "testament" of Moses would neatly sum up the point of Deut 32:47 and the point of the exhortation at the end is that they keep it and hold on to it (cf. φυλάσσειν καὶ ποιεῖν [Deut 32:47]). Thus, the phrase λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες in Phil 2:16 seems strongly to resonate also with this aspect of the Song of Moses, as Allen has observed.[36]

Perhaps the narrative context of the entering in the land hinted in Deut 32:47 ("crossing over the Jordan there to inherit") could be correlated with the opponents envisaged in Philippians.[37] In the larger literary unit of our passage, Phil 1:27–2:18, they figure, for instance, in Phil 1:28 (μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων).[38] Recognising such an allusion would be an example for a meaning potential at the level of larger narrative configurations, which could be activated in an interpretation of Phil 2:12–18.

Rather than being simply an element of Paul's Mosaic self-characterisation, the entire constellation would then be relevant for a comparison with Paul: as Moses towards the end of his life and before the promised land speaks the words of life to be held on to by the people of God as their vocation without fear in the light of opponents, so now does Paul, facing possible death in prison, speak the words of the gospel which the Christ followers in Philippi, without fear in the face of opposition, are called to hold on to and to hold forth.

The resonance of Deut 32:47 brought to bear in Phil 2:16 is also interesting in light of the motif of κενός which qualifies the contrast in Deut 32:47 between a word which brings life and a word which is empty.[39] Though the language of κενός is used differently in Phil 2:16 (οὐκ εἰς κενὸν ἔδραμον οὐδὲ εἰς κενὸν ἐκοπίασα), as it probably alludes to Isa 49:4 (and Isa 65:4), its presence in Deut 32:47 should also be noted. A word that is empty is one that does not bear out in effects in the life of those to whom it is addressed. In the case of Moses, the consequence is the threat of exile (cf. Deut 32:26). In the case of Paul, it would mean that the work that began in Philippi is not completed and the grounds for mutual boasting on the day of judgment falls away.[40]

The language of λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες in Phil 2:16, however, might also resonate with the book of Daniel, once the more explicit allusion to Dan 12:3 already in Phil 2:15 is recognised.[41] For the language of ἐν οἷς φαίνεσθε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ in Phil 2:15 probably alludes to Dan 12:3 OG:[42]

> "And those who are intelligent (οἱ συνιέντες) will light up like the luminaries of heaven (φανοῦσιν ὡς φωστῆρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), and those who strengthen my words (οἱ κατισχύοντες τοὺς λόγους μου) will be as the stars of heaven (τὰ ἄστρα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) forever and ever".[43]

While the connection of Phil 2:15 with Dan 12:3 is frequently observed, the further, secondary, link with Phil 2:16 is less often noted.[44] But, of course, λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες in Phil 2:16 and οἱ κατισχύοντες τοὺς λόγους μου in Dan 12:3 OG are further possible resonances. The semantic ranges of ἐπέχοντες and κατισχύοντες share some similar territory at least on certain interpretations.[45] Interestingly, it seems that both standard interpretations of ἐπέχοντες in Phil 2:15, holding fast and holding forth, could be semantically seen as allusively parallel to κατισχύοντες, either as making the words stronger in the way they are held or in the way they are presented to others.

The motif of the word (λόγος) would then appear both in the surface text of Phil 2:15, but also in the co-text of the passages alluded to in Phil 2:10–18, namely Isa 45:23, Deut 32:47 (co-text of Dan 32:5), and Dan 12:3. This would be an example for an interaction between the intertexts, or a shared thematic overlap in the metaleptic meaning potential.

The meaning of the allusion to Dan 12:3 in Phil 2:15 is controversial, though the general import seems clear. The comparison of the language of φανεῖν ὡς φωστῆρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Dan 12:3) and φανεῖν ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ (Phil 2:15) indicates a subtle change (or a different memory), if this wording was indeed in the *Vorlage*. The word φωστήρ could be used simply of a lamp or it could refer to the "lamps" in the night sky, the stars (cf. Gen 1:14 LXX). The word κόσμος could be used to refer to the universe as a whole or just to the sky or to the world.[46] The phrase ἐν κόσμῳ could thus either be part of the description of the source of the figurative language ("shine like stars in the universe"), or of the language used in applying the figurative language ("shine like stars" or "shine like lights") in the world, among the people who by implication are in the dark like the night sky or the darkness in absence of lights.[47]

At the level of the application of the imagery, it is debated whether specifically missionary activity is implied (speaking the word of the gospel, cf. Phil 1:14 τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν) or whether it is more broadly about a life-style and behaviour (which may include words of proclaiming the gospel), or even whether the image is merely used as contrastive without specific determination.[48]

The final allusion that is discussed by McAuley and others, and at which we hinted already, concerns the language of εἰς κενὸν τρέχειν (aor. ἔδραμον) and εἰς κενὸν κοπιᾶν (Phil 2:15). It is frequently recognised that allusion is made to Isa 49:4:

> But I said, "I have labored vainly (Κενῶς ἐκοπίασα), and I have given my strength in vain (εἰς μάταιον) and for nothing (εἰς οὐθὲν); therefore my judgment is with the Lord (ἡ κρίσις μου παρὰ κυρίῳ), and my toil before my God."[49]

There is some linguistic variation here (the adverb κενῶς instead of the prepositional phrase εἰς κενὸν; the prepositional construction, however, occurs in the semantically near parallels εἰς μάταιον or εἰς οὐθὲν). There are other possible candidates for the allusion (e.g., Isa 65:23), which is why McAuley argues for this reference specifically.[50] Note that the theme of judgment (κρίσις) would resonate with the implicit judgment envisaged in the day of the Christ in Phil 2:16 (εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ).[51] In its own literary context, these words are spoken by the figure of the servant.

Also, Isa 65:23 resonates with the language used in Phil 2:16:

> And my chosen ones shall not labor in vain (οὐ κοπιάσουσιν εἰς κενὸν), nor bear children for a curse, because they are an offspring blessed by God.

In Isa 65 the literary context speaks of an eschatological new creation.

3. The Nature of the Composite Intertext and Its Resonances as Functions of Pragmatic Aspects

In this section, we consider the composite nature of the intertext that Paul evokes in Phil 2:12–18. The co-texts of the evoked passages have meaning potentials—thematic, narrative (e.g., related to a figure), or others. These might be brought to bear *separately* on an interpretation of Phil 2:12–18, which would postulate some selection of them as activated and suggest their pragmatic import.[52]

However, in the case of the intertexts evoked in Phil 2:12–18, a fuller type of interpretation seems possible, which considers the meaning potential of the intertexts *concurrently*. There are certain interconnections between the resonances which result in an overall composite intertext.

In this section, we consider some of the meaning potential of these interconnections, which are textual–literary relations. Only in the next section will we consider how an interpretation might stipulate some of them as activated (though there will be advance hints already in this section).

3.1. Literary Relations between the Intertexts

For the purpose of this first step, the evaluation of the simultaneous metaleptic potential, we will consider larger literary units, such as Deut 32 OG and Isaiah 40–55 OG (as Paul alludes explicitly to Isa 45 and Isa 49 and thereby also activates larger contexts).[53] While Paul will not have considered Isa 40–55 a literary unit in the way modern scholarship sees it,[54] there is still some merit in assuming that the servant motifs and the thematic *inclusio* concerning the word of God might have made this a recognisable unit.[55]

We begin by a consideration of Deuteronomy 32 and Deutero-Isaiah, two texts that figure prominently in the scriptural reservoir on which Paul draws.[56] While Paul alludes to both of these larger texts in Phil 2:10–2:18, the relations between these evoked texts deserve study with regard to the meaning potential that could be activated by a reading of Phil 2:10–18 attuned to the simultaneous presence and interaction of the allusions.

There are strong thematic and literary resonances between Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah.[57] We will focus here on the links between Deut 32 and Isa 40–55.[58] There are the statements of divine incomparability and exclusive monotheism in Deut 32:39 OG (ἴδετε ἴδετε ὅτι ἐγώ εἰμι, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλὴν ἐμοῦ) and in Isa 45:22 OG (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ θεός, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος), in the immediate vicinity of Isa 45:23, to which Phil 2:10–11 alludes.[59] The kind of divine "I am" statement found in Deut 32:39 OG (ἐγώ εἰμι) occurs frequently in Deutero-Isaiah, clustering especially around Isa 45.[60] While the phrase appears elsewhere, only here does it occur in "YHWH's own self-presentation."[61] This monotheistic context is important in view of the quotation of Isa 45:23 in Phil 2:10–11. Some strong links between Deutero-Isaiah and Deuteronomy are not apparent in the Greek translation, but only show up in the Hebrew.[62] Note also that the references to God as faithful in Deut 32:4 (θεὸς πιστός) are matched by Isa 49:7 (πιστός ἐστιν ὁ ἅγιος Ισραηλ).[63] Further points of contact between the textual traditions of Deutero-Isaiah and Deut 32, as discussed by Kim, are the exodus (and new exodus) motif of the wing of the eagles,[64] the call to heaven and earth[65], the call to remember the days of old,[66] idol polemics,[67] and the vengeance motif,[68] where these last two are less pertinent for Philippians.

Of potential relevance for Philippians, however, is a further link between Deut 32 and Deutero-Isaiah, namely the language about the servant and the servants.[69] It is used in the plural in Deut 32:36 (ἐπὶ τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ παρακληθήσεται) and in the MT it also occurs in Deut 32:43,[70] while it occurs frequently in Deutero-Isaiah, especially in the servant songs.[71] Some have suggested that Deutero-Isaiah derives its conception of the "servant" from Deut 32.[72] Incidentally, the notion of the servant is also interesting in view of Dan 12:3, to which, as discussed above, Phil 2:16 alludes.[73] Indeed, the literary context of Dan 12:1–3 seems influenced by the servant passages from Deutero-Isaiah at multiple points.[74] Noteworthy with regard to Phil 2:12–18 (in the wider context of the letter) is the theme of discernment,[75] and the motif of shining like stars,[76] among others.[77]

3.2. The Word of God in the Intertexts

A further strong link between Deut 32 and Deutero-Isaiah concerns the motif of the word of God. Indeed, the motif of the word (λόγος, ῥῆμα) appears in a load-bearing fashion in the wider co-text of three of the evoked passages (Isa 40–55 evoked by Isa 45:23 and 49:4; Deut 32 evoked by Deut 32:5 (cf. Deut 32:47), and Dan 12:3),[78] but is also present in the surface text of Phil 2:12–18, namely in Phil 2:16 (λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες).

In the case of Deut 32, the motif does not appear in the "marked" of the allusion (Deut 32.5).[79] But it is very prominent both in the beginning of the song of Moses (Deut 32:1 [λαλήσω; ῥήματα ἐκ στόματός μου]; 32:2 [τὸ ἀπόφθεγμά μου; τὰ ῥήματά μου])[80] and immediately after the song, in passage framing of its intended reception[81] (Deut 32:44 [πάντας τοὺς λόγους τοῦ νόμου τούτου]; Deut 32:46 [προσέχετε τῇ καρδίᾳ ἐπὶ πάντας τοὺς λόγους τούτους]; Deut 32:47 [οὐχὶ λόγος κενὸς οὗτος ὑμῖν; ἕνεκεν τοῦ λόγου τούτου]).[82] And it also corresponds to the wider genre of Deuteronomy, being a song spoken in poetic recapitulation of the giving of the law as a way of life in the context of the desert wanderings, towards the end of life of Moses, as indicated in the literary frame.[83]

The word of God is also central in prophetic texts. Within Deutero-Isaiah, the motif of the words of God occurs in a context of God being the speaker in Isa 45:23 (ἐξελεύσεται ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου δικαιοσύνη, οἱ λόγοι μου οὐκ ἀποστραφήσονται).[84] These words are not in the alluding marker of Phil 2:10–11, but are important in the pre-text.[85] Further, note the occurrence in Isa 51:16 (θήσω τοὺς λόγους μου εἰς τὸ στόμα σου), again God being the speaker, addressing his people in Jerusalem.[86] At the beginning of Deutero-Isaiah, the motif occurs in Isa 40:8 (τὸ δὲ ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). It further appears, now thematising the supportive relation of God to the servant with regard to his words, in Isa 44:26 (ἱστῶν ῥήματα παιδὸς αὐτοῦ). But, notably, it can also be found towards the end of Deutero-Isaiah, in Isa 55:11, forming a kind of *inclusio* with Isa 40:8:

> "[S]o shall my word be (οὕτως ἔσται τὸ ῥῆμά μου), whatever goes out from my mouth (ὃ ἐὰν ἐξέλθῃ ἐκ τοῦ στόματός μου); it shall not return (οὐ μὴ ἀποστραφῇ) until whatever I have willed is fulfilled (ἕως ἂν συντελεσθῇ ὅσα ἠθέλησα)"[87]

The promise of the efficacy of God's word and the language of fulfilment (συντελεσθῇ) resonates with the further context of Philippians. Phil 2:12–13 envisages a kind of synergy between divine and human action, which is geared to the fulfilment of divine purpose. The holding fast or forth of the word of life in Phil 2:16 also stresses the confidence in the fulfilment of divine purpose, not least in an eschatological frame (cf. already in Phil 1:6 [ὁ ἐναρξάμενος ἐν ὑμῖν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐπιτελέσει ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ]). It is notable that the motif of joy occurs in Isa 55:12, immediately following the passage cited above, just as also Phil 2:17–18 ends in a note of joy.[88]

While Isa 55 is of course not alluded to directly in Phil 2:12–18, the argument here turns on the claim that an allusion may evoke a larger co-text and hence prominent themes within it. And in the case of several intertexts, the interactions between them might further emphasise a shared motif like the word of God, which is even more plausible given its presence in the alluding text (Phil 2:16). In this regard, an interesting example for such an interaction among the evoked texts is the link between the Song of Moses and Isa 55 provided by the simile of the rain in connection with the word of God.

For the beginning of the song of Moses appeals to sky and earth to listen to the words of Moses (ῥήματα ἐκ στόματός μου [Deut 32:1 OG]; τὸ ἀπόφθεγμά μου; τὰ ῥήματά μου [Deut 32:2 OG]) and compares their reception with rain (ὑετός), dew, (δρόσος), a rainstorm (ὄμβρος), and a snowstorm (νιφετός). While in Deut 32 this description is not applied directly to the words of God, but to those of Moses, this difference should not be pressed too strongly. Moses speaks prophetically and Deuteronomy offers itself as a presentation of words of God spoken through Moses to Israel.[89] In Isa 55, however, the prophetic words are presented as direct divine speech.[90] The effect of the words of God is compared with respect to its inevitability (and possibly fruitfulness) with rain (ὑετός) and snow (χιών) falling from the sky (Isa 55:10), the immediate context for correlative "so shall my word be" in Isa 55:11 (οὕτως ἔσται τὸ ῥῆμά μου).

As we have seen in Section 2, the motif of the word of God also occurs in the context of the murmuring traditions.[91]

Finally, the motif of the word of God is also important in Dan 12:3 OG (οἱ κατισχύοντες τοὺς λόγους μου), though it does not appear in the rendering of Theodotion (which reads instead ἀπὸ τῶν δικαίων τῶν πολλῶν). As McAuley has shown, it is likely that Paul interacts with a version similar to Dan 12:3 OG in alluding to it in Phil 2:15–16.[92] In the

wider context of the book of Daniel, λόγος and ῥῆμα are used, but not in connection with a word of God, so that Dan 12:3 appears singular in its reference to the words of God.[93] In the case of Dan 12:3 the motif of the word of God appears in the "marked", though not in the marker, unless Phil 2:16 (λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες) is seen as alluding to it.[94]

4. Suggestions towards a Coherent Overall Pragmatics

In this section, we draw together our close textual observations and analyse their possible contribution to a coherent pragmatics of the passage.

In the following, I will argue for a specific interpretation of the contribution of the simultaneously evoked intertexts in Phil 2:10–18. That is, I will argue for a selection from the metaleptic meaning potential that I ascribe to Paul's awareness and perhaps communicative intent.[95] To make this more definite, I will first sketch a hypothesis about the pragmatic setting (Section 4.1). Next, I will show that the overall constellation of Paul and his audience in relation to the gospel vocation is relevant for the pragmatics and for the metaleptic meaning contribution from the intertexts (Section 4.2). I will then propose that Paul is aware of the word of God theme in the metaleptic background and uses it for his own presentation of the gospel vocation of the Christ followers in Philippi (Section 4.3). Finally, I will suggest what this might reveal about Paul's scripturally sourced reflections upon his vocation (Section 4.4).

4.1. The Pragmatic Setting

To give more specificity to a sketch of the overall pragmatics, I will outline here my assumptions about Paul's context for Phil 2:12–18.[96] There are five steps.

First, the general outline of Paul and his task in relation to the task of the Christ followers in Philippi. Paul sees it as his fundamental task to live in such a way that his life displays the meaning of the Christ event. As apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13), he further wants to establish and promote groups of Christ followers, who live in the same missional way.[97] In Philippians, this is collaboration in terms of a gospel work, which is also seen as God working in them, towards the completion in the eschaton, is clearly present in Phil 1:6, but also in Phil 1:11. Furthermore, it is stated clearly in Phil 1:27, which rhetorically constitutes a thesis statement, providing a title for the whole section that follows (Phil 1:27–2:18).[98] Living a life worthy of the gospel (μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε) means producing appropriate signs with all of one's life's actions.[99]

Second, Paul's specific situation in writing this passage. Paul is imprisoned, perhaps in Ephesus, and faces the possibility that he might die, as he lets on in Phil 2:17.[100]

Third, his concerns in this situation. This situation prompts specific reflections about on his own vocation and, relatedly, about the vocation of the Christ followers in Philippi. These together are the immediate context for understanding Phil 2:12–18.

Fourth, regarding the vocation of the Philippians. With regard to the Philippians, this means that Paul wants to prepare them for the possibility of his demise. This might entail consoling them anticipatorily but, more importantly, for his concerns, preparing them to be able to live faithfully even after his death, in such a way that the eschatological judgment about their faithful vocational life and his leadership in this respect is positive.[101] This message has a double function.[102] In case of a positive outcome, with which Paul seems to reckon, this message will encourage them in the way to proceed even if Paul further guides them. In the case of an adverse outcome, which Paul thinks is possible, the writing would be akin to a testamentary writing with instructions for living.[103] This might explain the character of a testament of our passage, or least its exhibiting certain features of the genre.[104]

Fifth, concerning his own vocation. The prospect of Paul's death probably prompts reflections about his own vocation and what his death might mean about achieving his hopes or missing the goal.

4.2. The Overall Constellation

In this section I argue that one of the aspects of the metaleptic meaning contribution of the intertexts evoked in Phil 2:12–18 of which Paul is aware is a certain overall constellation, which is found analogously in Deut 32, Deutero-Isaiah, and Dan 12, and fits with the basic pragmatics of Phil 1:27–2:18 even without the recognition of the scriptural resonances.

Throughout Phil 1:27–2:18, Paul is concerned with his own vocation, but also with that of the Christ followers in Philippi and their interrelation.[105] If this is the case, then the activation of the metaleptic potential brought to bear on a fuller interpretation of the passage should also make its specific contribution in terms of an entire constellation, and not just individual aspects such as the identity of either Paul or the Philippians in isolation.

Thus, while the evoked texts imply an analogy between Paul and Moses (Deuteronomy),[106] Paul's construction of identity as such is not itself the point.[107] In the same way, while the evoked texts imply an analogy between the Christ followers in Philippi and Israel in the narratives of the wilderness,[108] the determination of the nature of the Philippian Christ followers' relation to the people of Israel is not as such the pragmatic issue.[109] Rather, the primary pragmatic concern of the passage is, I suggest, the gospel vocation of the community and Paul's role in shaping the life of the communities that this requires. His concern is that their vocation to display Christ in their lives succeeds.[110]

He discerns actual adversity or expects likely opposition to their living of this calling. The implicit comparison with the wilderness murmuring tradition does indeed cast the community in Philippi in a role analogous to the people of Israel in the desert (though in a different eschatological era).[111] But the point is not to explore their identity vis-à-vis Israel but to exhort them to a proper way of life in their circumstances, in which similar temptations might arise.

Again, whether Paul sees analogies between himself and Moses, the figure of the servant, or the Danielic wise men as an aspect of self-understanding or presentation is not the pragmatic point of the passage. Nor should it then be the point of the meaning contribution from a fuller recognition of the activated metaleptic meaning potential in an interpretation.[112]

Rather, the shared meaning potential of the evoked texts (Deut 32, Deutero-Isaiah, and Dan 12) includes as an overall constellation the relation between a leader figure (Moses, the servant, or the group of the understanding ones)[113] and the wider people of God, set in a contested environment, which influences some of the people of God. In all these cases, there is a dialectic between the fulfilment of the purpose of the leadership figure and the life led by the group to which the leader figure is connected.

It is likely that Paul is aware of this constellation within the metaleptic landscape of his evoked texts. Since this constellation fits with his own relationship with the Philippians, it seems probable that Paul is not only aware of it but that it even forms part of his communicative intent for his hearers.[114]

4.3. The Role of the Word of God

The phrase in which the motif occurs in Phil 2:16 (λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες) is of central importance for Phil 2:12–18, but also for the entire sweep of Phil 1:27–2:18.[115]

Its interpretation leaves room for debates, especially about the semantics of ἐπέχειν,[116] about the question of whether a missional aspect is in view or not, and, if so, in what form,[117] and about the verb which the participial phrase is supposed to modify.[118]

The phrase λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες belongs to the semantic level of a life worthy of the gospel as indicated in the crucial summary phrase in Phil 1:27 (μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε; συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου), and which via Phil 1:30 recalls both Paul's description of his current plight with a view to the gospel in Phil 1:12–26, and before that Phil 1:5 and Phil 1:10–11. In the light of Phil 1:14 (τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν), the words λόγον ζωῆς of Phil 2:16 almost certainly refer to the gospel.[119]

What is in view, however, is not simply proclamation of the word about Christ, but an entire way of life that proclaims the gospel (which includes verbal proclamation).[120] In

the wider co-text, this becomes clear from the comprehensive meaning of Phil 1:27 (ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε), in the immediate co-text, from the fact that an instruction like Phil 1:14 aims at a way of conduct which leads to holiness and unity in the face of adversity, which itself produces signs of the gospel. Furthermore, the designation as "blameless children of God" (Phil 2:15) opens a dialectic process between a gift and a task which is fulfilled in life's actions. This behaviour itself is missional. It is oriented towards the word of life and itself a life that proclaims the word.[121]

In recent literature, it has been recognised that λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες might also be an important allusion. McAuley has heard the allusion to Dan 12:3.[122] Allen has noticed the allusion to Deut 32:46–47. I would like to suggest that these are both true. Furthermore, the motif of the word of God, both in the wider context of Deutero-Isaiah and in the murmuring traditions, which we have analysed, should be added here as well. This cumulative case speaks for understanding λόγον ζωῆς really as "word of life" here.[123]

This, then, is the vocation of the Philippian Christ followers; Paul's vocation is directly related with this. For Paul intends the Philippians to live congruently with his interpretation of the gospel, and sees it as his own role to promote and encourage such a kind of missional life in his communities. In particular, this is concretised in conditions of adversity, opposition, suffering, and perhaps internal strain over these challenges.

Here, there is an interesting parallel element in the wider setting of the evoked texts. In the case of Deut 32, the words Moses gives in the song are supposed to guide a way of life of the addressed people of Israel, to which the leading figure exhorts them (Deut 32:46–47), as their way of living in a manner pleasing to God, in a context of outsiders who tempt some in the group not to live up to their vocation. In the case of Dan 12:3, though the setting is an eschatological future, the figures of the wise ones are supposed to teach many of the people, again in a context of fierce opposition and various positions within the group against that opposition. Finally, in Deutero-Isaiah, the role of the servant is to lead many others to a righteousness, in which the understanding and instruction in a way of just living are important (cf. Isa 52:13 OG; Isa 53:11 OG).

In all three situations and constellations from the evoked texts, as well as the situation and constellation for Philippians, the word of God is of central importance. The song of Moses, the Isaianic oracles, the instructions of the Danielic wise ones, and also Paul's exhortation to life worthy of the gospel are all deeply rooted in the words of God which mediate vocational life in the eschatological present.

4.4. Drawing on Scriptural Memory

The evoked texts seem to attest to Scripture's role in Paul's personal reflections about his vocation and its achievement, which his imprisonment occasioned. This need not be imagined as a process of consulting scrolls (which might not be available), but as a matter of reflection from scripturally sourced memory. It seems very likely that Paul would have known Deut 32, substantial portions of Deutero-Isaiah, and probably also Dan 12 by heart.

In thinking about the rejection of his message, and possibly also his less-than-ideal court proceedings, Paul perhaps reflected on the word of God and its efficacy. He would already identify the gospel about Christ with the concrete shape of the word of God in the end times, a word spoken in advance in Scripture about Christ and those who belong to him. And this word, the gospel, is to be what shapes their vocation, the way of life to which Paul exhorts them, possibly as a kind of "testament".[124]

5. Conclusions

To conclude, I would like to offer the following brief observations.

First, it seems worthwhile further to investigate the *simultaneous* activation of various scriptural intertexts in Pauline letters.

Second, it seems advisable to distinguish between the metaleptic meaning potential of one or more intertexts, tracing the literary connections, the postulated activations (and

their pragmatic import) of some elements from this meaning potential in an interpretation of either Paul's thought or his first audiences (or some other hermeneutical locus).

Third, Paul's allusions in Phil 2:12–18 evoke longer passages of Scripture, in particular Deuteronomy, Deutero-Isaiah, and Daniel, in which a constellation between a leader and a group who have a vocation to be faithful to a word of God in a contested environment is particularly prominent. This fits with Paul's own situation with regard to the Philippians.

Fourth, a connecting thread in the evoked texts from Deuteronomy, Deutero-Isaiah, and Daniel is the motif of the word of God. With the phrase λόγον ζωῆς ἐπέχοντες (Phil 2:16), Paul alludes to this motif and in particular to Dan 12:3 and Deut 32:46–47. Hence, attention to the simultaneous presence of several scriptural intertexts seems to offer a glimpse of Paul's scripturally sourced vocational reflection.

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Notes

1 For a recent overview see (Standhartinger 2023).

2 Though Lincicum (2017, p. 15) diagnoses "a kind of interpretative exhaustion as the quest for fainter and fainter echoes of Scripture in Paul's letters is met with diminishing returns".

3 Cf. (Hays 1989, pp. 21–24). For critical engagement with Hays' critics, see (Lucas 2014).

4 (Fee 1995, pp. 242–43). Blois (2020, p. 131) finds in Phil 2:12–18 an "abrupt eruption of Scriptural language".

5 McAuley (2015) (who begins his analysis with Phil 2:10 and its allusion to Isa 45:23).

6 (Allen 2017).

7 Cf. the similar questions posed by (McAuley 2015, p. 50).

8 The language of resonances seeks to avoid entrenched paths in the debate. For its use see already (Hays 1989, pp. 20–21; Wagner 2003, p. 18).

9 In the following, "metaleptical" will be used in its usual sense to refer to elements from the co-text of the alluded-to words in an evoked text, which might be brought to bear upon the interpretation of the alluding text. This usage has been established in the wake of Hays' reception of the notion of "metalepsis" from the work of the literary critic John Hollander on echoes in Milton and others (Hollander 1981) for his seminal study of scriptural echoes in Paul (Hays 1989). For Hays, the function of metalepsis is "to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed" (1989, p. 20). Cf. (Lucas 2014, p. 95; McAuley 2015, pp. 25–26). The notion and its application have been debated; for a refutation of its refutations, see (Lucas 2014).

10 To distinguish textual context from cultural setting, I use the term "co-text" for the text surrounding a textual unit (cf. Eco 1990, p. 215).

11 This is similar to the first three hermeneutical *loci* discussed by (Hays 1989, p. 26). Cf. also (Lucas 2014, p. 95).

12 This relates to the broader question of (McAuley 2015, p. 50): "What special consideration, if any, should be given to the interpretation of a cluster of successive allusions?" What Wagner (2006, p. 102) has observed for Romans might similarly apply to Philippians, as we will see: "Paul combines Isaiah's oracles with words drawn from Deut 29–32 in such a way that each text (and often its wider context) influences Paul's reading of the other. In each case, it is the interplay between the two texts that proves decisive for Paul's argument".

13 For his conclusion on the centrality of suffering as part of the "rhetorical situation," see (McAuley 2015, pp. 159–60, 162). For his use of this as a criterion to assess allusions, see (McAuley 2015, pp. 58–60).

14 For a minimalist position on what Paul's gentile hearers might have understood based on general considerations of literacy and access to books in the ancient world, see (Stanley 1999) (and in revised form (Stanley 2004, pp. 38–61)). Stanley argues that since

Paul's audiences were mostly illiterate and did not have access to the Greek versions of Israel's Scriptures, they were mostly unable to understand the quotations, let alone allusions to Scripture in Paul's argument. For a convincing critique of Stanley's approach, see (Abasciano 2007), who faults Stanley for making audiences criterial in the first place, for arguing illegitimately from absence of evidence, and for focusing on the isolated individual, instead of envisaging a community of readers and re-readers of a text, to which they would have obtained access given its value to them. For Abasciano it is probable "that Paul would have expected the leaders of his churches to grasp his scriptural allusions and their import for his arguments" (2007, p. 170). Similarly, and specifically for Philippians, (Öhler 2017) comes to a positive assessment of the scriptural competency of Paul's audiences.

15 I use "song of the Messiah" as a term here for what is often called the Philippian hymn or the Christ hymn, where song is supposed to capture some of the poetic or elevated prose language used, without committing to technical features of ancient Greek hymns. The designation Messiah simply hints at the natural interpretation of Christ language (cf. Novenson 2012). As a brief and traditional designator, I will also use "hymn". For the discussion of the questions of genre, see (Standhartinger 2021, pp. 152–56).

16 On this passage as a unit, see (Standhartinger 2021, p. 127).

17 See, for instance, the discussion of (Wojtkowiak 2012, pp. 159–63).

18 This gives rise to some tricky semiotic issues. No doubt "for one so steeped in the language of Scripture as Paul, he was bound to express himself in ways that subconsciously echoed scriptural texts on a regular basis without any metaleptic intentions" (Lucas 2014, p. 95). Nevertheless, in this case, the metaleptic background seems to add further depth in thematic congruence with the overall direction of Paul's pragmatic intentions.

19 Transl. M. Silva (NETS).

20 (McAuley 2015, pp. 178–87).

21 1 Cor 2:3, 2 Cor 7:15, cf. Eph 6:5.

22 Gen 9:2; Exod 15:16; Deut 2:25; 11:25; Judth 2:28, 15:2; 1 Macc 7:18; 4 Macc 4:10; Ps 2:11; 54:6; Isa 19:16; Dan 4:37a (all references to the LXX).

23 McAuley (2015, pp. 184–87) offers a fuller discussion of the evidence and suggests as a contribution of the allusion to Ps 2 in Phil 2:12 that Paul's "purpose in using the expression 'fear and trembling' is … to evoke Ps 2 to emphasise the call to allegiance in the face of opposition" (2015, p. 186).

24 McAuley does not treat γογγυσμός in Phil 2:14 as an allusion, but discusses the Septuagint's use of γογγύζειν (2015, p. 134). Allen (2017, p. 137) treats it as an allusion to the wilderness experience.

25 Cf. Exod 17:1 (οὐκ ἦν δὲ ὕδωρ τῷ λαῷ πιεῖν).

26 Though, sometimes, the sense is generic and the complaint directly against the Lord, as at Taberah (Num 11:1 [ἦν ὁ λαὸς γογγύζων πονηρὰ ἔναντι κυρίου]).

27 Cf. also when at Num 17:6 once more the leadership of Moses and Aaron is questioned (ἐγόγγυσαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ισραηλ … ἐπὶ Μωυσῆν καὶ Ααρων), charging them with killing the people of God (Ὑμεῖς ἀπεκτάγκατε τὸν λαὸν κυρίου), it is the glory of the Lord that protects them and the sanctuary from the charge (τήνδε ἐκάλυψεν αὐτὴν ἡ νεφέλη, καὶ ὤφθη ἡ δόξα κυρίου [Num 17:7 LXX]). Allen (2017, p. 137) makes the valuable observation with regard to Exod 17:7 that the "double mention of arguing and grumbling (Phil 2:14) parallels the dualism of Massah—Meribah", which corresponds to the "double mention of quarrelling and testing".

28 And see also a similar statement in Deut 32:40. But there is also an emphatic statement in Num 14:28 (Ζῶ ἐγώ, λέγει κύριος, ἢ μὴν ὃν τρόπον λελαλήκατε εἰς τὰ ὦτά μου, οὕτως ποιήσω ὑμῖν), which in this case is a threat to the generation that will have to remain in the desert and will not enter the land (cf. Num 14:30).

29 Noted by (Fee 1995, p. 244; Oakes 2000, p. 262; Blois 2020, p. 135).

30 See (McAuley 2015, pp. 198–211; Allen 2017, pp. 137–38). On the textual problems in Deut 32:5, see Bockmuehl 1997, p. 157. On the syntactic variants, see (Dogniez and Harl 1992, p. 323). Cf. also (Waters 2006, p. 153 n. 153).

31 Transl. Melvin K. H. Peters (NETS).

32 Cf. also the use of ἀμώμητοι in 2 Pet 3:14 (where some manuscripts offer the variant ἄμωμοι). The words are etymologically related (cf. Chantraine 1999, pp. 730–31 [s.v. μῶμος]). Allen (2017, p. 138) glosses ἄμωμα as "blameless" and ἀμώμητα as "without rebuke".

33 See also (Allen 2017, p. 138).

34 On the role of the last chapters of Deuteronomy for Paul, see (Waters 2006) (especially pp. 149–60 on Phil 2:15), also (Lincicum 2010). For scholarship on Paul and Deuteronomy, see (Lincicum 2008).

35 Translation Melvin K. H. Peters (NETS).

36 Cf. (Allen 2017, pp. 139–40). Given the allusion to Deut 32:5, the further allusion to Deut 32:47 seems more likely. For the exegetical options for this phrase, see Section 4.3.

37 For similar considerations, see (Allen 2017, pp. 137, 140–41).

[38] On the motif of fear with regard to entering the land, see for instance Num 14:6–10 (note also the motif of murmuring). For a similar observation with regard to Deut 11:25 and Phil 2:12, see (Allen 2017, p. 137).

[39] Cf. also (Allen 2017, p. 138).

[40] Cf. (Blois 2020, pp. 129–50).

[41] For a subtle exploration of the question of how detected allusions should influence the language used in translations of the alluding passages, using Phil 2:12–18 as a series of test cases, see (Oakes 2000).

[42] So (Oakes 2000, pp. 263–64; Schapdick 2011, pp. 187–88; Allen 2017, p. 136). For a detailed argument and his specific interpretative proposal, which differs from ours, see (McAuley 2015, pp. 212–25).

[43] Translation R. Timothy McLay (NETS). The version cited here is the Old Greek. The language of Theodotion is less close to Phil 2:15 (ἐκλάμψουσιν ὡς ἡ λαμπρότης τοῦ στερεώματος "shine like the splendor of the firmament" [trans. McLay]), though the "splendor of the firmament" probably still refers metonymically to stars.

[44] It is noted, however, by (Fee 1995, p. 247; Oakes 2000, p. 273; Schapdick 2011, p. 188 n. 300; McAuley 2015, pp. 216–17) (who also points to ζωή in Dan 12:2 OG).

[45] Note for instance how (Neef 2011, p. 3050) considers as possible German translations for οἱ κατισχύοντες τοὺς λόγους μου either "die, die meine Worte starkmachen" or "[die, die] an meinen Worten festhalten", where "festhalten" is the word used to translate ἐπέχοντες in the three standard German bible versions (Lutherübersetzung 2017; Zürcherbibel 2007; Einheitsübersetzung 2016).

[46] Cf. BDAG s.v.

[47] For a discussion of the translation issues see (Oakes 2000).

[48] Cf. also Mt 5:14. For McAuley, for instance, the language of "shine like the stars" is "not an appeal to evangelism" or "an abstracted exhortation to moral conduct" but "an eschatological prognosis that requires a steadfast refusal to capitulate under pressure in the tradition of the Danielic martyrs" (2015, p. 225). Wojtkowiak (2012, p. 164) detects only an emphasis on a contrast between the Philippians and their pagan neighbours. For Schapdick (2011), there is a missionary emphasis "mit dem der Bewährung christlicher Existenz Strahlkraft nach außen zugesprochen wird" (2011, pp. 187–88). Similarly, (Standhartinger 2021, p. 189).

[49] Transl. Moisés Silva (NETS).

[50] A close linguistic parallel can be found in the book of Job (2:9b εἰς τὸ κενὸν ἐκοπίασα; 39.16 εἰς κενὸν ἐκοπίασεν), but the thematic context is different (Job's wife giving birth; birth in the animal kingdom in Job 39). See also (Blois 2020, p. 147 n. 102). Note also that in Isa 45:18 the phrase occurs with God as subject (οὐκ εἰς κενὸν ἐποίησεν), in the vicinity of Isa 45:23 to which Phil 2:10–11 alludes. Cf. in Paul's letters Gal 2:2 (μή πως εἰς κενὸν τρέχω ἢ ἔδραμον), 1 Thess 3:5 (εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν). For McAuley, following Ben-Porat (1976), an allusion is always a relation between two texts (2015, p. 70). For its importance to Paul's own reflections about his vocation, see Gal 2:2, 3:4; 4:1; and 1 Cor 15:2; 15:58 (cf. Wright 2018, pp. 95–96 and 410–11; 2021, p. 276).

[51] Cf. Phil 1:6.

[52] For the language of "activation", cf. (Ben-Porat 1976, p. 109). Cf. for a similar approach to meaning potentials (in the context of early christology) (Bühner 2020).

[53] The connections between these prophetic texts in Paul's mind may be viewed in terms of a larger narrative, as (Wright 2013, p. 905) argues: "Paul frequently refers to his own ministry in terms of Isaiah 49. He seems not to have thought of the prophetic texts atomistically, as isolated fragments, but to have seen them—certainly these central chapters in Isaiah—as a seamless whole, more or less a continuous narrative".

[54] Though some scholars have questioned the boundary between Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah (cf. Kim 2016, pp. 2–4).

[55] In any case, at this point, we argue for a metaleptic meaning potential as a textual relation (not for a specific activation in an interpretation). For the thematic *inclusio* Isa 40:8 and Isa 55:11, see below.

[56] Cf. (Hays 1989, p. 162), where Isaiah and Deuteronomy contain the most frequently cited passages from Scripture (cf. also on Deut 32 in particular (Hays 1989, p. 30)). For Deutero-Isaiah and Deuteronomy being used "in concert", see (Wagner 2006).

[57] Cf. (Blenkinsopp 2002, pp. 51–54). The close literary links (or interaction) between the final form of Deutero-Isaiah and Deuteronomy are analysed, with reference to the MT, by (Kim 2004, esp. p. 167) (with an overview of results in a table). Cf. also (Wagner 2006).

[58] Cf. also (Blenkinsopp 2002, pp. 52–53).

[59] Cf. also Deut 32:39 OG (οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλὴν ἐμοῦ) with Isa 44:6 OG (πλὴν ἐμοῦ οὐκ ἔστι θεός) and Isa 45:14 OG (Οὐκ ἔστι θεὸς πλὴν σοῦ), in an acknowledgement by other nations, and Isa 45:21 OG (Ἐγὼ ὁ θεός, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλος πλὴν ἐμοῦ). Cf. further Dt 4:35, 39; and Isa 44:8; 45:5, 6, 21; 46:9 OG. For a more detailed analysis of the correspondences in the MT, see (Kim 2004, pp. 154–56).

[60] Cf. Is 41:4, 10; 43:10, 25; 45:8, 18, 19, 22; 46:4, 9; 48:12, 17; 51:12; 52:6; 61:8 OG. For a close analysis of the MT data, see (Kim 2004, pp. 154–56).

[61] (Kim 2004, p. 155).

62 The references to God as a rock (צור) occur within Deuteronomy only in Deut 32 MT (32:4, 15, 18, 30, 31, 37) and within Isaiah only at Isa 44:8 MT, but the Greek translation omits this designation or renders it as θεός. The name Jeshurun (ישׁרון) for Israel only occurs at Dt 32:15; 33:5, 26 MT, and in Is 44:2 MT, and is rendered as Ἰακὼβ, ὁ ἠγαπημένος, or ὁ ἠγαπημένος Ισραὴλ in the Greek translations. For a discussion of the connection, see (Kim 2004, pp. 161–62). Of course, Paul might have been aware of links in the Hebrew text as well.

63 Cf. Deut 7:9 (ὁ θεὸς ὁ πιστός). In the Hebrew, the verbal forms of Deut 7:9 (הנאמן) and Isa 49:7 (נאמן) are closer than the noun form used in Deut 32:4 (אמונה). Cf. also (Blenkinsopp 2002, p. 53).

64 In Deut 32:11 OG (ὡς ἀετὸς … διεὶς τὰς πτέρυγας αὐτοῦ ἐδέξατο αὐτούς καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτοὺς), cf. with Ex 19:4 (ἀνέλαβον ὑμᾶς ὡσεὶ ἐπὶ πτερύγων ἀετῶν) and Isa 40:31 OG (πτεροφυήσουσιν ὡς ἀετοί, δραμοῦνται καὶ οὐ κοπιάσουσι, βαδιοῦνται καὶ οὐ πεινάσουσιν), with a slightly different application (though note the meaning potential for Phil 2:16). For a detailed analysis of the MT, see (Kim 2004, p. 166).

65 In the song of Moses, this constitutes an *inclusio* (cf. Kim 2004, p. 167), in Deut 32:1 (Πρόσεχε, οὐρανέ, καὶ λαλήσω, καὶ ἀκουέτω ἡ γῆ ῥήματα ἐκ στόματός μου), with the theme of the words of God being prominent, and Deut 32:43 (εὐφράνθητε, οὐρανοί [though the MT reads 'nations' (גוים)], ἅμα αὐτῷ, καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ· εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ), and towards the end emphasises rejoicing (which is interesting in view of the rejoicing of Phil 2:17–18). In Deutero-Isaiah, the same language appears in Isa 44:23 (εὐφράνθητε, οὐρανοί … σαλπίσατε, θεμέλια τῆς γῆς, βοήσατε ὄρη εὐφροσύνην), Isa 45:8 (εὐφρανθήτω ὁ οὐρανὸς ἄνωθεν … ἀνατειλάτω ἡ γῆ ἔλεος), and Isa 49:13 (εὐφραίνεσθε, οὐρανοί, καὶ ἀγαλλιάσθω ἡ γῆ, ῥηξάτωσαν τὰ ὄρη εὐφροσύνην), the last in the vicinity of Isa 49:4, to which Phil 2:16 probably alludes. In the vicinity of Phil 2:12–18, the cosmic perspective of heaven and earth is implicit in Phil 2:10 (ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων). For an analysis of the MT passages, with a view to the literary function of these appeals to heaven and earth as witnesses, in Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah, see (Kim 2004, pp. 150–52).

66 Deut 32:7 OG (μνήσθητε ἡμέρας αἰῶνος) with Isa 43:18 OG (Μὴ μνημονεύετε τὰ πρῶτα), 44:6–8 OG (μνήσθητε ταῦτα … καὶ μνήσθητε τὰ πρότερα ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰῶνος … ἀναγγέλλων πρότερον τὰ ἔσχατα πρὶν αὐτὰ γενέσθαι). For an analysis of the MT and an interpretation of the differences in terms of reference and pragmatic intent between Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah, which emphasises the surpassing newness of God's action, see (Kim 2004, pp. 152–54).

67 Cf. (Kim 2004, pp. 157–58).

68 Cf. (Kim 2004, pp. 164–66).

69 Cf. (Kim 2004, pp. 162–64). For further connections between Deuteronomy and Isa 40–66, see (Blois 2020, pp. 57–59).

70 Cf. Deut 32:43 MT (עבדיו) with Deut 32:43 OG (τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ, probably for בניו, also in Qumran [4Q 44 frag. 5ii]).

71 The MT reads the singular (עבד) in the relevant context in Isa 41:8, 9; 42:1, 19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3, 5, 6, 7; 50:10; 52:13; 53; and the plural in Isa 54:17 (cf. Kim 2004, p. 163). For the shift to the use of the plural in Isa 54–66, see (Kim 2004, p. 163). In the Greek, δοῦλος in the singular, in a relevant context, is used in Isa 48:20; 49:3, 5, 7 (in some MSS in the plural), in the plural in Isa 42:19; the term παῖς in the singular in Isa 41:8, 9; 42:1; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21, 26; 45:4; 49:6; 50:10; 52:13; the plural is used, again in Isa 42:19 (for further considerations see also (Blois 2020, p. 68 n. 60)). The relevance of these observations is not strictly dependent on the position in the controversial debates about the relevance of the "servant" for the interpretation of Phil 2:6–11, on which cf., e.g., (Häußer 2016, p. 158).

72 Cf. (Knight 1984, p. 43), with regard to Deut 32:36 and Ps 135:14.

73 Standhartinger (2021) is reticent about describing this as a citation (p. 188).

74 Cf. (Goldingay 2019, p. 518). A detailed analysis and interpretation are offered by (Portier-Young 2011, pp. 272–76), with a table comparing Isa 52:13–53:12 with corresponding aspects of the end of the book of Daniel (p. 273). Collins (1993, p. 385) notes with a view to Dan 11:33 that the term משׂכילים derives from the "suffering servant" of Isa 52:13.

75 Cp. Dan 12:3 MT (והמשׂכלים) OG (καὶ οἱ συνιέντες) with Isa 52:13 MT (ישׂכיל עבדי) OG (συνήσει ὁ παῖς μου), where the *hiphil* stem of שׂכל could also mean to understand or to make understand (contra Portier-Young 2011, p. 273), but also to prosper (cf. *DCH* s.v. שׂכל I). Note also Deut 29:8 MT (תשׂכילו) 29:9 OG (συνῆτε). Cf. also (Goldingay 2019, p. 518).

76 Cp. Dan 12:3 MT (יזהרו כזהר הרקיע) OG (φανοῦσιν ὡς οἱ φωστῆρες τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) Theodotion (ἐκλάμψουσιν ὡς ἡ λαμπρότης τοῦ στερεώματος) with Isa 53:10–11 OG (ἀπὸ τοῦ πόνου τῆς ψυχῆς αὐτοῦ, δεῖξαι αὐτῷ φῶς), where the motif of "light" is supported by some Isaiah manuscripts at Qumran (1QIsa^{a} XLIV, 19 [מעמל נפשוה יראה אור], similarly 1QIsa^{b} VIII, 22 [מעמל נפשו יראה אור], cf. probably also 4QIsa^{d}, cf. (Abegg et al. 1999, p. 360)), though the motif of light is absent in Isa 53:11 MT. Cf. also (Goldingay 2019, p. 518). Note, in particular, for the connection with Dan 12:3 (οἱ συνιέντες) OG the motif of understanding in Isa 53:11 (καὶ πλάσαι τῇ συνέσει), in connection with the motif of light (see also Collins 1993, p. 393). With a view to Philippians 2:12–18, the noetic aspect of Phil 2:5 seems pertinent here.

77 For a discussion of further connections, see (Goldingay 2019, p. 518; Portier-Young 2011, pp. 272–76) (also the literature).

78 Given how prominently the motif of the word of God figures in the three evoked texts, one might even speculate that their joint selection might be related to its occurrence.

79 On the terminology, see the distinction by (Ben-Porat 1976, p. 110) between the "marker" ("the marking elements as they appear in the alluding text") and the "marked" ("the same elements as they appear in the evoked text"). Cf. also (McAuley 2015, p. 76).

[80] Though the implied speaker is Moses, it is presupposed that he speaks the words of God to the people of Israel.

[81] Cf. also Deut 31:19.

[82] We note also the further faint echo between Deut 32:47 (κενός) and Isa 49:4 (κενῶς).

[83] Cf. the references to the death of Moses at Deut 32:48–52, cf. Deut 31:14, 16, 27, 29.

[84] Cf. on the monotheistic context of Isa 45, see (Bauckham 1998, pp. 132–33).

[85] Using Ben-Porat's (1976, p. 110) distinction, they might be said to appear within the "marked", though not the "marker".

[86] The other occurrences of λόγος (Isa 41:26, Isa 50:4) are more indirectly related to the word of God.

[87] See note 19.

[88] Cf. also Deut 32:43 OG.

[89] Cf. Deut 1:3.

[90] Cf. Isa 55.8 OG.

[91] Cf. Ps 105:24 LXX and Isa 30:12 LXX.

[92] See (McAuley 2015, p. 20).

[93] Though the occurrence in Dan 12:8 OG (ἡ λύσις τοῦ λόγου τούτου) seems to refer to divine speech transmitted by the angel as indicated by Dan 12:7 OG. Note also the oath in Dan 12:7 (ὤμοσε τὸν ζῶντα), in a context of eschatological fulfilment (συντελεσθήσεται πάντα ταῦτα), and in proximity to the theme of "running" (Dan 12:9 OG [Ἀπότρεχε, Δανιηλ]). Note also that Dan 12:9 Theodotion reads οἱ λόγοι where OG has τὰ προστάγματα.

[94] Cf. also the further resonances to 1 Enoch 104.

[95] My focus here on an interpretation suggesting elements Paul might have activated from the metaleptic meaning potential does not preclude other possible interpretations with an interest in what the first hearers might have understood. This is consistent with my call at the outset for a methodological distinction between a textual exploration of metaleptic potential and an interpretation that selects elements from that metaleptic potential given a hypothesis about the competence of a particular participant in the communicative process and with a view to an overall pragmatics.

[96] I will not argue in detail here for the assumptions (which are debated); they can be taken as hypothetical and conditional reflections on the scriptural resonances.

[97] With regard to Romans, I have argued this in (Dürr 2021, pp. 267–92).

[98] Cf. also (Schapdick 2011, p. 179).

[99] As Fowl (2012, p. 177 n. 27) writes, "The entire section stretching from [Phil] 1:27 to 2:18 is really a working out of Paul's admonition to the Philippians to order their common life in a manner worthy of the gospel".

[100] Cf. (Holloway 2017, p. 96). Cf. also already Phil 1:24–27.

[101] For the interrelation between Paul's vocation and the Philippians in terms of "honour" see (Blois 2020, pp. 129–50). For a similar two-pronged statement with regard to Romans, see (Reichert 2001, p. 99).

[102] As noted above, this is similar to what Reichert (2001, p. 99) has argued for Romans.

[103] Cf. this double situation is reflected in the use of παρουσία and ἀπουσία in Phil 2:12.

[104] While in the case of testamentary literature the setting for a demise is fictitious, here, it would be real.

[105] While (Blois 2020) focuses on the interrelation in terms of honour, here, the emphasis is on vocation.

[106] Similar considerations apply to the servant figure (Isaiah) and the wise ones (Daniel). The use of "analogy" here does not necessarily preclude continuities in terms of a larger narrative.

[107] For the emphasis on Paul's self-understanding, identity, or self-presentation as "Mosaic", see (Michael 1927, p. 99; Beare 1959, pp. 88–89; McAuley 2015, pp. 198–211; Allen 2017 (in particular, pp. 130–40); Jennings 2018, p. 111). Cf. (Blois 2020, pp. 139–41). With regards to 2 Cor 3 (and Deut 31), see, for instance, (Heath 2014).

[108] Cf. (Wojtkowiak 2012, p. 163).

[109] For a refutation of the "supersessionism" of Collange (1973, p. 100), see (Bockmuehl 1997, pp. 156–57).

[110] My emphasis on an overall constellation is not meant to exclude the contribution of the author's rhetorical ἦθος. Indeed, a Mosaic characterisation, for example, strengthens the overall pragmatic point of the community's gospel vocation. But the emphasis on a constellation points to an important shared element between the metaleptically evoked passages in Deuteronomy, Deutero-Isaiah, and Daniel, which has not to my knowledge been sufficiently noted. On the rhetorical notion of ἦθος and its application to New Testament research, see (Aune 2003), cf. also (Thompson 2020, pp. 28–29).

[111] Cf. (Blois 2020, p. 140).

[112] Unlike (McAuley 2015), I do not make the pragmatics of the passage criterial for determining the allusive potential of the evoked texts. Rather, I try to discern the specific contribution of the allusive potential to a larger reading of the passage, which postulates certain elements (e.g., a constellation of "leadership") as activated.

[113] Moses is an individual figure; the wise ones are a collective figure; the servant figure admits of various complex interpretations.

[114] For a positive assessment of the Scriptural competence of the Philippians in light of their previous history and access to texts and explanations, see (Öhler 2017), who argues for Phil 2:14–15 "dass Paulus … darauf setzte, dass der Bezug [auf die LXX als solcher, SD] erkannt würde" (Öhler 2017, p. 132).

[115] For Jennings (2018, p. 112), Phil 2:15–16a "is the climax of Paul's entire argument since 1:27".

[116] It is debated whether ἐπέχειν should be rendered as "holding fast" or "holding out" (or some combination). The problem is that clear textual evidence for both meanings is hard to come by (cf. Standhartinger 2021, p. 189). Poythress (2002) is sceptical of "holding out" and (Ware 2005, pp. 256–70) critiques the meaning "holding fast." A similar critique is offered by (Oakes 2000, pp. 266–80), who argues for an idiom instead (ἐπέχειν λόγον + noun in the genitive) and considers including ἐν κόσμῳ in the phrase, which results in the meaning "having the role of life in the world".

[117] Cf. the differing assessments of (Ware 2005, p. 270; Schapdick 2011, pp. 187–88; Wojtkowiak 2012, p. 164; McAuley 2015, p. 225), as noted earlier, also in connection with the motif of "shining".

[118] For a concise summary of the options, see (Standhartinger 2021, p. 189) (the participle ἐπέχοντες is either taken to modify ποιεῖτε in Phil 2:14, γένησθε [v.l. ἦτε] in Phil 2:15a, or φαίνεσθε in Phil 2:15b).

[119] (Ware 2005, p. 270; Schapdick 2011, p. 188; Standhartinger 2021, p. 189) ("vermutlich").

[120] Ware (2005, p. 270) limits the interpretation too narrowly to speaking: "in no other letter does Paul explicitly command his congregations to preach the gospel or to engage in active verbal mission". Relatedly, because he takes it too concretely to refer to verbal proclamation, he seems to overstate the imperative force of the participle; Paul exhorts by offering a descriptive image to aspire to; it is not here something Paul "explicitly commands" (2005, p. 270).

[121] So, rightly, (Schapdick (2011), who speaks of "ein immer wieder zu realisierendes ἐπέχειν …, das zudem missionarische Strahlkraft hat." (Standhartinger 2021, p. 189) concurs.

[122] See (McAuley 2015, pp. 216–17) and the other interpreters noted earlier.

[123] This seems to speak against the interpretation of "role of life" for which (Oakes 2000) argues as part of an idiom, based on pertinent philological evidence. Standhartinger (2021, p. 189) is also critical of Oakes' suggestion on the grounds of pragmatics ("Das Idiom hilft jedoch wenig").

[124] In such a reconstruction, the parallels between Paul's situation and the narrative setting of the end of Deuteronomy are suggestive. In Deuteronomy, Moses leaves parting instructions unto a way of life. This is offered as a word of life from the God of Israel, to be held onto and kept. Yet, in the case of Moses, there is an expectation of having partially failed and, for some of Israel, there is an expectation and "prediction" of disobedience. Likewise now for Paul, facing a similar situation, yet under different eschatological conditions, there is a new word from God, revealed in Christ, but now with the hopeful expectation of fulfilment and obedience.

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Article

Rhetorical Approach to the Periautology of Philippians 3:2–16

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Abstract: This article examines why Paul uses self-praise, or periautology, in Phil 3:2–14 to respond to Christians who boasted of their Jewish origin. It shows the importance and relevance of this type of rhetoric, clarifies its purpose, and examines the way Paul uses it. Paul does not only use periautology in Phil 3, but it is in this passage that it has the most force and originality. As, until now, very few monographs and articles have shown the existence of periautology in the Pauline letters, this article invites exegetes to be more sensitive to the existence of literary models and their importance for better interpreting the apostle's thought.

Keywords: Philippians 3; epidictic genre; praise; invective; self-praise; periautology; synkrisis; Judaizers; circumcision; Phil 3:4–14; 2 Cor 10–13; 1 Cor 13; Gal -2

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1. Introduction

As works on John Calvin[1] and, much more recently, Bultmann's essay on the use of diatribe in the Pauline letters show (Bultmann 1910), the study of the rhetoric of the Pauline letters did not begin at the end of the 20th century. It was undoubtedly with H.D. Betz's famous article (Betz 1975) that the rhetorical approach to Paul's letters developed systematically and scientifically. From then on, essays on the composition of all the letters and on their rhetorical genre—judicial, epidictic or deliberative—proliferated. On several occasions, I have shown that the study of composition has gradually become more refined and that exegetes have come to recognize the diversity of Paul's arrangements and arguments[2]. In the following sections, I propose to move in the same direction and show the originality and relevance of the argumentation of Phil 3:2–16.

2. The Arrangement of Ph 3:2–16

2.1. An Exhortative Unit

Commentators have often found it difficult to identify the boundaries between rhetorical units and have thought that Phil 3:2–4,1 comprised a single unit. However, the passage is made up of two parallel units:

A	*exhortation*	3:2	3:17
B	*reasons (examples)*	3:3/4–14 γάρ v.3	3:18–19 and 20–21 γάρ v.18
A'	*resumption of the exhortation*	3:15–16 οὖν v.15	4:1 ὥστε

2.2. The Invective of v.2 and the Purpose of Ph 3:2–16

Phil 3:2–16 form a rhetorical unit in which v.2 indicates that the exhortation, with its motivations, has a polemical function, that of calling Philippi's believers to distrust the Judaizers, who were probably Jewish-Christians and had come from Jerusalem to urge Philippi's believers to be circumcised.

Most recent commentaries note that v.2 has all the features of an invective (vitu-*peratio*), a Greco-Roman oratory technique aimed at denigrating opponents and opposed to praise (*laus*, ἐγκώμιον), which the author of the Rhetoric to Herennius classifies in the epidictic

genre. Indeed, the words that illustrate it are all pejorative: "dogs" (κύνες), "bad workers" (κακοὶ ἐργάται), and "mutilation" (κατατομή), which derisively refers to circumcision.

2.3. Reasons to Justify the Invective

Paul justifies his invective with a double praise, first that of the group constituted by Paul and the Philippian believers, in "We", and then that of Paul himself, qualified as self-praise or periautology:

(i) A first praise (v.3), that of Paul and the Philippians, defined as (true) circumcision or, in other words, as περιτομή, opposed to the κατατομή that the Judaizers are. This is true circumcision—that of the heart obviously—which derives its glory from Christ Jesus and not from a carnal mutilation.

(ii) A second praise (v.4–14), that of Paul, which, as we will show, effectively demolishes the claims of the Judaizers.

It is thus possible to present the composition of Ph 3.2–16 more precisely:

A = v.2	exhortation (invective)
B = vv.3 + 4–14	reasons to justify *A* (the opposite of the invective of v.2)
A′ = vv.15–16	(i) v.3 = praise of Paul and the Philippians (in 'WE')
	(ii) v.4–14 = self-praise (periautology) of Paul (in 'I')
	resumption of the exhortation

3. The Use of Periautology in Paul's Letters

If commentators perceived that v.4–14 comprised examples, as are often found in the epidictic genre, it took time for these examples to be qualified as praise and self-praise. Actually, decades ago, in an article commenting on Plutarch's treatise on self-praise, Betz clearly saw that Paul was praising himself in 2 Cor 11:1–12,13 and that the reasons for this should be determined, since, according to Plutarch, self-praise was to be avoided as far as possible (Betz 1978). But Phil 3:4–14 had not yet attracted the attention of exegetes. It was not until F. Bianchini's doctoral thesis on this passage that we had a serious study of how and why Paul uses this rhetorical technique (Bianchini 2006). In my commentary on Philippians published in 2005, I analyzed this periautology myself (Aletti 2005), though at less length than Bianchini, whose thesis I had had access to since I had been its director and it had been defended before the publication of my own commentary.

These books inspired two other doctoral students, D. Chaaya (Chaaya 2010) and M. Kowalski (Kowalski 2013)—now chairpersons in their respective faculties of theology—to examine Paul's self-praise in 2 Cor 10–13. As a result, the periautology of these passages was the subject of an exhaustive analysis, the non-entirely compatible results of which should inspire others to revisit these chapters of 2 Corinthians. But there are other passages where Paul praises himself, for example, in Galatians 1–2, whose periautology was presented and commented in a doctoral thesis defended at the Gregorian University of Rome in more or less the same years (Puca 2011). Since then, few articles—and, it seems, no monographs—have appeared on these periautological passages. The only ones I have been able to find are Gerber's on 2 Cor 12:1 and Smit's on Phil 3:2–21[3]. We can only hope that other researchers will be interested in Pauline periautology.

4. The Arrangement of the Periautology in Ph 3:4–14

4.1. The Overall Unfolding

This passage, which is an exemplum, has already been presented by Bianchini and myself, so I will just briefly recall its composition. It is broadly divided into two parts, of which v.4 and 7 form the inaugural statements that will be illustrated by v.5–6 and v.8–14, respectively:

vv.4–6 privileges and values ἐν σαρκί	v.4 opening statement	in time past, without Christ
	vv.5–6 illustrated by various traits	
vv.7–14 radical change; new values in Christ	v.7 opening statement	in these times, with Christ
	vv.8–14 illustrated by various traits	

Vv.7–14, which are essentially Christological, can also be divided into two parts:

Vv.7 + 8–11 = change of judgment or value and rejection of the first values for three purposes: righteousness through faith in Christ, knowledge of Christ, and the same itinerary as his.

Vv.12–14 = double correctio to not only avoid misinterpretations but also explain the goal pursued and the progress already made.

4.2. The Arrangement of vv.5–6

In these verses, the exemplum clearly follows the model of praise. Indeed, in the textbooks of the time[4], praise (in Greek, ἐγκώμιον or ἔπαινος) was part of the narratives that schoolchildren had to write during the *progymnasmata* and included the same arrangement:

(i) γένος or origin: country, nation, homeland, ancestors, parents, and birth;

(ii) παιδεία or education: customs and principles of conduct, school, and culture;

(iii) πράξεις or actions, the most important and most developed part, themselves divided into three: those of the body (physical performance), those of the mind (judgment, courage, prudence, great undertakings, etc.), and those attributed to fate (power, wealth, friends, honors, and glorious death, as well as their opposites of hardships, exiles, betrayals, persecutions, and ignominious death);

(iv) at each stage, use of comparison or σύγκρισις (between the personage being praised and others—in terms of origin, education and respective actions—to emphasize differences or similarities, superiority or inferiority[5]. The reader can see that vv.5–6 follow this pattern:

***topoi* of praise**	**Ph 3:5–6**
origin	circumcision on the eight day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew, son of Hebrews,
education, qualification	with regard to the Law, Pharisee,
actions	with regard to zeal, persecutor of the Church, with regard to the justice found in the Law, irreproachable.

The repetition of the traits concerning origin shows that Paul insists on what the Judaizers themselves were certainly emphasizing and thus indirectly underlines that, in this respect, he is in no way inferior to them.

4.3. The Arrangement of vv.7–14

V.7, expanded upon v.8, states the total change of point of view. If Paul spoke only of himself in vv.5–6, indirectly indicating that he remained centered on himself, in vv.7–14, it is Jesus who becomes the point of reference, and it is in relation to him that Paul describes himself, being henceforth totally decentered from himself.

- The opening statement of v.7 is well developed and specified in v.8:

v.7	**v.8**
but (ἀλλά)	but much more (ἀλλὰ μενοῦνγε καί)
whatever, that (ἅτινα ταῦτα)	everything (πάντα 2x)
gain (κέρδη)	in order to gain (ἵνα κερδήσω)
I counted (ἥγημαι)	I count (ἡγοῦμαι 2x)
as loss (ζημίαν)	to be a loss (ζημίαν εἶναι)
	I suffered a loss (ἐζημιώθην)
	refuse (σκύβαλα)
because of (διά)	because of the surpassing worth (διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον)
Christ (τὸν Χριστόν)	knowing (τῆς γνώσεως)
	Christ Jesus my Lord (C. I. K.)
	because of him (δι᾽ὅν)

- Vv.9–11 set out the new features of Paul's journey.

These verses, in which Paul describes his experience in Christ as incomparably superior to that under the Law, are excellently presented and analyzed by the monographs and commentaries, so I will not repeat what they say[6]. I retain here only the end of v.11 ("if in some way I will attain the resurrection from the dead"), where one can think that Paul is not sure of reaching the final goal of the journey, namely, the resurrection and the final glorification with Christ: would therefore the path that he describes as supereminent not lead to the desired result and the periautology fail? Suffice it here to recall that in other letters (1 Thess 4:13–18; 1 Cor 15:20; 2 Cor 5:1), Paul has no doubt that he and the believers will live definitively with the risen Lord. He reaffirms this assurance not only at the beginning of the same letter to the Philippians, in 1:23, but also just after the periautology we are talking about, in 3:21. If he does not doubt the final resurrection of believers, how should we interpret Phil 3:11? Simply by not forgetting that this formulation is due to the periautological genre, since the last statement of v.11 announces the corrections of vv.12–14. What he is experiencing now is already a strong communion with Christ, but the resurrection is a blessing yet to come, and Paul does not want us to believe that he has already obtained it.

4.4. The Correctiones of vv.12–14

How can we situate the correctiones of vv.12–14 in relation to vv.7–11? The progression of this rhetorical unit can be described as follows:

Vv7-11 = the itinerary Paul wanted to follow and the goal he wished to reach;

Vv.12-14 = the itinerary no longer desired but in the process of being achieved.

Let us note first that the correctiones are not about Christ, i.e., that he could not totally satisfy or fulfill the believer's desire, but only about where Paul is at:

v.12	*a*	not that I have already obtained or have already become perfect	*b*	but I press on to grasp because I myself have been grasped
v.13	*a′*	I do not think I have already grasped	*b′*	[but] I press on towards the goal

If these correctiones are intended to avoid a misinterpretation of Paul's praise of himself, it is important to see that they do not function like those in 2 Cor 12, where Paul, after saying that he had the greatest graces and visions, adds that he came to glory in his weaknesses, God having declared that his grace was sufficient for him. The apostle even concludes: "for when I am weak, then I am strong" (v.10). Thus, in 2 Cor 12:10, the correctio

consists in emphasizing the opposite of what is previously said about the eminent visions and graces mentioned (2 Cor 11:17–18 and 12:1–5). On the other hand, in Phil 3:12–14, Paul does not mention his weaknesses but rather describes an unfinished journey with Christ: the correctiones in no way detract from the superiority of being with Christ, as they merely point out that this superiority, already real and effective, still needs to grow.

Before asking whether Paul was right to proceed with self-praise in these verses, it is important to underline the paradox of this rhetorical unit, for if vv5–6 are a real self-praise, vv7–14 reverse it by declaring that it is no longer worthwhile and transform it into a praise of Christ. For what reason? Because being-with-Christ leads to a superiority that can in no way be accused of vainglory and vanity.

5. This Periautology, Relevant or Not?

Once we have established that Paul's argument in Phil 3:4–14 follows the rhetorical model of self-praise, it is important to see why he takes it up and modifies it to the point of turning it upside down. It is moreover necessary to see if his periautology holds.

5.1. When Is Self-Praise Permissible?

Addressing his friend Herculanus, at the very beginning of his brief treatise on periautology, Plutarch reports a majority opinion at the time: "There is no one who does not agree that nothing is more intolerable and more odious than to speak favorably of oneself and to boast of one's qualities and talents" (539a)[7]. And L. Pernot sums up the ancient moralist's judgment as follows: "Plutarch subscribes to the common observation that self-praise is unpleasant and reprehensible. Insofar as it is inspired by glory, this conduct falls under the criticism that ancient morality tirelessly addressed to vanity and the untimely love of honor and glory" (Pernot 1998).

But, again according to Plutarch, self-praise is permissible

(*a*) when we are unjustly accused or slandered (540c);

(*b*) when it is stated that our qualities and good deeds are due to (the goddess) Tychè (542f);

(*c*) when we mix our own praise with that of others thanks to whom we have been able to act well and be what we are (542b);

(*d*) when we declare that our own qualities have been useful to others and have reinforced their own choices and actions (545f);

(*e*) when, to make our own praise less odious, we temper it by admitting to some ignorance, poverty or inexperience (544ab).

5.2. Do Ph 3:4–14 Respect the Conditions of Self-Praise?

It is easy to verify that Paul's self-praise complies with the conditions set out by Plutarch and the moralists of his time by following the order in which I have listed them above:

(*a*) As the invective of Phil 3:2 shows, the context is polemical. It was because Judaizers, probably from Jerusalem, wanted the believers in Philippi to be circumcised such that Paul reacted. And it is because they themselves were probably accused of not yet being circumcised and Paul himself was accused of being responsible for this situation that Paul finds himself obliged to show the excellence of the choice he and the Philippians have made.

(*b*) If, in the first part of the periautology (v.5–6), Paul puts himself forward and can provoke jealousy and resentment, in the second part (v.7–11), what he says about himself is entirely due to Christ, to whom he is practically assimilated without any merit or self-glorification.

(*c*) Before praising himself, Paul associates the believers in Philippi with the dignity he shares with them, that of being the (true) circumcision (v.3). We might even say that the superiority he declares to be his in v.11–12 is already that of the believers, since in v.15 he declares to them: "we who are perfect". Paul does not claim to be the only one who wants

to share Christ's itinerary, and if, in these verses, he speaks in the first-person singular, in "I" and not "we", it is for reasons we will have to explain further.

(*d*) Paul does not praise himself in order to show off, but, as the exhortative nature of the rhetorical unit shows, to keep the Philippian believers on the same track as he was: the periautology is not intended to glorify Paul but to comfort the Philippians in the choice they made, that of radically adhering to Christ.

(*e*) Thanks to the two *correctiones*, this periautology finds further justification, for the apostle finishes clearly by declaring that the journey with Christ already taken is far from over: "not that I have already become perfect (τετελείωμαι)" (v.12), he says. He thus shows that the superiority he is talking about is Christ's, not his own. One might object that Paul does not mean what he says and that the correctio could be pure hypocrisy, since in v.15 he will declare, as we noted above, that he and the Philippian believers are perfect (τέλειοι). But we must not forget that the statement in v.12 alludes to that in v.6: "with regard to the justice found in the Law, (I was) blameless". The correctio is intended to underline the decentering that Paul is now undergoing: it is no longer his blamelessness or perfection that matters but his attachment to Christ, an attachment that fully satisfies him.

These few remarks show that Paul's self-praise respects the requirements formulated by Plutarch and his contemporaries. But the fact that it is a valid periautology does not imply that it constitutes a sound argument. Should not Paul have argued, as he did in Galatians or Romans, that circumcision was of no use in obtaining salvation? Before answering this question, let us look at some other objections that could ruin his argument.

5.3. Some Objections to the Validity of the Periautology of Phil 3:4–14

Indeed, three statements in the passage seem to contradict those of other letters on justification and obedience to the Law[8]:

(*a*) As we saw above, in v.6 he declares: "with regard to the justice found in the Law, (I was) blameless". However, in the letters to the Galatians and Romans, he shows at length that one cannot become righteous through obedience to the Law (Rom 3:21) and that the Law itself has never been an instrument of justification (Rom 7:7–25). How then can he say here "with regard to the justice found in the Law" if this Law, although good and holy, cannot lead to justice? This is why some commentators have said that the apostle contradicts himself. It is true that the statements in Galatians/Romans and Philippians are materially incompatible, but we must not forget that in the first part of the periautology Paul takes over the point of view of the Jew and Pharisee he was then: he reasons as he used to reason at that time.

(*b*) The same applies to the statement "I was blameless". Certainly, in Romans 7:14–23, Paul affirms that the subject of the Law may at best wish to obey the commandments but cannot do the good he wishes to do. In short, for the Paul of Galatians and Romans, blamelessness may be desired, but it remains an unattainable dream. Thus, the contradiction between Phil 3:6 and the assertions of the other letters is real, but it needs to be seen in the perspective Paul adopts here, that of the Jew he was, convinced that he was perfectly obedient to the Law.

(*c*) For centuries, the phrase in v.9 "μὴ ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐκ νόμου" had been translated as follows: "not having a righteousness of my own" (RSV) or "not having my own righteousness" (KJV), a translation which meant that in Christ the believer remained without righteousness of his own, a statement which was interpreted as saying that he was still a sinner but declared forensically righteous! The consequence of this would be that the condition of Christ's disciple would be inferior to that of the Jew subject to the Law because he no longer had any righteousness at all. Whatever be the relevance of the adage *simul peccator et justus*, it must be remembered that the translation mentioned above is a misinterpretation of the Greek double accusative, of which we know that the part without an article is necessarily a predicate and not a direct object complement. This is why it should be translated as follows: "not having *as* my righteousness (=predicate) that (=righteousness) which comes from the Law (=direct object complement)". In this

verse, Paul is only saying that his righteousness (for he has one) does not come from the Law but from his being in Christ. On this point, therefore, Paul cannot yet be accused of contradiction.

5.4. Are vv.5–6 Essential to the Argumentation?

Assuming that periautology is the right argument, one may nevertheless wonder whether Paul would not have done better to avoid the ambiguity of v.6 pointed out above in passing directly from v.3 to v.8 and developing the praise in the first-person plural, as follows:

> "[It is] we indeed the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God, who put our pride in Christ Jesus and do not place our trust in the flesh, . . .[8] we who consider everything to be a loss because of that surpassing good which is the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, . . . who regard [everything] as garbage in order in order to gain Christ [9] and be found in him*, not having as our righteousness that [coming] from the Law, but that [coming] through faith in Christ, the righteousness [coming] from God [and relying] on faith, etc."

The praise would then have been that of Paul and the non-Jewish Christians of Philippi. Yes, but the whole unit in its composition—(i) exhortation, (ii) reasons, and (iii) resumption of the exhortation—would have been changed, because in this unit what Paul wants is, by offering himself as a model, to confirm and consolidate the Philippians' choice. Having renounced all previous privileges, he himself had shown that faith in Christ was infinitely more fulfilling and that it was worth following his example.

It is understandable that in 2 Cor11–12, Paul chose to respond to the criticism of the other missionaries with a periautology, for it was he who was targeted and criticized. But in Philippians, it seems that it was not only he but also the uncircumcised Philippians who were the object of criticism. The Judaizers (i) boasted that they were Jews, circumcised, sure to share in the blessings promised to Abraham (Gen 17:10–14) and (ii) invited the non-Jewish Christians of Philippi to be circumcised. If Paul responds in their place, offering himself as an example, it is to set out the features that fully justify their choice to resist the Judaizers' request.

5.5. Why a Self-Praise and Not an Argumentation as in Galatians/Romans?

Finally, one may wonder why Paul preferred to respond to the Judaizers' requests with self-praise and not by taking up an argument similar to those of Galatians/Romans, showing that believers could not obtain justification and salvation by submitting to the Law and that, far from being proud of being circumcised, Jews should, on the contrary, lament not being able to do the good they want to do (cf. Romans 7:7–25). Did the Philippians already know this evidence? Had they also heard or even read the letters to the Galatians and Romans? Although several historians doubt that Paul sent each of his letters to all the churches, the faithful did not need to read Galatians and Romans to know what Paul thought about the issue, for the controversy over circumcision was the major problem the first Christian generation had to face. In my commentary, I have also shown that many words, phrases and sentences in Phil 3:2–14 allude to this problem and that if Paul does not dwell on it, it is because the Christians of Philippi knew it well.

It is also likely that, since the Judaizers had failed to convince the Philippians to be circumcised, Paul did not have to develop an argumentation. And it is no doubt because the Judaizers had insisted that, by not being circumcised, the Philippians would remain second-rate Christians that Paul wanted to show a contrario, by means of a periautology, that their pride was in fact an illusion. What Paul is making clear to the Philippians is that, if the Judaizers are proud, they, and he, have far better reasons to be prouder. In short, it is the question of καύχησις, in those days so prevalent, that best explains the use of periautology in Ph 3:2–14: the epidictic genre was somehow necessary.

A final reason also accounts for periautology and, more generally, the exemplum of Phil 3:3–14. It must not be forgotten that if Paul sets himself as an example, it is in

conformity with that of Christ Jesus in Phil 2:6–11. Bianchini and I have shown that Paul is reproducing Christ's journey in his own way and that he has also asked the Philippians to have the sentiments that were in Christ Jesus. In short, the exemplum of Phil 3 refers back to that of Phil 2.

May the preceding reflections have shown why, unlike the argumentations of Galatians and Romans, Paul preferred in Ph 3 to choose the epidictic genre of praise, so widely used to exhort and encourage.

5.6. Praise and Self-Praise in the Pauline Letters

Let us conclude by pointing out that in the Pauline letters, praise is used much more than one might think. I take advantage of this essay on Phil 3 to say that a passage like 1 Cor 13, for example, is a praise. In fact, it repeats the praise of the virtues as presented in the ancient textbooks translated by G. Kennedy. The praise of a virtue has three parts: (i) It shows that the virtue is morally very useful, even necessary; (ii) it says what it consists of by its action; (iii) it compares it with the other virtues—comparison (in Greek, *synkriris*) being a technique that was then in vogue—to indicate whether it is superior or inferior to them. Taking up this model, in 1 Cor 13, Paul begins by declaring that charity (ἀγάπη) is essential (v.1–3), then shows what it consists in through its actions (v.4–7), and ends by declaring that it is superior to the other two theological virtues, faith and hope (v.8–13). But identifying a model and showing how it is used is not enough. It is also and above all important to see in what way and to what extent it is essential to the idea developed.

6. Conclusions

The exegetes who have written on this periautology since the publication of my commentary and Bianchini's monograph have been more concerned with making known the periautology genre, its requirements, and its aims, with the help of ancient authors (Plutarch and Co.), than with analyzing Paul's text to confront its difficulties and issues. It was at the very least appropriate to go back to the various passages in which the apostle speaks of himself, in particular the self-praise of 2 Cor 10–13 and Phil 3:4–14 (difficult if ever there was one), to assess their relevance. In short, the exegesis of the Pauline letters can no longer be merely descriptive; it must also assess the relevance of the evidence and genres used. The exegesis of the Pauline letters still has a lot of work to do.

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Notes

1 Substantial information can be found in Q. BREEN's the article (Breen 1957).

2 See among other articles, (Aletti 2011).

3 (Gerber 2015). (on Philippians, pp. 238–42); (Smit 2014). These authors lay more stress on the features of periautology in general than they give a detailed presentation of that of Phil 3:4–14.

4 (Kennedy 2003; see also Martin 2008); (with regard to praise, pp. 36–41).

5 It is because they are more interested today in the models used by the NT writings that exegetes have proposed praise as a model for the composition of the gospels, particularly the third one, in its three parts: (i) origin (Lk 1:5-2,21) and (ii) education (Lk 2:22–52), (iiiα) actions, first those relating Jesus' competence for mission with baptism and victory over temptations (Lk 3:1 to 4:13), (iiiβ) and then those of spirit and body, due to Jesus' initiative (Lk 4–21), (iiiγ) finally those coming from fate (Lk 22–24). This is one of the reasons why, according to J. Neyrey, Luke's narrative is a praise of Jesus. See his monograph (Neyrey 2020).

6 The commentaries ask whether the Paul who became a disciple of Jesus Christ is still a Jew or not. This is a good question to which an entire article should be devoted, as it involves a careful exegesis of a number of passages in Paul's letters. Unfortunately, this essay, focusing on periautology, cannot deal with this question.

7 PLUTARQUE, Περὶ τοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινεῖν ἀνεπίφθονος (539a-547f).

8 For an analysis of vv.6 and 9, consult the commentaries, in particular mine on Philippians, and Bianchini's monograph.

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Article

Rethinking Paul's Rhetorical Intentions: An Interaction with Ryan S. Schellenberg's *Abject Joy*

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Abstract: Ryan S. Schellenberg recaptures a more human version of the Apostle Paul by challenging the mainstream understandings of boasting and joy as rhetorical. This essay, with reference to the concept of "rhetorical framing", suggests that Schellenberg is right in what he affirms but wrong in what he denies and that a "strategic" understanding of boasting and joy language in Philippians is still possible, and no less human.

Keywords: Philippians; boasting; joy; rhetoric; Schellenberg; framing

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1. Introduction

In what sense can the language of boasting and joy in Philippians be called "rhetorical"? In Pauline studies, the word typically means something more than the popular, negative sense found in such phrases as "empty rhetoric" or "merely rhetorical"[1]. Rather, scholars have labeled Paul's boasting rhetorical because it conforms to social mores of self-praise exhibited in the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition and because it helps to accomplish his epistolary aims (Fiore 1985; Smit 2014; Aletti 2024; Bianchini 2024). A rhetorical use of boasting language in the senses just described is part of scholarship's standard line on Pauline boasting—he boasts to beat his opponents at their own game and to reengineer the very concept of honor (Judge 1968; Forbes 1986; Harrison 2018). Just over a decade ago, Ryan S. Schellenberg challenged this understanding with the claim that *no, Paul actually boasts* (Schellenberg 2013).

Boasting and joy are related themes (Spicq 1994, vol. 2, p. 301). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that scholarly treatments of joy in the letter run parallel to those of boasting. Rejoicing, too, is said to serve Paul's pedagogical purposes—he writes of joy to correct the Philippian's grief, drawing on (and transforming) Stoic conceptions of emotion (Holloway 2017, pp. 33–35). Recently, Schellenberg has again countered that *Paul actually rejoices* (Schellenberg 2021). In his view, if the language of joy in Philippians is to be called rhetorical, it is a "performative rhetoric" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 147). Paul's writing "[forges] the very self it describes" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 143). That is, his confident expression of joy fosters the very experience of the joy he claims.

In attempting its own answer to the opening question, this essay interacts with Schellenberg's work. Ultimately, it argues that, whilst largely right in what he affirms, he is perhaps wrong in what he denies. In particular, he rightly maximizes the embodied, emotional, and experiential realities that Paul's language of boasting and joy signifies, but he perhaps too quickly minimizes the intentional arrangement of the discourse in those terms. The concept of "rhetorical framing" allows for compatibility between his and other approaches to Pauline rhetoric. But first, it will be useful to trace the contours of his argument.

2. Ryan S. Schellenberg's Abject Joy: Paul, Prison, and the Art of Making Do

At the heart of Schellenberg's project is a "Bourdeausian argument. . . the history of Paul's emotions is a history of his body, which is also a history of his social interaction"

(Schellenberg 2021, p. 177). Thus, he places an emphasis "not on the putative philosophical origins of Paul's language, but rather on the particular social and somatic context in which it has taken root—namely, prison" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 133). This brings a focus on Paul's body, which is a departure from the usual focus on his thought, and which also produces an appreciation of his letter in social terms—*social* in two senses: (1) his particular bodily suffering in the context of multiple imprisonments by local authorities attests to a less distinguished social location or status than scholars tend to imagine Paul inhabiting, and (2) we are in a better position to appreciate Paul's relationships and his social interactions with those who care about his imprisoned body. Within this framework, Philippians is a revelation, a letter conveying not only Paul's longings for a bodily status reversal at the coming of Christ (Schellenberg 2021, p. 89) but also the "emotional interdependence" or "intersubjectivity" of its author and recipients (Schellenberg 2021, pp. 152, 155). Schellenberg writes to correct the standard interpretation of Paul's joy in prison, seeing that "Hagiographic impulses, a predilection for theological abstraction, and a Western fixation on altruism have conspired, I suggest, to obscure the shared affective benefits of Paul's concern for the Philippians, benefits that accrue to Paul at least as much as to his addresses" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 152).

Abject Joy makes many of the same moves as its predecessor, *Rethinking Paul's Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetoric and 2 Corinthians 10–13*. This is significant because, if boasting and joy are mutually informative themes in Philippians, and if Schellenberg already has rejected the former as an expression of Paul's rhetorical strategy, then he is predisposed to do the same for joy (and boasting) in Philippians. It is worth noting just how deeply the similarity runs between the two works.

Rethinking Paul's Rhetorical Education conveys the same interrelation of *soma*, social location, and social interaction (Schellenberg 2013, p.13). In both works, Schellenberg excoriates the portrait of Paul as a dispassionate rhetorical strategist (Schellenberg 2013, p. 2; 2021, p. 171). That is, a strategist who merely "uses boasting" (Schellenberg 2013, p. 121, quoting Watson 2003, p. 90; cf. 2016, p. 108) and "employs joy" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 14, quoting Holloway 2001, p. 17). He aims to recover a more human Paul (Schellenberg 2013, pp. 318–19; Schellenberg 2021, p. 14), and along with him, a more realistic appreciation of his letters as "artifacts of social practice" (Schellenberg 2013, p. 13) or "affective technology" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 177). In these letters, he finds Paul *gesturing* (Schellenberg 2013, p. 312; 2021, p. 54)—coming to grips with and constructing his own conflicted identity (Schellenberg 2013, p. 317; 2021, p. 176). These reappraisals arise from a comparative method that is analogical rather than genealogical (Schellenberg 2013, pp. 10, 310; 2021, pp. 152–53). Such comparisons run contrary to the apologetic strands of modern scholarship, which use the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition as "a foil against which to highlight Paul's moral and intellectual superiority" (Schellenberg 2013, p. 176), even as they use the prison experiences of his contemporaries as "a foil, emphasizing Paul's admirable silence regarding his own suffering" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 104). These portrayals, which Schellenberg seeks to overturn, evince a tendency to view Paul as a moral exemplar and are perhaps indebted to Lukan hagiography (Schellenberg 2013, pp. 20–21; 2021, pp. 6–7)[2]. Whether it is the accusations that Paul faces in Corinth or his multiple imprisonments at the hands of local authorities, the exigencies of Paul's letters attest to a marginalized status (Schellenberg 2013, p. 307; 2021, pp. 58, 178). In sum, Paul's rhetoric "is an abject rhetoric, characterized by insecurity and self-abasement—and vigorous bursts of defiance" (Schellenberg 2013, p. 7); his joy is an "abject joy" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 24).

Schellenberg has crafted a formula that works. The logic of the two monographs—though nearly a decade separates them, and though they consider different themes (boasting/joy), contexts (rhetoric/prison), and letters (Second Corinthians/Philippians)—runs nearly identically. This formula works, in part, because there is much truth in it. Focusing on Philippians, we need only reach for the nearest commentary to read that joy "is not the self-satisfied delight that everything is going our way, but the settled peace that arises from making the gospel the focus of life" (Thielman 1995, p. 72), that "we have diluted

the term 'joy' so that it often means 'be happy' or 'have fun.' . . . nothing is further from Paul's definition. His joy is one with eschatological content, not fleeting emotion" (Cohick 2013, p. 164), or that Paul's language of joy is shorthand for grief giving way to consolation (Holloway 2001, p. 79; 2017, pp. 33–35). Such transcendent descriptions might cause us to ask, with Schellenberg—did not the Apostle have *feelings*?

Inasmuch as Schellenberg leads us to recover a Paul with emotions, the work is not only right in what it affirms but is even welcome[3]. But is it right in what it denies? Can the language of joy and boasting remain truly emotional but still rhetorical, in the sense of furthering Paul's authorial aims and even participating in an "epistolary strategy"? Has Schellenberg's earlier treatment of boasting caused him to overlook this potential for boasting—and joy—in Philippians?[4] The concept of "rhetorical framing" may help to answer these questions.

3. What Is Rhetorical Framing?

Schellenberg's work evinces familiarity with the concept of framing, or at least with one of the seminal works behind the concept (Schellenberg 2013, p. 176; Goffman [1974] 1986)[5]. In his exegesis of Paul's boasting in Second Corinthians 10–13, he notes that Paul uses the "framing device" of "the disclaimer" to show "that he is aware of the foolishness of his boasting" (Schellenberg 2013, p. 177). What Schellenberg does not see—what most interpreters have not appreciated—is that presenting issues in terms of boasting *is itself a framing of those same issues*.

That is, before asking whether Paul's boasting is either foolish or ironic, we would do well to seek its significance *as boasting*: Why does Paul present the conflict between himself and his Corinthian opponents in these terms? For that matter, why does he present the strife among the Corinthians also in those terms, in First Corinthians 1–4? Why the climactic crystallization of the difference between himself and his Galatian rivals into the alternative between boasting in the flesh, or in the cross (Gal 6:11–18)? Why, in Romans, does he contrast his interlocutor's "boast in God" *via* law (Rom 1–4) with the believers' "boast in God" *via* Christ (Rom 5–8), and then juxtapose the divisive pride of the Gentiles (Rom 9–11) with his own boast to unite Jew and Gentile in Christ (Rom 12–16)? And why, returning to the letter at hand, Philippians, does he first characterize his relationship with his readers as one of mutual boasting (Phil 1–2) before rejecting outsiders as boasting wrongly (Phil 3)? In short, why take issues that are not in and of themselves boasting issues and treat them as if they are? Paul presents a diversity of issues in the same terms—the terms of true and false boasting.

Every day we speak as judges when we pretend to be only witnesses, presenting issues in certain terms so that our audience understands them in particular ways (Topf 2020, pp. 78–84). This is *framing*, a concept that scholars in the fields of psychology (Bateson [1972] 2000; Goffman [1974] 1986; with an emphasis on conflict: Wehr 1979; Drake and Donohue 1996; Rogan 2006; Tylim and Harris 2017), journalism and mass communication (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gamson 1989; Gamson et al. 1992; Entman 1993; D'Angelo 2002; Gitlin [1980] 2003; Kuypers 2006; see also the collection of essays in D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010 and D'Angelo 2018), and the study of social movements (Steinberg 1998; see overview in Snow et al. 2019) have discussed at length[6]. Though there are differences, these studies share the basic assumption that "facts have no intrinsic meaning. They take on their meaning by being embedded in a frame or storyline that organizes them and gives them coherence, selecting certain ones to emphasize while ignoring others" (Gamson 1989, p. 157). We can define a frame as a value-laden, culturally embedded concept or narrative that includes criteria for evaluating and reasons for responding to certain issues when those issues are presented so as to evoke that concept or storyline (cf. Van Gorp 2010, p. 88). As such, framing deals with the interpretive and motivational aspects of communication.

When an author "organizes the context" within which a particular event or issue is to be viewed, that organizational process and production can be termed "rhetorical framing" (Kuypers 2010, p. 300). Kuypers writes of this kind of framing, "When highlighting some

aspect of reality over other aspects, frames act to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies" (Kuypers 2010, p. 301; cf. Entman 1993, p. 52). We should note that such framing is not always a conscious endeavor; it may be merely intuitive; yet, in many cases "the frame is consciously recognized and even represented in vocabulary" (Bateson [1972] 2000, pp. 186–87; cf. Nisbet 2010, p. 46).

Schellenberg draws our attention to two "means by which persons labor on their emotions… cognitive reappraisal and focusing on others" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 167, citing Gross 2014, pp. 3–20). His description of cognitive reappraisal mirrors those above of framing, being "not so much the interpretive creativity of any one individual as the activation of a cultural repertoire" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 167). He sees this strategy on display in Philippians 1:28–30, where Paul "describes the opposition he and his addressees endure as a sign of their coming salvation… thus echoing topoi that were already well established in Jewish discourse" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 167). Yet, Schellenberg prefers to take the language of boasting and joy in Philippians as a "socio-affective means of emotion regulation" over "cognitive strategies like reappraisal" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 169). But perhaps the latter strategy merits further attention. Especially, what if Paul engages in the latter (cognitive reframing) for the sake of the former (the good of the Philippians)?

4. Rhetorical Framing and Boasting: Salience and Story

Like a frame about a painting, a rhetorical frame highlights certain aspects of its subject, in a manner analogous to "agenda setting" (Kuypers 2010, pp. 299–300). This is called *salience*. What elements of a subject might the frame of *boasting* render salient in communication? The use of boasting language in ancient sources gives rise to at least three possibilities.

First, to label an utterance a boast can draw attention to the speaker's motives or *ethos*. This focus is frequently negative, such that to describe a person or group as boasting is to attribute to them excessive pride (Heckel 1993, pp. 153–57; Spicq 1994, vol. 2, p. 296; Gerber 2015, p. 221)[7]. Yet, boasting language also amplifies the sense of joy that characterizes relationships of mutual love and respect (Blois 2020, pp. 37–100), or the joy shared by a group following a triumph[8]. As such, the boasting frame amplifies the subjective elements of a social equation—used negatively to attribute excess, and positively for effusion.

Second, the designation "boasting" cues readers to inspect the matter or *logos* of whatever the author presents in those terms. Without attempting pedantry, the foundation of boasting meets critique or confirmation based on one or more of three criteria: its *reality*, its *realism*, and its *realization*. Various critiques of boasting in wealth illustrate the nuance. A boast in wealth might rest on an *unreal* foundation: "One pretends to be rich, yet has nothing" (Prov 13:7)[9]. Even where wealth is really had, our sources criticize boasting in it as an *unrealistic* appraisal of its value: "Look at all those things of which I have no need" (Philo, *Agr.* 62; cf. *Deus* 146; *Plant.* 64–65). Finally, many boasts are future-oriented, open to the objection that the object of boasting will remain forever *unrealized*: "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' … As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil" (James 4:13, 16). It is the connotation of *unreality* in the ancient world that renders boasting; in some cases, tantamount to lying (Pernot 1998, p. 117; Heckel 1993, p. 149)[10], and it is the connotation of *unrealism* that makes it akin to insanity and drunkenness[11]. Conversely, the designation "boasting", when used positively, draws readers' attention to what is real, realistic, and sure to be realized, as Philo describes boasting in God (*Spec*. 1.311; *Somn*. 1.246).

Lastly, the charge of boasting can imply a criticism of a speaker's manner or *pathos*. In view here is the obscenity of the speech, whether the boast is appropriate or inappropriate, rather than its truthfulness or the character of the speaker. Plutarch addresses himself to diffusing the odium of self-praise in *De Laude Ipsius*, the text that captures the bulk of scholarly attention concerning the context within which we should understand Paul's boasting[12]. Despite the emphasis on *periautologia* in recent scholarship, a framing approach

to boasting considers the topic more a matter of his arrangement and presentation of the issues, *inventio*, than of style or *elocutio*—a difference in line with Paul's actual usage of the term[13].

At its best, to describe someone in terms of boasting connotes joy, soundness of mind, and security of possession—at its worst, rampant self-interest, ignorance, and a disconnect from social reality. Though boasting does not *mean* pride, folly, or narcissism, these qualities are part of the cognitive background, the network of associations, and the chain of reasoning that boasting language triggers. When meaning is constructed within the boasting frame of reference, these are some of the features that might be represented, metonymically; therefore, we might describe boasting as good or bad, true or false, appropriate or inappropriate, on the basis of the criteria latent in the boasting frame and apparent in the discursive context. Of course, not all these effects operate simultaneously, and the sheer fact of discursive effect does not equate to authorial intention. Only, conscious or unconscious, these are some of the interpretive options that the frame of boasting opens up.

In addition to salience, there is a narrative element to framing, which is true of the boasting frame. This storied logic is not unrelated to the concepts described above, for it is a story of pride giving way to humiliation and shaky foundations exposed as such. The relationship of boasting with judgment provides the basic contours of the storyline—a reversal in the status of those honored and shamed.

It is this story that Aristotle instantiates in recounting Amyntas' murder (Pol. 5.8.10 [1311b.4–5]), as does Diodorus Siculus in his telling of Dionysius' fall from greatness (*Bibl. hist*. 16.70.2–3), and Dio Cassius of Sejanus (*Hist. rom.* 58.11.1–7). Many stories evince the "well-known notion of divine vengeance for human arrogance, of tisis for hybris" (Most 1989, p. 130). It is this story that shapes many of the Aesopic fables[14], and it is because he does not want this story to become his own that Pindar tempers his praise (*Isth.* 5.7–15; *Ol.* 9.38). Sappho taps into this narrative when she prays that Aphrodite silence the boast of her rival (Sappho, 15.9–10); as Demosthenes does when he predicts the censure of Aeschines as the jury renders its verdict, bound by conscience and oath to judge as the heavens would (*Cor.* 82, 217, 323–324); as does Socrates, when he envisions the status of philosopher and sophist reversed before the tribunal of Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus (Plato, *Gorg.* 523A–527E). Whether we look to the past with ancient historiographers, to the present with the moralists, or to the future with those who pray, predict, and petition, we see this narrative invoked. And because so much of this literature is instructive, what we have is not only evidence for a cultural narrative of boasting but an encouragement to appropriate that narrative for oneself.

The same can be said for Jewish sources, whether in the texts that recount Israel's potential and Ben Hadad's actual fall (Judg 9:2; 1 Kings 20:1–12, 23–33) or in the lessons of Proverbs (Prov 11:7; 19:11), the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (*T. Reub.* 3:5–9; 4:4; *T. Jud.* 3:2–3, 8), and the philosophy of Philo (*Conf.* 118). Deuteronomy, the Psalms, and Jeremiah are of special importance. The climax of the covenant is Israel's boast (Deut 26:19); their covenant failure is its forfeit (cf. 28:44). It is YHWH's judgment that brings the nations over Israel, and the same judgment, visited on them, that brings her restoration (30:1–10; 32:1–43). In the Psalms, a veritable typology emerges of God silencing the arrogant speech of the wicked and establishing the boast of the righteous[15]. Finally, perhaps the most memorable statement on boasting (memorable, at least, to Paul) contrasts two types of boasting in the context of impending judgment (Jer 9:23–24)[16].

The reason these three texts are particularly important lies in the fact that they are picked up and employed as a frame of reference in other works. Ezekiel 16 picks up the boasting language from Deuteronomy in its description of Israel's judgment, and Sirach does the same in its vision of a restored community[17]. The LXX version of 1 Samuel 1:1–2:10 includes the verbiage of Jeremiah 9:23–24, highlighting the honor conflict between Hannah and Peninnah, and the *LAB* version of the same story casts Peninnah as one of the godless mockers of the Psalms, whose boasting God will silence (*LAB* 50:5). What we find are ancient texts not only *contributing to* a cultural understanding of boasting but *actively*

employing that understanding. When Paul writes similarly, he places the situations he faces within an established script of boasting and judgment, allowing him to assign motives to the actors, predict outcomes, and recommend courses of action.

5. Boasting, Joy, and the Boasting Frame

Before turning to the text of Philippians, it is worth asking how the description of boasting as a rhetorical frame compares with the prevailing understanding of Pauline boasting. The study of boasting in Paul's letters has passed through definite stages, at first revolving around the *question of consistency*, of whether his practice and prohibition of boasting prove contradictory. Studies from a psychological perspective find Paul inconsistent and take his boasting as evidence of incomplete conversion (von Harnack 1911, p. 143; Asting 1925; Dodd 1933, pp. 103–4; Callan 1990, pp. 16–50); those from a theological perspective see a paradoxical consistency (Bultmann 1964; Barrett 1986)[18]. The works of Judge (1968) and Betz (1972) ushered in the *question of context*—studies that located Paul's boasting in its social milieu, in relation to Greco-Roman rhetorical tropes and practices (Forbes 1986), the phenomenon of sophistry (Winter [1997] 2002), and the cultural values of honor and shame (DeSilva 2000; Watson 2002, 2016). It is this last item that prevails in scholarly discussions of Paul's boasting, notwithstanding a recent emphasis on *the question of corpus*, which considers the discursive role of boasting language in individual letters (Davis 1999; Donahoe 2008; Harvey 2016; Blois 2020; Kasih 2023).

Within the honor–shame framework, Paul's boasting is understood as a claim to honor (Moxnes 1996, p. 24). On one hand, his boasting serves as a point of interaction with the surrounding culture, which might even be glossed as a "boasting culture" (Harrison 2019, p. 19); on the other, this honor claim provides evidence for a theology of grace that runs contrary to contemporary notions of honor ascribed and achieved (Barclay 2015). Thus, Paul's boasting proves central to his task of community formation, for by it he keeps "believers' ambitions focused on securing their honor through pleasing God rather than by surrendering to society" (DeSilva 2000, p. 56).

Although Schellenberg distances himself from the strategic understanding of boasting that often accompanies honor–shame readings, it should be said that the honor–shame framework supports Schellenberg's notion of performativity in rhetoric. Inasmuch as the ancient self was "dyadic" (Malina 2001, pp. 60–67), Paul's attempts to promote a particular image of his enduring joy are not duplicitous, but authentic constructions of the self, rooted in social relations (Schellenberg 2021, pp. 148–49).

The honor–shame framework also coheres with the concept of boasting advocated in this paper. Boasting is a spoken act (having silence as its opposite; being evaluated according to its *ethos*, *logos*, *pathos*, etc.)[19] and a social act (having shame as its opposite and glory as its fellow; occurring in contexts of comparison, etc.)[20]. Taking these two descriptions together, boasting might properly be described as a speech act in the technical sense—it is speech that does something: it makes a claim to honor and invites public recognition. Honor–shame studies are particularly well-attuned to appreciate the intertwining of boasting with the contrast between divine and human judgment in Paul's letters, which is part of the narrative of boasting explored above, as a contrast between two different courts of opinion (DeSilva 2000, p. 56; Lau 2020).

However, a rhetorical framing perspective on boasting pays greater attention to Paul's *use of boasting language* as something different from his *acts of boasting* than standard honor–shame interpretations. The argument is that Paul does not boast every time he uses καυχ- or related terminology; rather, he leads his readers to understand a particular issue in terms of boasting, evoking the criteria of motives and matter (as seen above) and the narrative of boasting and judgment, in what might be called a "conceptual blend" (on which, see Coulson and Oakley 2005). Thus, although boasting and joy are not identical, Paul is able to treat them as mutually informative, bringing the frame of boasting to bear on his relationship with the Philippians, as seen below[21]. In the sense that it focuses on Paul's use

of language, a rhetorical framing perspective shares a greater affinity with the most recent wave of studies on boasting, referred to above as *the question of corpus*.

The rhetorical framing perspective also highlights what cognitive linguists call the "background knowledge" (Coulson 2008, p. 35) of a term or concept. The values of honor and shame are important and, in a sense, even govern the idea of boasting. Yet, as seen above, there are a host of connotations the charge of boasting might carry, for which it might be faulted, some of which are not captured in the current positioning of boasting narrowly somewhere between patronage and *periautologia*[22]. We cannot merely consign inappropriate boasters to the ranks of the dishonored, ranks with no distinctions in kind or degree. A synthesis of honor–shame and rhetorical framing perspectives would help us to see that there are a number of ways the charge of boasting might serve to impugn one's honor. Thus, though the perspective offered here is presented as a correction to an imbalance in Schellenberg's understanding, it is not simply a restatement of previous categories.

6. Boasting as a Rhetorical Frame in Philippians: Emotion and Cognition

But does Paul employ the boasting frame in Philippians? And if he does, does he do so intentionally? The pattern of true and false boasting in several of Paul's letters, which we noted above, leads us to ask if similar dynamics present themselves here. In what follows, attention is given to the construction of mutual boasting in Philippians 1–2, the contrast between insider and outsider boasting in Philippians 3, and Paul's boast that "I can do all things" in 4:13.

The most significant treatment of "mutual boasting" in Philippians 1–2 is that of Isaac D. Blois (Blois 2020), concentrating on Philippians 1:25–26 and 2:14–16. Most scholars, including Blois, interpret the relationship between these two passages as two halves of a single thought—the Philippians boast in Paul, and he in them (cf. Chaaya 2024). Another view is that they are two iterations of the same thought and that in each case Paul's boasting is in view (Bosch 1970, p. 119)[23]. In either case, the boasting in Philippians 1–2 is mutual, bespeaking shared glory. The only question is whether mutuality is explicit, as in the first option (the majority view), or implicit, with Paul's boast accompanying the believers' "progress and joy" (Phil 1:25) and their shining as glorious stars (2:15). Both readings preserve a sense of mutuality; therefore, we can set the question aside for our purposes here. Three observations can be made of this mutual boasting.

First, Paul's language of boasting and joy provides a compliment to the central subject matter of these chapters, namely the relationship between Paul and the Philippians, whether present or absent (1:21–30; 2:12–18). It is a remembrance of this relationship that shapes his prayers (1:3–11), and in support of this relationship, he sends them news and hopes for news of them (1:12–20; 2:19–30). Boasting is not the central topic, but it is the complement Paul affixes to that topic; it is the predicate to the subject.

Second, the language of boasting functions climactically in these passages. This is true in terms of form (with boasting capping off the sentences in Phil 1:25–26 and 2:14–16, and with these passages bracketing the central theological section of 2:1–11), and in terms of content: boasting serves to amplify the relational, emotional, and honorific aspects of the letter. Te-Li Lau suggests that joy here is founded on the bedrock of honor, being "an emotion that one experiences when one is honored" (Lau 2020, p. 135). However, we might put it oppositely—Paul bestows or predicts honor bestowed on those who cause him joy. Whether now (upon his release) or later (at the return of Christ), Paul and his readers are united in celebrating victory—a victory in which each plays a part for the other (Blois 2020, pp. 115, 121).

Finally, according to Blois, the language of boasting situates the relationship between Paul and the Philippians within a particular, scriptural storyline. Blois successfully connects Philippians 2:14–16 to the "history of disobedience and eschatological restoration in Deut 26–32" (Blois 2020, p. 141). Furthermore, Paul's allusion to Isaiah 49:4 in Philippians 2:16 shows that he imagines his vocation as part of this restoration, thus participating in the "tripartite matrix of honor flowing between Paul [the eschatological servant of Isaiah], the

Philippians [the renewed covenant community of Deuteronomy], and God/Christ" (Blois 2020, pp. 146–50, 153–54)[24]. What matters to us is that boasting in this scriptural storyline is a boasting set against the horizon of judgment, as indicated above. For Paul to invite his readers into a relationship of boasting is to invite them into a relationship that rests upon divine judgment in the face of unjust human judgment. Perhaps one reason Paul presents their mutual joy as mutual boasting is for just this reason—to testify that it is a joy that no merely human judgment will ever overturn.

The description of Philippians so far is of a letter that defines its community as a boasting community. This is part and parcel with boasting in the ancient world—the love between family members is described as boasting (Prov 17:6; Sir 9:16; 30:2), the patriotism of citizens in the same terms (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. Hist.* 17.101.2; *Schol. in. Il.* 1.2.96; Jdth 15.9). Philippians 3 only advances this relational focus, as it takes the boasting shared by Paul and the Philippians in chapters 1–2 and sets it against the boasting of outsiders[25]. That he wants this conversation understood in terms of boasting is especially seen in Philippians 3:3–8, a passage *Abject Joy* does not address[26].

The literary juxtaposition in this section is an act of definition, which brings both an encouragement and a challenge to his readers. Paul associates true boasting with "worshipping in the Spirit" and differentiates it from "trusting in the flesh". The characterization of the life of faith as a life of boasting brings attention to the *matter* of boasting, and the question that Paul seems to answer in relation to the matter is what comprises *realistic* grounds for boasting (hence the preponderance of terminology dealing with cognition and evaluation; see Lau (2020), p. 129). What the outsiders consider grounds for glory are realistically grounds for shame (Phil 3:19). That Paul ascribes a heavenly reason to boast to himself and his readers is encouraging—it helps them to make sense of a present lack of status, to deal with the basic bodily and emotional suffering that accompany that lack of status. It is also a challenge—to press on and secure the prize in which one currently boasts (Phil 3:12–15).

The trajectory of boasting and rejoicing carries on into chapter 4, wherein the believers are instructed to "rejoice" (Phil 4:4). There is a return to the effusive intimacy of chapters 1–2 in Paul's designation of the Philippians as "my joy and crown" (χαρὰ καὶ στέφανός μου, 4:1). Though it would be too much to assert a conscious connection on Paul's behalf, it is telling for us to contrast the crown of 4:1 with the chains (τοὺς δεσμούς) of 1:13. Dio Cassius presents crowns (στέφανοι) and chains (δεσμὰ) as polar opposites (*Hist. rom.* 58.11.12). Interestingly, as Paul passes through the somewhat more cerebral (though no less personal) discussion of chapter 3, the reality that comes into focus is not the dishonor of prison but the joy his heavenly compatriots inspire.

And yet, the warmth of Philippians 4:1–9 appears to falter on Paul's boast that he can do all things through Christ (4:10–20, especially 4:13)[27]. The boast comes amidst his reflection on the support the Philippians sent to him. For Schellenberg, self-sufficiency is a posture necessary for Paul's own survival in prison, and so he attempts a thanksgiving whilst seeking "to evade the impression of dependency" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 148). For others, Paul's seemingly "thankless thanks" results from his navigating "the rocky waters of the social conventions supporting patronage and friendship" (Cohick 2013, p. 241), or because he exemplifies the Christian realization of a Stoic ideal[28].

What gives pause to these interpretations is not so much their implausibility (for surely Paul faced insecurities and social conventions, alike); rather, it is the apparent discrepancy between the joy preceding Phil 4:10 and the seeming indifference after. I would like to venture a hypothesis that has, to my knowledge, not yet been proposed. Yet, it is an interpretation that integrates two features of Philippians 4:10–20 that give the impression of Paul failing to appreciate the gift he has received: (1) the assertion of his contentment, which, put negatively, is the same as his not being in need (4:11, 17); and (2) his redirection of the gift from himself to God (4:17–19; on these two features, see Cohick 2013, p. 237, and Schellenberg 2021, p. 148). The hypothesis is that Paul promotes the boast of the Philippians.

Paul asserts that he wants nothing: "Not that I speak of impoverishment [ὑστέρησις]" (Phil 4:11). In the Pauline economy, "Need creates an obligation" (Taylor 2022, p. 357). If Paul were in need, the believers may have felt shame that they were unable, for such a long period, to support him. Moreover, by stressing his lack of need, Paul not only guards the Philippians from a sense of shame but *provides a context in which to construe the gift as a reason for them to boast*. A similar logic is on display in First Corinthians 9, where Paul avows that he is under obligation to preach the gospel (1 Cor 9:16; cf. Rom 1:14) and that therefore his foundation for boasting lies not in preaching but in laying down his right to financial support while doing so, voluntarily (ἀνάγκη, 1 Cor 9:17). The Philippians are in an equal-but-opposite position, wherein their giving and not their receiving is in question. If their gift were a response to Paul's need, it would be, in essence, an obligation, and therefore not a reason to boast. Granted, Paul does speak of them meeting his need (χρεία) in times past (Phil 4:16), but this only underscores the interpretation offered here: Paul's seemingly "thankless thanks" is a corollary to what we might call his *needless need*. As it is, since Paul presents himself as lacking nothing, he creates a framework within which he can not only free them from potential shame for having been unable for so long to support him but within which he might also style their gift as a voluntary offering (e.g., 4:17–19), an excess or effusion of grace. Paul's rhetoric in Philippians 4:10–20, then, is not so much about Paul maintaining his honor (*contra* Schellenberg 2021, p. 142) as defending and even promoting theirs.

Although the language of boasting drops out of Philippians 4, the logic of boasting continues to operate in defining Paul's response to the Philippians' gift. Perhaps we should not take Philippians 4 as an example of boasting-as-framing in the same manner as chapters 1–3, but we may take it as evidence that the boasting frame was evoked in those previous chapters, as Paul continues to reason in line with it.

In this section, we have seen that Paul presents issues central to the letter to the Philippians in terms of boasting, especially bringing boasting to bear upon the related concept of joy. In chapters 1–2, Paul speaks of boasting to communicate the emotional depth and enduring worth of his relationship to the Philippian believers. In chapter 3, he employs the same framework of boasting to characterize the relationship between the Philippians and himself (jointly) and the world—the world's is a false boasting, in contrast to their true boast in Christ. In chapter 4, though the language of boasting is absent, that of joy carries on and makes the sense it does within the framework of boasting established earlier in the letter.

The "big picture" of boasting in Philippians is of a set of interrelated contrasts: between true and false boasting, imitation and repudiation, and divine and human judgment. There are a number of *true boasts* in the letter: Paul's and the Philippians' mutual boasting (Phil 1:25–26; 2:14–16); their worship in the spirit and confidence in Christ (3:3–10); Paul's assertion that he can do all things through Christ (4:13), and his praise of the Philippians following their gift (4:17–19). These true boasts shine in contrast to the quagmire of arrogance and depravity that Paul assigns to his opponents. Throughout the letter, true boasting is exemplified in Paul's boasting. This is true in chapters 1–2 if Bosch's interpretation of 1:26 is correct, and it is certainly true in chapter 3, regardless.

We should note that the contrast between true and false boasting rests on another distinction—that between human judgment and God's judgment. There are two forms of this secondary contrast in the letter: that between persecution and vindication, and that between spiritual and unspiritual ways of thinking and evaluating[29]. As Schellenberg writes, "Paul's letter expresses both his confidence in the Philippians' continued care and esteem and also a shared sense of displacement from the social order of which the magistrate's justice serves as an emblem. Paul and his addressees are awaiting another, truer judgment; in the meantime, together they make the best of it" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 127). Also, in the meantime, according to Lau, "Paul's readers would do well therefore to conduct their lives according to God's mandate. It is this divine court of opinion, not society's, that ultimately matters. . . They are to reconfigure their value system so that it is

ultimately congruent to that of the gospel, not of the world" (Lau 2020, pp. 132–33). Within this framework, the imitation and repudiation of boasting is simply the assimilation of God's verdict to one's own, critiquing or confirming boasting inasmuch as it aligns with or correctly anticipates the judgment of God. Interestingly, this same intermingling of contrasts appears in some of the very sources considered above (e.g., Psalms, Jeremiah, Plato's *Gorgias*, Demosthenes' *De Corona*), which contribute to and employ the boasting frame.

It bears repeating that not all framing is a conscious activity. However, if, as many scholars maintain, the language of boasting held a negative connotation in the surrounding culture, then Paul's choice of words may represent a conscious alignment with the positive connotation of boasting in the LXX (von Harnack 1911, p. 144; Pernot 1998, p. 117 n. 64)[30]. Furthermore, the fact that Paul treats diverse issues with the same general template of true vs. false boasting shows that it functions as something like a heuristic device where it occurs.

7. Conclusions

Philippians is not a letter about boasting; it is about Paul and the Philippians, the relationship between them, and the joy that relationship inspires. It is also about the factors that might threaten that relationship or the fruit it has borne—death, suffering, false teaching, and fighting. Yet, these issues are presented in relation to boasting. As a frame, boasting carries with it some ready criteria for evaluating the issues at hand. Putting things into these terms draws attention to Paul's positive motives and his opponent's allegedly hubristic ones, to his sound reasons for confidence, and to the judgment that will ultimately reverse the believers' experiences of honor and shame. In this case, discussing joy in tandem with boasting not only highlights the familial and effusive nature of that joy but also places the relationship between Paul and the Philippians within a storyline where divine judgment safeguards the intermingled joy and honor of the oppressed over and against that of the oppressors.

This reading is not really an alternative to Schellenberg's "performative rhetoric", but a redress of an imbalance. If Paul's choice of words is intentional, and in that sense rhetorical, it is not for that reason less emotional. Frames are felt. Schellenberg eschews the depiction that Paul "uses boasting" or "employs joy". But conceivably, Paul might use boasting *language*, might employ *the language of* joy. I do not think we should dismiss the original phrases for their awkwardness and infelicity if they are circumlocutions or shorthand for something more reasonable than the phraseology alone suggests.

Schellenberg reads Paul's self-presentation as unfixed and his joy as "inchoate", seemingly rather than intentional (Schellenberg 2021, pp. 26, 127). In this essay, I have focused on joy's twin—boasting—to show that it might be too soon to jettison readings "of Paul's letters that find [their] coherence. . . in some organizing feature of its discourse, whether a putatively central rhetorical aim or a key ethical or theological motif" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 21). Schellenberg has identified real problems in standard readings of Paul's joy and boasting. Yet, inasmuch as he positions socio-affective interpretations over and against cognitive and persuasive ones, to that degree, he tacitly endorses the false dichotomy that has produced the very dispassionate reading of Paul's rhetoric that he seeks to overturn. Emotional experience and intentional arrangement do not stand in a converse relationship such that one can only increase at the expense of the other. A framing perspective does not contradict Schellenberg's "performative rhetoric", but it does allow for a greater degree of intentionality than he seems ready to permit.

Of course, it may also be too soon to attempt an advance from Schellenberg's work, which is well worth digesting. However, if this essay is a false start, I hope at least that it is a false start in the right direction. None of this is meant to reintroduce Paul as a rhetorical robot, a creation Schellenberg rightly dismantles; rather, I suggest that having intentions and allowing those intentions to shape one's discourse, is itself, a very human thing[31].

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Notes

1 For a helpful discussion of the term "rhetorical" in New Testament studies, see Litfin (2015, p. 36) and Weima (2000, p. 124 n. 29).

2 Schellenberg returns repeatedly to the insufficiency of Acts' portrayal of Paul: see discussion at Schellenberg (2021), pp. xi, 7, 8, 9, 25–27, 29 n. 15, 35, 45, 47, 51 n. 123, 55, 120–121, 174.

3 This is not to say that Schellenberg alone provides a truly emotional reading of the letter. There is probably more of this emotional appreciation in the commentary tradition than is let on. Jew writes of "the heartfelt emotions that arise from the close relationship that he enjoys with this community of believers" (Jew 2020, p. 65); see also the forthcoming work of Isaac D. Blois, *The Role of Emotions in Philippians: Discerning Affections* (LNTS). Also consider Shantz (2012), which Schellenberg cites approvingly.

4 An additional factor that Schellenberg fails to consider is the role of a scribe in the production of Paul's letters. Would not the use of an *amanuensis* increase the likelihood of rhetorical devices that capture Paul's intentions? However, the scribal factor is a bit beside the point in the present essay, which concerns Paul's own tendency to address a variety of situations with the same approach—to present the exigencies of a situation as a choice between two kinds of boasting, one that aligns with or correctly anticipates the judgment of God, and the other that rests of mere or faulty human judgment.

5 There is also a more conventional use of the term "frame" in Schellenberg (2021), pp. 90–91.

6 Rhetorical framing also bears some similarities to that field of cognitive linguists called frame semantics, of which the seminal work is (Fillmore 1976), and which has been applied in New Testament studies with some success (e.g., Stettler 2017).

7 Ps 73:3–4/74:3–4 (LXX/MT); Plutarch, *Comp. Arist. Cat.* 5.2–3; *Aem.* 27.6; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. hist.* 4.74.3; Cicero, *Arch.* 11.27; Philodemus, *De sup.* 15.15–22; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 31.21–22; 77/78.24; *Schol. in Il.* 7.96. See also Philo, *Somn.* 1.130–132; *Post.* 48.

8 Jdth 15.9; Sir 1:11; 30:1–3; Pindar, *Isth.* 5.50; Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. hist.* 17.101.1–2.

9 Cf. the descriptions of the *pauper ambitiousus* in Quintilian's *Institutes* (2.4.29) and *Rhetoric ad Herennium* (4.63–64); also Theophrastus' vivid characterization of ὁ ἀλαζὼν who pretends to be rich (*Char.* 23).

10 Theocritus, *Id.* 5.77; Aeschines, *In Ctes.* 256; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 2.39.e.; Cicero, *Off.* 1.137.

11 On the connection between boasting and drunkenness: Daniel 5:prologue (LXX); Diodorus Siculus, *Bibl. hist.* 15.6.3; *De sign. Il.* 8.231; 20.84; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 77/78.27. Aesop's boasting lamp is "drunk on its own oil" (Perry 349 = Chambry 232 [The Lamp]).

12 For examples, we can look no further than the articles of Bianchini and Aletti appearing alongside this article in this very journal.

13 On these terms, see Cicero, *De Inv.*, 1.7.9; Quintilian, *Int. Or.*, 3.3.1; Franzosi and Vicari (2018) discuss the overlap of frame analysis and classical rhetorical categories including *inventio*.

14 E.g., Perry 45 = Chambry 70 (The Two Oxen and the Axelrod); Perry 74 = Syntipas 15 (The Stag and his Reflection); Perry 281 = Chambry 20 (The Two Roosters and the Eagle); Perry 304 = Chambry 101 (The Fir Tree and the Thistle); Perry 413 = Syntipas 31 (The Olive Tree and the Fig Tree).

15 Occurring, for instance, in Pss 1–3, 5, 10, 17, 22, 31–32, 36, 50, 58–59, 63–64, 73–74, 89, 94, 97, 106–107, 140, 144, 149. Given this, it is true that "the significance of the Psalter for Paul's boasting language has been overlooked" (Bohlinger 2019, p. 128).

16 There is also a relevant piece in Jeremiah 17:5–11 wherein the prophet appeals to divine judgment (carefully distinguished from human judgment in Jer 17:9) to vindicate his boasting in the face of those who hope in humankind.

17 Scholars have noted Sirach's Deuteronomic outlook (Witte 2012, pp. 112, 125).

18 Of course, there have been correctives along the way specifically to an overly theological understanding of Paul's boasting (e.g., Bosch 1970; Gaventa 1985; Thurén 2002, pp. 165–78; Wilk 2010).

19 Silence antonymous to boasting: Ps 31:2–11/32:2–11 (LXX/MT); Aesop, Perry 45 = Chambry 70 (The Oxen and the Creaking Cart); Perry 349 = Chambry 232 (The Boastful Lamp); Pindar, Ol. 5.51; Nem. 9.7; Aristonicus, De. sign. Od. 14.436.

20 Shame antonymous to boasting: Ps 96:7/97:7 (LXX/MT); Jer 12:13; 17:12–14; 27:11–12/50:11–12 (LXX/MT); 27:38/50:38 (LXX/MT); Ezek 16:37–39; Zeph 3:20; Aesop, Perry 281 = Chambry 20 (Two Roosters and an Eagle); Herodotus, Hist. 7.39.2; Lycurgus, Frag. B.8; Sir 10:22–23; James 1:9–10.

21 Thus, a rhetorical framing perspective on boasting is able to make sense of the mutually informative relationship between boasting and joy, which commentators frequently assume (e.g., Schellenberg 2021, p. 176). Though space prohibits a lengthier discussion, we can note a similar relationship between boasting and the theme of *hope* in Romans.

22 Any perspective carries the danger of reductionism or abstraction, and honor–shame readings are no different: "As with so many sociological models, the real question is not whether we are indeed being introduced to one aspect of ancient reality, but whether other aspects can be reduced to terms of it" (Wright 2015, p. 252). Not all honor–shame discussions of boasting avoid this danger

(e.g., Wilk 2010; Harvey 2016). To date, the most helpful discussions of the criticisms that surrounded boasting and self-praise in Paul's world are (Heckel 1994) and (Pernot 1998), though the latter artificially separates boasting and self-praise.

[23] The difficulties with the first view are primarily contextual, since "Paul's choice to remain with the Philippians in 1:25 is essentially an act that should bring Paul honor, but what we find in v. 26 is that it is the Philippians who also acquire the abundant boast resulting from Paul's choice" (Blois 2020, p. 120). Yet, Paul clearly holds a concept of mutual boasting (cf. 2 Cor 1:14), and already in the letter he has stressed the interconnected nature of his relationship to the Philippians. The difficulties with the second view are primarily syntactical since Paul describes the boast in 1:26 as both ὑμῶν and ἐν ἐμοὶ. However, we might, with J. Sánchez Bosch, take the former as an objective genitive and the latter as a dative of advantage or possession. In this view, the prepositional phrase ἐν ἐμοὶ functions identically to the ἐμοὶ of 2:16, and the syntax of Philippians 1:26 resembles 1 Corinthians 15:31 (τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν | τὴν ὑμετέραν καύχησιν; ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ | ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ; ἐν ἐμοὶ | ἣν ἔχω). On the ability of ἐν (+ object) functioning as a simple dative, see Robertson 1934 (1914), p. 588, who cites Philippians 1:26 as a possible example.

[24] What one makes of Blois' depiction depends, in part, on one's predisposition for or against the methodology of intertextuality. I think Blois' proposal, especially the part on Deuteronomy, receives some support through a comparison of Paul and Sirach on the subject of boasting. Paul's use of boasting language, the καυχ- stem, is fairly unique among NT authors (he pens 58 of 64 NT occurrences of that terminology, counting 1 Cor 13:3); however, his usage does not stand out as unique against the Greek translation of Sirach (17 instances). Sirach's usage of καυχ- terminology owes, in large part, to its Deuteronomic outlook, perhaps attesting to its belief (not that texts believe) that it describes life for the restored community of Israel as predicted in the final chapters of Deuteronomy. To the extent that Paul and Sirach each share affinities with Deuteronomy, to that extent Blois' suggestion receives unlooked-for support. On the Isaiah passage, see the discussion in (Radl 1986).

[25] Nikki (2019) provides an excellent restatement of traditional opinions within the framework of her argument that Paul envisions one set of opponents throughout the letter; by contrast, Ryan D. Collman (2023) suggests that the "we" who boast are not believers, generally, nor Paul and his audience, but rather Paul and Timothy, "the Jewish authors of the epistle" (p. 147). This view keeps in line Paul's normal usage of περιτομή as indicating Jewish identity. However, if the "we" may be defined by the actions they perform (e.g., worshipping, boasting), then, given the preceding context of mutual boasting, it seems best to take "we" as inclusive of the letter's author and recipients. Yet, even if Collman is correct, it is still the case that Paul's reflections on boasting in Philippians 3 are paradigmatic and instructive for his readers. That is, "Paul uses his own story to demonstrate how the Christ-gift forces a complete reassessment of value or worth" (Barclay 2020, p. 108). He specifically calls them to imitate his attitude (Phil 3:17). So, regardless of the identity of "the circumcision" in 3:3, what we have in chapter 3, following the construction of a mutual boast in chapters 1–2, is a contrast of that boasting to another kind of boasting, one "in the flesh", and one that is as typical of all believers as it is opposed to the outsiders. This contrast is a further expression of the solidarity Paul experiences with the Philippians—not only do they share the same boast, but they do in opposition to other forms of boasting.

[26] This is especially the case if, as has been argued, Paul imitates the standard cultural resumes of the time (so Hellerman 2005). However, the similarity may simply be due to the fact that Paul also partook in this culture. Either way, he modulates the conversation into the key of boasting.

[27] Asting (1925, p. 167) recognizes Philippians 4:13 as a boast. As Bosch (1970, p. 201) also notes, there are "modalidades existenciales del gloriarse cristiano, vistas en textos que cumplen la definición de καυχάομαι, aun sin usar el término.

[28] "Comparison of Paul's claim to be αὐτάρκης with Stoic discourses of self-sufficiency has long been a fixture of commentary on Philippians" (Schellenberg 2021, p. 138)

[29] That these are different senses of judgment does not mean they should not be taken together, especially when it is true to Paul's usage.

[30] The observation of a negative connotation of boasting language is a major plan of the argument in (Donahoe 2008).

[31] At this point, we might ask why Schellenberg's analogical comparisons did not include more *letters* from the incarcerated of modern times, as opposed to ethnographies and memoirs. Here he is not well-served by the conflation of somatic realities and social interactions. Would such letters as those imprisoned fathers write to their children not exhibit the kind of intentionality in Paul's rhetoric that Schellenberg seems determined to avoid?

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Article

Talking about Oneself to Talk about Christ: The Autobiographical Text of Philippians 3:1–4.1 in Light of Ancient Rhetorical Heritage

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Abstract: In this contribution, we will proceed in three steps. First of all, we will investigate the rhetorical approach for studying the Pauline letters, considering different methodological options. In this context, we will propose the approach of the literary rhetoric as the most valid. Secondly, we will analyse the autobiographical text of Philippians 3:1–4:1, starting from its delimitation, textual criticism, and its arrangement, according to oral and discursive models. Then, we will proceed with genre and literary origins; here, we will discover the periautologia as the point of reference of the Pauline autobiography. This eulogy of self is a genre, well known in the rhetorical tradition, to which Plutarch dedicated the treatise *On praising oneself.* This discovery determines the following exegetical analysis of the text. Thirdly, we will conclude with a reflection about Paul's way of speaking about himself in this passage. In light of ancient rhetorical heritage, he does not use his autobiography to praise himself but to praise Christ, who completely changed his life. Ultimately, Paul's talk about himself is a way of talking about Christ for the benefit of the addressees who should creatively imitate the Apostle and his Christian life.

Keywords: Philippians 3; Pauline autobiography; Pauline Rhetoric; periautologia

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1. Introduction

Within the Pauline corpus, the "Letter to the Philippians" is to be included among the lesser works of the Apostle with regard to its length (1629 words, corresponding to 104 verses, subdivided into 4 chapters in the printed editions). Nevertheless, such a classification does not appear adequate when judging its importance. First of all, because one of its texts, the Christological passage of 2:6–11, has represented a point of reference not only for theology but also for liturgy and Christian life over the course of centuries and to this very day. In addition, the importance of the letter emerges from those eminently personal passages such as chapter 3, where Paul, a prisoner on account of the Gospel and with the possibility of martyrdom before him, shows to the recipients and to subsequent readers, more than in any other of his writings, the profound and mysterious relationship which binds him to his Lord.

Therefore, in this contribution, we intend to analyse the autobiographical text of Philippians 3 in light of the ancient rhetorical heritage in order to understand in depth the way in which Paul talks about himself.[1] For this purpose, we will proceed in three steps. First of all, we will investigate the rhetorical approach for studying the Pauline letters, considering different methodological options. Secondly, in line with our choice to use a literary rhetoric approach, we will analyse the autobiographical text of Philippians 3:1–4:1, starting from its delimitation, textual criticism, and its arrangement. Then, we will proceed with the literary genre; here, we will discover the periautologia as the point of reference of the Pauline autobiography. This discovery determines the following exegetical analysis of the text. After this, we will put the text in the context of the letter in order to understand the overall logic of Philippians 3:1–4:1. Thirdly, we will conclude with a reflection about

Paul's way of speaking about himself in this passage and also draw a comparison to the talking about oneself that was developed and implemented in his cultural context.

2. Rhetorical Analysis of the Pauline Letters

Since the mid-1970s, the Pauline letters have been studied in a rhetorical perspective, due to the fact that scholars recognized their persuasive and argumentative character, and rhetoric was the art of persuasion *par excellence* in the first century AD.[2] Today, after almost 50 years, to speak of rhetorical analysis of the Pauline letters and of the NT can be quite vague; in fact, the interpreter needs to specify which kind of rhetorical analysis s/he intends to follow.

We can find at least four approaches currently available for those seeking to interpret the Pauline letters from a rhetorical lens: rhetorical criticism, biblical rhetoric, new rhetoric, and literary rhetoric.[3] The first approach makes use of the classical manuals of rhetoric, above all, the analysis of the Pauline letters with the conviction of the eminently persuasive tenor of the Apostle's writings. The second approach is described by its supporters as that of biblical rhetoric, set in contrast with the first, and it claims that all the biblical texts, whether Old Testament or New Testament, were composed according to a predetermined plan that retraces the particular symmetrical compositions of Semitic culture. The third approach contemporises the ancient rhetorical heritage, making use of the contributions of modern disciplines such as linguistics, semiotics, anthropology, and sociology; presenting itself as a real theory of persuasive discourse; and fixing its attention on the argumentation itself, classifying the different types of argument. The fourth and last approach, that of the literary rhetoric method of analysis, deriving from Aletti[4] and other French and Italian scholars, draws on Greco-Roman rhetoric as a tool for understanding the NT, especially Paul's letters. Such an approach avoids the rigidity arising from rhetorical criticism, in which rhetorical models (linked mainly to the judicial genre) become a straitjacket hindering the liberty of the expression of Paul and other NT authors. Literary rhetoric, in distinction, bypasses the purely formal level of earlier rhetorical analyses as a way to draw out the persuasive dimension of the text along with its performative function vis à vis the recipients. Using the text's composition and rhetorical figures, the aim of literary rhetoric is to elucidate the development of the text's argumentative flow, especially by analysing its relative proof, thereby uncovering the overall message contained therein. This method thus combines the purely literary dimension with the discursive, and epistolography with rhetoric, in order to overcome the harmful dichotomies arising from previous rhetorical criticism of Paul's letters.

For the aforementioned reasons, we propose following this last rhetorical approach. Moreover, the fruitfulness of this literary rhetorical approach will become clear as we proceed in the study of Philippians 3. In contrast with rhetorical criticism, following Longenecker's distinction in regard to rhetoric in Galatians (Longenecker 1990, p. cix), the method of literary rhetoric is not a "diachronic rhetorical criticism", but rather a "synchronic rhetorical criticism", bestowing primacy upon the text itself rather than upon various comparisons with ancient rhetorical models. An assessment of the concrete results yielded from such an approach will determine the appropriateness of its application for Paul's corpus.

3. Exegesis of Philippians 3:1–4:1[5]

3.1. Delimitation

The first question to be posed is where the text we wish to examine begins and ends. On this level, it is not enough to refer to the numeration of the Bible in chapters and verses, which do not belong to the original text but were introduced in the 13th and 14th centuries.

With regard to the higher limit, we should note that there is a break between the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3. In fact, there is a move from the third person singular with which Epaphroditus is mentioned (2:30) to the second person plural of the imperative for addressing the listeners directly, to put them on their guard against

adversaries (3:1–2). However, the question appears more complicated if we observe the sudden change in tone from exhortation to rejoicing (verse 1a) to polemical attack (verse 2); moreover, it lacks a syntactical connection. These observations have led several scholars to assume, especially in the past, the presence of two different letters clumsily joined here.[6] Nevertheless, if, on the one hand, the break between verse 1 and verse 2 is undeniable, on the other, verse 1b, as a reflection on the writing itself ("writing the same things"), acts as a good introduction to everything that follows, particularly to the following verse, which aims to capture the recipients' attention at the beginning of a new epistolary development. On account of what we have shown, therefore, we consider 3:1 the higher limit of the pericope of chapter 3.

If we seek the lower limit of the passage, we note the presence of the conjunction ὥστε, which has an inferential value so as to connect 4:1 with what is written before. This solution, which leads to the integration of the first verse of chapter 4 with our passage, is further supported by the parallelism of expression, almost an inclusion, between 3:1 ("my brothers, rejoice in the Lord") and 4:1 ("my brothers, stand firm in the Lord"). In conclusion, we can delimit our field of study in Phil 3:1–4:1 with a fair degree of certainty.

3.2. Textual Criticism

Seeing that we do not possess the manuscript that Paul dictated, textual criticism seeks to arrive at a reconstruction of the text that is reasonably close to the original, critically analysing the variants that have come down to us. In our passage, we did not have many textual problems. We could only indicate that the 28th edition of the *Novum Testamentum Graece* of Nestle–Aland displays uncertainties with regard to the insertion or omission of the following words in Phil 3:1- 4:1: ἀλλ' (verse 7); τήν (verse10); τῶν (verse 10); Ἰησοῦ (verse 12). However, the inclusion or not of these terms does not change the sense of the text.

3.3. Arrangement According to Oral and Discursive Models

Understanding how the passage is structured is a fundamental key to arriving at its correct interpretation. The oral model employs literary criteria (grammar and syntax, repetition of words and themes) to delineate the basic composition of a text, which must be perceived immediately by the listener in its essential nature. For the oral model, we can propose the following arrangement for our passage:

3:1 transition;
A. 3:2–4a comparison "we"/"they", with communication "I"–"you";
B. 3,4b–16 auto-presentation of "I", with link to "we";
A′. 3:17–21 comparison "we"/"they", with communication "I"–"you";
4:1 conclusion.

This scheme is useful because it provides us with a subdivision that links two units on account of intratextual echoes (A.–A′.) and highlights the special nature of verses 3:4b–16 (B.). Furthermore, we should note that the outer units consist of exhortations that are based on the exemplary model depicted in the central unit; on the other hand, the exhortations tell us about the perspective within which the exemplary model is to be read.

On the other hand, the discursive model makes use of rhetorical criteria to demonstrate the logical arrangement of the text, with reference to the typical disposition of the rhetorical discourse (dispositio) but also to its figures (elocutio). In the past, some exegetes (e.g., Harnisch 1999; Edart 2002; Marguerat 2004) have sought to apply this model to Phil 3:1–4:1. However, our pericope does not have a markedly argumentative character, given that Paul does not intend to prove a concept or a theory but, rather, to show his way of life. Consequently, the discursive model is shown to be unsuited to the nature of the passage, and, therefore, we follow the aforementioned oral model. Nevertheless, the broader rhetorical perspective of the study, whereby we seek to understand how a Pauline text proceeds and develops in order to engage and convince the audience, will be of great use to us and will be carefully considered by us in the subsequent analysis.

3.4. Literary Genre

Seeking the genre means comparing the passage with the various literary models of the time of Paul. The most widespread proposal among scholars has been that regarding the classical literary form of the exemplum. In it, a person or an event are offered as models of reference for the edification of the audience. Thus, in our text, Paul becomes an example of the Christian life presented in such a way that the listeners imitate him in their actions (cf. verse 17).[7] This identification with the exemplum appears to be well grounded. However, it does not turn out to be a total match for the complexity of Phil 3:1–4:1. In fact, the typical mode of expression of this literary genre is in the third person, whereas an important portion of this pericope is in the first-person singular (verses 4b-14). Additionally, the presentation which the Apostle makes of himself appears to be marked by encomiastic elements.

Thus, the most recent idea is that of identifying the literary genre of the passage as that of the periautologia, or eulogy of the self.[8] The Greek word περιαυτολογία is used for the first time by Plutarch in *On Praising Oneself* (about 100 AD), a section of his *The Morals*,[9] coming from the verb περιαυτολογέω, which means "to talk about oneself", understood in a positive sense. Plutarch's treatise is post-Paul, but it captures a rhetorical practice that has been widespread for centuries (and often frowned upon) and then fixed in a literary genre that has many points of contact with that of the autobiography (Cf. Pernot 1998). As Forbes (1986, p. 8) states, in the periautologia, typical features or *topoi* of the eulogy, which were pronounced in the first person, are adapted to the first person. In general, they comprise the following elements: origins, education, deeds, and virtues, with the possibility of also including the factor of comparison. However, in the ancient world, it is difficult to emphasise the individual; thus, the possibility of a recourse to the periautologia is found to lie mainly in two reasons: one is apologetic in nature, the other ethical. Following the former reason, it is appropriate to employ this form in order to defend oneself from the accusations of enemies, while on the basis of the second perspective, the eulogy of self has to constitute a means for imitating the author himself, suggested as a model of values and behaviour. In any case, the periautologia always turns out to be unpopular. Thus, according to the recommendations of the ancients, the orator must focus all his attention to lessen the unwelcome effect produced on the audience from a person who talks about himself by praising himself. In this context, therefore, there is recourse to a procedure that can be considered, following Pernot (1998, pp. 114–15)—a real occasion of transfer. In fact, if the periautologia has as a formula, "I am praising myself before an audience", the whole of the rhetorical skill consists of dissociating the "I" from the "me" or the orator from the audience. Thus, to disguise the "I", one puts one's own praise into the mouths of others; to disguise the "me", one reports personal merits to fortune or divinity or mixes one's own praise with that of the audience or others to whom one is related; to detach oneself from the audience, one presents periautologia in the form of an apostrophe towards opponents. In addition, little tricks that serve to attenuate and justify the praise of self are the blame of the conduct opposite to that of the one who is speaking and the list of some minor defects of the latter.

The above elements, typical of the periautologia, can be found with some certainty, in the passage of Phil 3:1–4:1. First of all, this form fully accounts for the employment, in verses 4b-14, of the first person as the subject of almost all the verbs; here is an "I" who is telling about his life in the past, present, and future. In this way, the Pauline text also appears to fulfil the necessary pre-condition of truthfulness of the periautologia[10], because it is based on a real autobiography. Next, in verses 5–6, we recognise some *topoi* from the encomiastic genre, such as origins (circumcision on the eighth day; of the people of Israel; of the tribe of Benjamin; Hebrew, born of Hebrews), education (living as a pharisee), and acts (persecutor of the Church, found blameless), based on his virtues (zeal and justice). In its turn, the rhetorical element of comparison between Paul and his enemies is directly present in verse 4, and in verses 2–3,18–21, is present indirectly, mediated by the group "we" to whom the Apostle belongs. If we dig still deeper into the reading of the text, we

also see that the two principal reasons for having recourse to the eulogy of self are present: in verses 2,18–19, the apologetic reason due to the hostile action of the enemies, and, in verse 17, the ethical reason bound up with the imitation of the good example of the subject who is praising himself. Additionally, the process of transfer in Phil 3:1–4:1 is brought into play on at least two levels. In fact, in verses 3,15, 20–21, the Apostle blends his own eulogy with that of the audience, and the one who is speaking shows himself the representative *par excellence* of the category that he is exalting, operating a transfer from himself to his listeners. In verses 7–8, on the other hand, Paul ascribes his own merits to the action of his Lord by performing a transfer of himself to Christ. Finally, in verses 12–14, the Apostle refers to his imperfection as a Christian, employing the trick of also citing his own limits so as to make his praise of himself more acceptable. In conclusion, seeing a periautologia with an exemplary function in this passage turns out to be the soundest proposal for understanding the text.

However, agreeing in this with Schmeller (2015), we note that a full identification of Phil 3:1–4:1 with this literary genre and its normal use in antiquity is not immediate, especially since verses 7–11 cannot be adequately explained. In fact, in these verses, unlike in the typical periautologia, Paul does not speak of the praiseworthy deeds he has done, but of the work accomplished in him by Christ; it is not his personal success that is narrated, but the losing of everything for the sake of a greater good; above all, the Apostle's "I" is not actually placed at the centre, but rather the person of Christ. Thus, on the one hand, the motive of boasting becomes paradoxical, consisting of a loss; on the other hand, the transfer process is implemented in a radical manner, as the identity of the Pauline "I" is completely transformed. At the end of this comparison, we believe that, on the one hand, the freedom with which Paul uses the literary canons of his time clearly emerges, and, on the other hand, the subsequent analysis of the text must be carried out, bearing in mind, above all, this paradoxical perspective of the periautologia of Phil 3:1–4:1.

3.5. Exegetical Analysis

Now that the time has come for an exegetical analysis, we shall ask about each of the expressions in the text. To this end, the use of words in Greek, in the LXX and the New Testament (especially in the Pauline passages), furnishes indications for grasping the sense that they take on in the specific context of the passage in question. Moreover, our interpretation will be guided precisely by what has emerged concerning the literary genre that determines the entire logic of our passage.

3.5.1. Transition (3,1)

The beginning of chapter 3:1, as mentioned, has a transitional function. In particular, verse 1a picks up the theme of joy, and the related exhortation, present in 2.18, occurs after an interruption due to autobiographical news and the recommendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus of 2:19–30, whereas verse 1b, also corroborated by the adverbial expression τὸ λοιπόν of verse 1a (cf. 1 Cor 1:16; 4:2; 7:29; 1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1), introduces a new development of the writing, namely the second part of the letter, which is seen as a repetition of the first ("to write the same things"), plausibly at the level of content, argumentative tools, and exhortative purpose.[11]

3.5.2. Exhortation with Motivation (3,2-4a)

The textual unit A. (verses 2-4a), consists of a negative warning about the enemies (verse 2) and the related motivation given by the profile of the believers who place their trust in Christ (verses 3-4a). The exhortation in verse 2 is addressed to the recipients to beware of certain individuals, designated by insulting epithets.[12] In a manner typical of invective and used against opponents, Paul attacks them in order to discredit them in the eyes of the Philippians and prevent the former from exerting their evil influence on the latter (Cf. Neumann 1998). As for the identity of these adversaries, they are probably Judeo-Christians, who, according to the Apostle, constitute a possible danger to the ethno-

Christians of Philippi, since they would invite them to assume circumcision, prescribed by the Law,[13] and thus disavow the justification that comes solely from faith in Christ (3:9).[14]

In fact, verses 3-4a, providing the motivation for the exhortation of verse 2 (note γάρ), insist on the sign of Jewish identity, which is circumcision, a symbol of belonging to the Abrahamic covenant and a necessary element for participating in the temple liturgy and thus approaching God (cf. Ex 12:44–48; Ezek 44:7). In verse 3, Christians, especially those from paganism and uncircumcised, such as the Philippians, are now referred to as "the circumcision", in contrast to their opponents who represent "the mutilation". For the former, by virtue of the Spirit, worship the Lord through a life relationship with him (cf. Rom 12:1; Col 2:11). Their identifying mark is not circumcision, the more obvious element of "having confidence in the flesh" (cf. verse 5) but "boasting in Christ Jesus", placing the basis and reason for existence in Christ. All this is true, although Paul may also be confident in "the flesh" (verse 4a), i.e., on the gifts received and virtues acquired by him (cf. verses 5–6).

Taken together, these verses introduce the protagonists of the passage: Paul, Christ and the Philippians, and, in the background, the opponents. In this way, verses 2-4a are preparing Paul's self-eulogy, which will be developed from verse 4b. In fact, they set the opponents in play (so, too, do verses 18–19)—a typical reason for turning to the periautologia—and praise the group "we", preparing the eulogistic transfer from the author to his listeners and, finally, insert the rhetorical element of the comparison between Paul and his adversaries—correspondingly, between "trusting in the flesh" and "boasting in Christ Jesus".

3.5.3. Self-Eulogy with an Exhortatory Conclusion (3,4b-16)

The textual unit B. (verses 4b-16) brings Paul's "I" into greater prominence. We are before the periautologia proper, with the exclusive use of the first-person singular (verses 4b-14), followed by a paraenetic conclusion that is characterised by "we" (verses 15–16). This unit can be further divided, on the basis of grammatical and syntactical considerations, into four subunits: verses 4b–6; 7–11; 12–14; and 15–16. With regard to verses 4b–14, this arrangement is confirmed at the level of the literary genre since we are looking at a piece of self-boasting in three steps: Jewish boast (the past), boast *turned upside down* in Christ (from the past to the present), and moderated Christian boast (from the present to the future). Each stage is marked by the use of a verb from the semantic field of "think, consider", indicating three different moments in self-perception (δοκέω, verse 4b; ἡγέομαι, verses 7–8; λογίζομαι, verse 12).

Verse 4b announces the beginning of Paul's self-eulogy in response to the claims of a hypothetical exponent of a group of adversaries. In this way, the Apostle, while starting on the same level as the antagonist, also introduces a prodiorthosis, a rhetorical figure indicating a prior apology for something that may be offensive—in this case, for the periautologia he is about to weave. Hence also the rhetorical comparison, through which the author asserts that he has more reason than anyone else to place trust "in the flesh" as an alternative to trusting in Christ. Therefore, following the *topoi* of the encomiastic genre, verses 5–6 provide Paul's reasons for "trusting in the flesh", through a list of the privileges received (the first four) and the merits acquired (the other three). The privileges received are related to the encomiastic *topos* of origins and indicate that Paul was circumcised on the eighth day as an authentic Jew,[15] that he belongs ethnically to the people of Israel (hence not a proselyte), that he comes from the prestigious tribe of Benjamin (cf. Rom 11:1), and that his parents are both Jews. On the other hand, the merits acquired are related to the *topos* of education, because Paul was brought up within the Pharisaic current, the most rigorous as regards the practice of the Law (cf. Gal 1:14). Secondly, the merits acquired are related to the *topoi* of deeds and virtues, consisting of zeal for the Law, on account of which the Pharisee Saul persecuted the church, and righteousness resulting from legal observance for which he was blameless.[16]

In verses 4b–6, the Pauline autobiographical data are thus placed at the service of a self-praise that is presented through its seven elements, placed in a rhetorical *climax* (a figure in which successive words, phrases, clauses, or sentences are arranged in ascending order of importance) in order to constitute an impeccable and inimitable Jewish profile. In this way, verses 4b–6 also prepare the radical turn of verses 7–11, indicating that if Paul subsequently chose Christ, he did not do so to compensate for his failure in Judaism, but only because of the unexpected intervention of God, the only one capable of upsetting his firm and convinced personality.

Thus, with verses 7–8, a total reversal of the previous Jewish boasting is triggered. These verses enunciate, using a rhetoric of excess, that Paul has come to consider the "gains" from the excellent gifts and merits acquired in verses 5–6, "a loss", "rubbish".[17] Indeed, everything has now lost its value for him. Rhetorically speaking, we have an *anticlimax*, in full contrast to the *climax* of the previous verses. The reason for this revaluation and change is solely Christ, the encounter with and knowledge of the Risen One, who has become, for Paul, "my Lord". The concluding sentence of verse 8, "in order that I may gain Christ", attests to the fact that such knowledge is a dynamic and evolving reality. This sentence is deepened and clarified at the beginning of the next verse by "and be found in him"; it is not Paul who gains Christ, but it is Christ who causes him to be found in him.

As a whole, verses 9–11 show what derives from this reversal, what is now really important for Paul[18]. First of all, being united to Christ, with a state of justice before God, which is not based on the observance of the Law but on faith (verse 9). There are many questions of interpretation raised by verse 9, but it is essential to understand its syntactic structure correctly in order to provide a correct reading of it—"and be found in him, not having my own righteousness that comes from the law, but that [my own righteousness] which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith". Thus, in the verse, the opposition is between "Law" and "faith in Christ" as two contrary and alternative principles on which to base one's righteousness, where only the last one leads to righteousness derived from God and is therefore salvific.[19] Paul, in his choice for Christ, opted for the second principle and abandoned the first.

The second effect resulting from the encounter with Christ is the experience of knowing him in the gradual, daily conformation to his death, which leads to the experiencing of the power of resurrection, even in the midst of suffering (verse 10). If, in verse 8, it was a matter of having come to know Christ, now, in the foreground, is the dynamic of knowing Christ that Paul lives day by day, reproducing, sustained by God's action, his own journey of death and resurrection (cf. 2.6–11).[20] In verse 10, the rhetorical figure of the *hysteron-proteron*, which reverses the natural order of events with the precedence of the element of Christ's resurrection over his sufferings, is intended to highlight that the Apostle, like every baptised person, first of all experiences the Lord with all his power as the Risen One (cf. verse 8) and then can and must also experience with him the tribulation, resulting from his own choice of faith. Moreover, the progressive conformation to Christ's death, during the time of earthly life, is marked by the hope, which does not depend on the person's will but on God's, of attaining the final resurrection[21] and thus full life (verse 11).

Thus, in verses 7–11, taken together, the Apostle performs a radical periautological transfer. In fact, here it is not simply a matter, as Plutarch also advises, of concealing self-praise by reporting some of one's merits to fortune or divinity; this is because his boast has been completely transferred to Christ and is motivated not by his successes but by what he has lost and fulfilled in him by the Lord. His self-eulogy has thus become a paradoxical one. Paul not only overturns his own Jewish eulogy but upends all the classical conventions of the periautologia, placing at the centre, not his "I" so much as the person of Christ.

Now, if verses 7–11 could lead us to suppose a completeness and perfection in the Apostle's existence and boast "in Christ", it is clear that what is said in verses 12–14 establishes a necessary clarification to avoid misunderstandings. Therefore, we have a double rhetorical correctio, the amending of the term or phrase just employed. Particularly, verse

12 corrects verses 7–11, saying that in following the path of the Christian life, Paul is not perfect and has not yet arrived, but he strives to reach the goal while Christ has laid hold of him. On the other hand, verses 13–14 correct verse 12, saying that Paul has not attained the destination of his journey, but he pursues the prize related to the high calling of God through Christ (that is, salvation in full and definitive communion with the Lord). In these last verses we find a metaphor that was much utilised also in the philosophico-moral teaching of the time, in relation to the struggle for virtues and ethical values.[22] Paul is a runner who does not look back at the course he has already completed but is wholly stretching forward towards the finishing post in order to gain the prize. Thus, the subunit of verses 12–14 is characterised by a toning down of Paul's Christian boast, which was presented with all his power in verses 7–11, employing, among other things, the trick advised for the periautologia of referring to his own minor defects.[23]

The exhortatory conclusion in verses 15–16 provides a full involvement of the listeners within the Pauline journey passing from "I" to "we". Thus, the Apostle begins to address the Christians of Philippi, considering them τέλειοι, i.e., mature in the faith (cf., e.g., 1 Cor 14:20; Heb 5:14) and therefore called to assume the mentality just shown in Paul's itinerary (τοῦτο φρονῶμεν). If this is the essential perspective to be taken into account, for the rest, it is left exclusively to God to enlighten the listeners, through his revealing in the case of disagreements with Paul on minor issues. Ultimately, according to verse 16, for the Philippians, as for the founder of their church, it is a matter of maintaining the level of Christian life achieved and of moving forward united and unanimous. In these verses, the typical device of the transfer, already implied in verse 3, occurs between the author and the recipients; both are praised as "perfect", even if, paradoxically, this condition, as explained in verse 12, consists of the awareness of their own imperfection in the Christian life.[24]

3.5.4. Exhortation with Motivations (3,17–21)

The final textual unit A'. (verses 17–21) is composed of an exhortation to imitate Paul (verse 17) and the two reasons for it (verses 18–19.20–21). In particular, in verse 17, there is a transition from the previous "we" to "you", through a positive invitation, addressed to the recipients, to imitate the Apostle all together,[25] helped also by those who already follow his model. Therefore, this verse indicates not only the purpose of the entire passage of Phil 3:1–4:1 but also the higher, justifying, ethical purpose of the Pauline periautologia; Paul has demonstrated his example for the Christians of Philippi to imitate (and not only them).

In spite of this conclusion, the direct appeal to imitate the speaker in Phil 3:17 could still turn out to be a demonstration of arrogant superiority, since it would represent a unique case in all ancient thought before Paul.[26] Indeed, such an exhortation is understandable and acceptable only in view of the Apostle's unique awareness of the new identity he has received. In the comparison with the past, he sees his own existence radically transformed and expropriated in order to "live Christ" (cf. Phil 1:21) so that he is able to speak of himself as "other-than-self" and propose himself as a model for others as a concrete image of his own Lord.

The first motivation (note γάρ) of the exhortation is negative, and it is the threat posed by the bad example of the enemies (verses 18–19), which is also a typical reason to turn to periautologia. As already stated in verse 2, now, in verse 18, they are denigrated by the author so that the listeners—repeatedly warned by the Apostle and now pleaded with in tears (use of rhetorical *pathos* to indicate urgency)—will not be influenced by them. Indeed, the opponents are described as those whose behaviour is completely at variance with the cross of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:18–25).[27] They, in fact, possess a purely worldly mentality (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες, verse 19) and not the mentality proper to Christians, who have Christ himself as their point of reference (cf. 2:5).[28]

The second motivation (note γάρ) of the exhortation is positive; it depends on the condition of the Philippians and Paul (and of all Christians) who are destined for final salvation (verses 20–21). They, while living their earthly life, are governed[29] from heaven by their Lord, of whom they are fervently waiting as Saviour (verse 20). For he will one

day come to transfigure the poor bodies of believers, marked by weakness and death, to make them conform to his glorious body, through the energy with which the Risen One exercises his universal dominion (verse 21). In the past, the unusual and particularly elevated language has called into question the Pauline origin of verses 20–21 and led to the hypothesis of a hymn or fragment of a hymn; however, the reasons given are not convincing to most current scholars, since from the study of form, vocabulary, context, and ideas, it is only plausible to assume the Pauline use of traditional material in order to compose a prose text of elevated style as an appropriate *climax* to the entire passage (Matta 2013, pp. 332–37).

Finally, we must note that the procedure of periautological transfer from the author to the audience begun in verse 15 and was completed in verses 20–21 with a eulogy of the "we" group and its identity (also placed in a rhetorical comparison with the enemies of verses 18–19). However, in its turn, this boast of the listeners is subjected to another transfer in relation to Christ. Therefore, the path traced by Phil 3:1–4:1 finds its goal in these last verses; Paul's boast of the self, transformed into a eulogy of Christ, becomes the boast of the Philippians, and, in a wider sense, of all the believers. As such, it will be revealed definitively with the return of the Lord, ruler of history and the universe.

3.5.5. Conclusion (4,1)

Corresponding to the transition of 3:1, in 4:1, we find the conclusion of the passage by means of an appeal, in a very affectionate tone (in order to arouse a positive *pathos* towards the Apostle), for the believers in Philippi to remain steadfast and faithful to Christ, in the manner just shown in the Pauline example. Overall, the text of 4:1 is not an exhortation in its own right but rather a summary and final reminder of the previous exhortations, the one to beware of adversaries (3:2) and the one to imitate Paul (3:17).

3.6. The Text in the Context and the Overall Logic of the Text

After an examination of the passage in itself, the question is what its significance in its context (section and letter) is. The passage 3:1–4:1 clearly recalls the Christological text of 2:6–11; in continual conformity to the death of Christ, united with the hope of attaining the resurrection, Paul's path is a reproduction of the way of the Lord, humiliated to the death of the cross and, therefore, highly exalted by God. On the other hand, if Christ is the perfect prototype at the foundation of all Christian existence (see also Timothy and Epaphroditus who, in 2:19–30, are presented as people who embody the Christological model), Paul is the imperfect example, still in becoming, whom the addressees have before their eyes. His is a concrete experience of life in Christ, which they are called to emulate according to the characteristics of each.

With a concluding glance, we shall summarise the overall logic of the text, bearing in mind the entirety of Pauline theology, which is also revealed in other, possibly parallel, passages. In conclusion, the sense of the text of Phil 3:1–4:1 is that of addressing the believer with an exhortation to follow the Apostle in making his or her own life a paradoxical praise of self, based on the way of Christ so that it becomes a praise of the Lord. Extending our case to other autobiographical Pauline passages such as 2 Cor 11:1–12:18 and Gal 1:11–2:21, we receive confirmation of the assumption that the Apostle presents the path of his life to the advantage of the Gospel, as also implied summarily by the text of Phil 1:12. In fact, in these texts, the Apostle emphasises the initiative of God who changed his life with a paradoxical and shocking style of human logic; because he chose the one who was proud to be a Jew and was furthest from the gospel to make him a proclaimer for the Gentiles (Gal 1, 11–2:21), this showed him that all his achievements as an observant Pharisee are rubbish in the face of the knowledge of Christ (Phil 3:1–4:1), and this granted him his strength and power when he came to boast of his own weakness (2 Cor 11:1–12:18).

4. Paul's Way of Speaking about Himself in Phil 3:1–4:1

Focusing now on Paul's "I" in Phil 3:1–4:1, Vouga's (2000) position is interesting here, because he affirms that the Apostle stands at the end of a path of development of

self-consciousness proper to antiquity, which began with the discovery of the individual in Homeric literature and continued with that of the subject in Greek lyric poetry. In fact, Paul, as a result of the divine revelation he received, becomes a subject capable of reflecting on his "I", a self-reflective subject; this perspective will be further followed and deepened by Augustine in his *Confessiones*, an intimate diary of his soul and the pinnacle of autobiographical writing in antiquity (Cf. Baslez et al. 1993).

In Phil 3:1–4:1, looking back over the entire journey, Paul can put his "I" at the centre, in communication with the recipients, because he now considers himself an "other-than-self". Indeed, he has received a completely new identity through the encounter with the Risen One, and he now possesses, not through his own merit but through a divine gift, an "I in Christ", even though his journey has not yet reached its destination, because he is waiting, together with the other believers, for the final transformation that will come with the resurrection from the dead.[30] From this perspective, the use of the first-person singular, proper to periautologia, does not prove unpleasant as expected in the context of the ancient world, for the Apostle is essentially speaking of someone other than what he was thanks to the gifts he received and the merits acquired. Moreover, the exemplarity of the "I" of Phil 3:1–4:1, with regard to Christian existence, can also be well understood by the Philippians so as to accept the massive use of the first-person singular in the Pauline text (Dodd 1999). After all, the use of the "I" is a suitable and effective tool to enable the process of identification of the recipients with the author so as to lead them precisely to emulate his itinerary (Cf. Schoenborn 1989). It is an itinerary that does not focus on the subject but rather on what God has accomplished in the person. In this sense, talking about oneself becomes the perfect means of highlighting all the greatness and mercy of God, who can radically change a person's life with his grace, and therefore, what could be an excellent occasion for self-praise becomes instead an ideal situation for praising one's Lord. Ultimately, by talking about himself, Paul has found the best way to talk about Christ.

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Notes

1 For a comprehensive study of the autobiographical Pauline texts, we permit ourselves to cite (Bianchini 2021).

2 The pioneering study was (Betz 1975). For a good survey of the reactions to Betz and the rhetorical analysis studies of the NT till 2009, see (Classen 2009); very useful, though just less updated: (Lampe 2006; Watson 2006). Moreover, Aletti (2021) provides an overview of the rhetorical studies of the Pauline letters up to the present day. He speaks of a first generation (Betz and his followers) with the strict application of the classic model of the forensic rhetoric to the letters; a second generation trying to find only the essential elements of each argumentation in the texts and building a bridge between epistolography and rhetoric; and a third generation that focuses not only on the arrangement of the argumentation but also on its proof and their evaluation. The last interesting contribution about Paul's rhetoric is Thurén (2022, pp. 294–313).

3 For further development of the history of rhetorical analysis in Paul, from which the following is a summary, see (Bianchini 2023).

4 (Aletti 1992, 1996). However, the denomination "literary rhetoric" is never used by Aletti, but following this methodology, it is coined by Pitta (1996, pp. 36–37).

5 This paragraph builds on (Bianchini 2006).

6 The most recent work that holds this view is (Standhartinger 2021, pp. 20–22).

7 One of the last contributions that follow this perspective is (Wick 2015, pp. 309–26).

8 After my book *L'elogio di sé in Cristo* (2006), see (Pitta 2010, pp. 208–11; Smit 2013, pp. 118–21; Focant 2015, p. 144; Gerber 2015; Pialoux 2017, pp. 244–76; Giuliano 2019; Rojas 2019).

9 For a critical edition of this work, see (Plutarque 1974, pp. 539A–47F).

10 Plutarch, *On Praising Oneself*, 539E. 545E.

11 For a good and comprehensive discussion of all the interpretive issues concerning 3:1, see (Aletti 2005).

12 For a convincing explanation of the words of verse 2, see, e.g., (Williams 2002, pp. 154–59).

13 Here, "Law" indicates the Mosaic law.

14 For a good state of research about adversaries' identity in Philippians, see (Nikki 2019, pp. 8–22).

15 Paul begins with circumcision because, as already appears in the previous verse, it was to be what the adversaries could demand of the recipients, but also because, as Aletti (2005, p. 31) well points out, it is this that constitutes the fundamental religious identity of the Jew, and therefore, the following three privileges without it would be purely worldly for him.

16 As Holloway (2017, p. 160) points out, it should be noted that in Phil 3:6, Paul has no fear of arguing for possible perfect obedience to the Law, thus defeating many interpreters who claim that, for the Apostle, the deficiency of the Law would be found in the impossibility of observing it fully. Clearly, here we are in the realm of Paul's past life in Judaism; in fact, furthermore, the righteousness derived from the Law will be contrasted with that based on faith in Christ, which will prove to be the only one capable of justification (3:9).

17 The Grek term σκύβαλα utilized here can be also translated as "dung".

18 The syntactic structure of these verses is very complex. Bear in mind that in verse 9, καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ is inseparable from ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω, a sentence dependent on ἡγοῦμαι of verse 8. In turn, τοῦ γνῶναι of verse 10 is syntactically dependent on ἡγοῦμαι of verse 8, and it is thus parallel to ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω καὶ εὑρεθῶ ἐν αὐτῷ. Finally, εἴ πως καταντήσω of verse 11 depends on of συμμορφιζόμενος of verse 10.

19 For all the exegetical and theological problems raised by the verse, we permit ourselves to refer to (Bianchini 2011).

20 A recent valid contribution about the relation between the journey of Christ in Ph 2 and the journey of Paul in Phil 3 is (Bertschmann 2018).

21 The text carefully distinguishes the believer's present participation in Christ's resurrection (τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ, verse 10) from the future participation that is from the dead (τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν, verse 11).

22 E.g., Seneca Jr., *Moral Epistles to Lucilius* 78.16 and Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.48.

23 As Aletti (2005, p. 253) suggests, highlighting the *periautological* logic of these verses, the positions of those who want to see a response to opponents (e.g., perfectionists or with a realised eschatology) in the Pauline statements of verses 12–14 are unfounded.

24 From a rhetorical point of view, the pair consisting of the negation of τετελείωμαι in verse 12 and the affirmation of being τέλειοι in verse 15 is an antanaclasis, i.e., a repetition of the same word (or body of words) in two different senses.

25 The word συμμιμητής is *hapax legomenon* in all Greek literature up to that time. The simplex form μιμητής is used in the Pauline letters for the imitation of other communities (1 Thess 2:14), of God (Eph 5:1), of Christ and Paul together with his co-workers (1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6), and of the Apostle alone (1 Cor 4:16).

26 We do not know, however, whether the invitation to imitate in 4 Mac 9:23 is earlier or later.

27 In verse 18, we have a very complicated syntactic–grammatical structure; in this regard, we can note the hyperbaton because the parenthetic phrase (οὓς πολλάκις ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω) is interposed between two constituents of a syntagma in order to highlight the expression τοὺς ἐχθροὺς τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

28 The text does not indicate the involvement of a new group of opponents; however, Paul intends to broaden the discourse, since the elements in verses 18–19 do not only apply to Judeo-Christian opponents but are aimed at blaming all those who lead an existence in contradiction with the gospel of the cross of Christ, who, in different ways, could influence the recipients.

29 The word πολίτευμα (in the New Testament, *hapax legomenon*), denotes the result or dynamic of the action expressed by the verb πολιτεύω, used in 1:27, and thus possesses a basic sense of "political activity". There are four proposals regarding the meaning of the term in 3:20 (cf. Aletti 2005, pp. 273–75): "citizenship", "colony", "homeland", "state, constitution". The last meaning is the one most frequently witnessed in the Hellenistic period so as to indicate, in our context, the model and the force that governs the earthly life of believers; this reality is found in the heavens, and is therefore placed, as the end of the verse suggests, in direct connection with Christ himself.

30 Becker (2019) speaks of an introspective Pauline "I" in Phil 1–3, which, as is the case with ancient philosophers (see especially Seneca), develops its reflection above all in view of imminent death; furthermore, in Phil 3, there is an eschatological transformation of Paul's "I". For our part, we find the German scholar's contribution interesting. However, we believe that the prospect of imminent death is only present in Phil 1 and that the transformation of the Apostle's "I" in Phil 3 is first and foremost with respect to his Jewish pharisaic identity in the past.

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Article

"Their End Is Destruction": Reading Philippians as Philosophical Dialogue

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Abstract: Paul's address to the *ekklesia* in Philippi evidences an ideological conflict within the community. The letter encourages the community to persevere in a prescribed philosophy while simultaneously recognizing the presence of "opponents" (Phil 1:28) and "enemies" (Phil 3:18) against whom the community must "stand firm" (Phil 4:1). Building on Pierre Hadot's work in identifying ancient philosophy as a "way of life", this article examines the nature of this ideological conflict by reading Philippians in light of the conventions of ancient philosophical dialogue. While the letter does not take the strict literary structure of a formal dialogue, it can rightly be understood as a philosophical text that is engaging in a critical conversation about competing philosophical "ways of life". In this philosophical dialogue, Paul critiques the alternative way of life on offer to the Philippian *ekklesia* by portraying it as an insufficient way of life that will lead to destruction. He simultaneously presents his own philosophy as the one that is consistent with the appropriate "goal," the right "mind," and a consistent "way of life" that will help the community attain their ultimate *telos*.

Keywords: Philippians; philosophical dialogue; philosophy as "way of life"; *telos*; *phronesis*; ethics

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1. Introduction

Paul's epistle addressed to the *ekklesia* in Philippi evidences an ideological conflict within the community. Paul indicates he is composing the text from prison because of the controversy surrounding the content and method of his teaching (Phil 1:13–14), and he also claims that those to whom he writes "have the same struggle" (Phil 1:30). There is a precipitating crisis, or conflict, underlying the composition of Philippians. This letter, at least in part, encourages the community to persevere in a prescribed, positive ideology while simultaneously recognizing the presence of "opponents" (Phil 1:28) and "enemies" (Phil 3:18) in their midst against whom they must "stand firm" (Phil 4:1). The letter itself denigrates the opposing ideology—even calling those associated with it "dogs" and "evil workers" (Phil 3:2) who are on the path of destruction (Phil 1:28).

Much of recent Philippians scholarship has been interested in seeking to identify the group or groups that are the target of the Philippians' invectives, though there is no scholarly consensus concerning such an identification (Williams 2002, p. 54). There has been a strong tradition of seeing the opposition as some sort of Jewish or Judaizing perspective—not least based on the two epithets of Phil 3:2: (Engberg-Pedersen 2021, p. 18).[1] However, recent studies have challenged this view and the assumptions that lie behind it (Nanos 2009; Collman 2021; Phillips Wilson 2023). These studies suggest that it is not Judaism or legalism per se that Paul warns against;[2] rather, they suggest, it appears "the concerns of the Philippians and Paul can be interpreted within a Greco-Roman cultural and political-religious context" (Nanos 2015, p. 184). Beyond this, though, lies significant speculation and disagreement. As Williams has noted, "Paul is content to assume that his intended audience knowns who the opponents are" (Williams 2002, p. 55); however, for modern readers, the "polemical approach is too vague to provide clarity" (Nanos 2017, p. 142). When reading Philippians, then, modern readers must be attentive to the

ideological conflict evident throughout the letter while simultaneously accounting for the speculative nature of any attempt to concretely specify an ideological opponent.

One potential way to accomplish such a reading of Philippians is to consider it as an act of philosophical dialogue. Understanding the conflict as a clash between competing philosophies can help illuminate the ways in which Paul develops his own ideology while engaging with competing ideologies (even if the exact identification of the oppositional ideology—or multiple oppositional ideologies—remains undetermined). Throughout Philippians, Paul sets up a contrast between his own system of practice and the conflicting ideology using the categories of philosophical discourse. The letter contrasts the understandings of the appropriate goal (σκοπός in Phil. 3:14) of life, the "mindset" (φρόνησις) necessary to pursue the telic goal, and the concrete actions, behaviors, and emotions consistent with the philosophical way of life. Before examining the specific ways in which the letter engages in this philosophical dialogue, though, it must be demonstrated how Philippians, often considered a text of a "religious movement," can be read as ancient philosophy.

2. Ancient Philosophy as a Communal Way of Life

There is a significant tradition within both classical and early Christian scholarship that sees a sharp distinction between the New Testament texts and ancient philosophy. Representative of the classical tradition, Simo Knuuttila suggests that "early Christianity as a religious movement was not philosophical in itself" (Knuuttila 2004, p. 111). Representative of the early Christian scholarship, Emma Wasserman notes, with reference to the Pauline corpus: "scholars of Paul have often taken a hostile stance towards Greek philosophical thought on the assumption that Paul is so distinctively religious in his self-understanding that he must be understood primarily, if not exclusively, in terms of Jewish traditions and writings. On this view, Judaism belongs essentially to the category of religion, whereas ancient philosophy does not" (Wasserman 2008, p. 387). Such objections illustrate the long-standing divide placed between "religion" and "philosophy" that has often plagued scholarship concerning the choice of historical parallels and contextual studies.[3] Ancient philosophy has frequently been discarded as too personal, theoretical, abstract, and systematic an enterprise to compare with the religious and Jewish context of the New Testament texts.[4] However, such objections reflect misunderstandings both of the task of ancient philosophy and the longstanding yet erroneous distinction between Judaism and the broader Greco-Roman world.

Such traditional bifurcations between Hellenism and philosophy on the one hand and Judaism and religion on the other are far too simplistic and unrepresentative of the first-century Mediterranean world within which Philippians was written.[5] The first century world was characterized by an active philosophical climate composed of various schools from both Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds. Though the era falls between two great philosophical epochs of the original Hellenistic philosophers of the third and second centuries BCE and the Neoplatonists of the second and third centuries CE, the first-century philosophical world featured Peripatetic, Stoic, Epicurean, and Platonic schools and traditions in a fruitful time of philosophical development. Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, highlights the porous boundaries between these traditional distinctions not least in describing the various Jewish factions as distinct φιλοσοφίαι or "philosophies" (Josephus 1965, §18.11). Writing for a Roman audience and attempting to convey the compatibility of Judaism and the Roman world, Josephus indicates that Judaism should be considered among the other Greco-Roman philosophical schools of the first century. As we will see, the task of philosophy in the first century was far different than the caricature of a personal, theoretical, abstract, and systematic enterprise. Instead, philosophy, whether Greco-Roman or Jewish, was conceived of as the pursuit of an entire way of life involving spiritual exercises that took place within an established community.

2.1. Philosophy as a Way of Life

The pursuit of ancient philosophy as an entire way of life can be strikingly seen in an intriguing, short text from either the mid first to late second century CE, *The Tablet of Cebes*.[6] The text describes a group of young men who have come upon an unusual painting while visiting a local temple. The painting "appeared to show neither a walled city nor a military camp, but presented a circular enclosure, within which were two other circular enclosures, one larger than the other. The first enclosure had a gate, and it seemed to us that a large crowd was standing near to this gate, whilst within the enclosure we could see a large number of women. Beside this entrance to the first enclosure stood an old man who appeared to be giving instructions of some sort to the crowd that entered" (Seddon 2005, §1.2–3). Unable to determine the meaning of the painting on their own, the young men are instructed by an older man at the temple. Under his guidance, they learn that the painting conveys a fable in which the "circular enclosure" is "Life" and the large crowd standing near the gate were those who were about to enter "Life". Within the painting, the man giving instructions near the gate is telling those about to enter "Life" what path they should take if they are "to be saved in life" (εἰ σώζεσθαι μέλλουσιν ἐν τῷ βίῳ) (§4.3).[7] The various women within the enclosure are personified virtues and vices that influence people's paths in life, for good or for ill. As the older man at the temple continues to describe particular components of the painting to the young men, it emerges that the painting depicts the pursuit of a philosophy that seeks to help individuals "fare well in life" (§3.1).

This eclectic text conveys how ancient philosophy sought to convey a view of the entirety of human life with the explicit aim of being able to live well.[8] In his commentary on the text, Seddon notes that *The Tablet of Cebes* invites its readers "to consider that the fate of those who wander the enclosures is our own fate in the real world" (Seddon 2005, p. 176). That is, ancient philosophy was the pursuit of a coherent and holistic *Weltanschauung* with implications for every aspect of human existence. Marcus Aurelius, for one, spoke of philosophy in the context of locating oneself within "universal substance" (συμπάσης οὐσίας) and "universal time" (σύμπαντος αἰῶνος) (Aurelius 1908, §5.24). Such an undertaking results in a new conception of the entirety of life, what Aurelius elsewhere terms "a view from above" (Aurelius 1916, §7.48, 9.30, and 12.24.3, as cited in Engberg-Pedersen 2000, p. 59).

Based on passages like these, Pierre Hadot describes ancient philosophy as an "existential option which demands from the individual a total change of lifestyle, a conversion of one's entire being, and ultimately a certain desire to be and to live in a certain way" (Hadot 2002, p. 3).[9] This way of life extends beyond moral conduct, though ethics are certainly an important consideration. It is, rather, "a mode of existing-in-the-world, [. . .] the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life" (Hadot 1995b, p. 265). The task of the philosophical life itself was "a unitary act, which consists in *living* logic, physics, and ethics" (Hadot 1995b, p. 267). Ancient philosophy aimed at establishing a holistic conception of life that resulted in practices and exercises that were consistent with its view.

2.2. Philosophy and Spiritual Exercises

The philosophical way of life was ultimately incomplete if it remained a matter of theoretical, unenacted learning. In his *Discourses*, for example, Epictetus emphasizes that philosophers cannot "be satisfied with merely learning"; rather, they must add "practice" (μελέτη) and "training" (ἄσκησις) to learning (Epictetus 1925, §2.9.13). Seneca specifies even further that "philosophy teaches us to act, not to speak (facere docet philosophia, non dicere); it exacts of every man that he should live according to his own standards, that his life should not be out of harmony with his words, and that, further, his inner life should be of one hue and not out of harmony with all his activities" (Seneca 1917, §20.2). Here, Seneca highlights that philosophy is an action and exercise. It seeks consistency between internal and external activities. Epictetus and Seneca both help demonstrate that the development of the philosophical *Weltanschauung* was aimed at practical changes

expressed in the behaviors of everyday life. Hadot, distinctively, terms such philosophical practices "spiritual exercises" because "these exercises are the result, not merely of thought, but of the individual's entire psychism" (Hadot 1995c, p. 82). Such habits, activities, and practices of ancient philosophy corresponded to "the transformation of our vision of the world, and the metamorphosis of our being" (Hadot 1995a, p. 127).

According to Diogenes Laertius, Diogenes the Cynic maintained that philosophical training (ἄσκησις) involved both mental and bodily exercises (English: Laertius 1925, §6.70; Greek: Laertius 2013). Indeed, for Diogenes, "one half of this training is incomplete without the other" so that "good health" and strength" were to be included among the philosophical exercises. Indeed, according to Diogenes, "gymnastic training" leads directly to virtue (Laertius 1925, §6.70). Elsewhere, Seneca proscribes occasional ascetic bodily practices in which one should "be content with the scantiest and cheapest fare, with course and rough dress" in order to prepare the soul (Seneca 1917, §18.5).

In addition to bodily training practices, Philo of Alexandria maintains that sustaining philosophical training (ἄσκησις) involves internal exercises such as "inquiry, examination, reading, listening to instruction, concentration, perseverance, self-mastery, and power to treat things indifferent as indeed indifferent" (Philo 1932, §253). Allusions to a number of different such practices in ancient writings indicate that they included activities like meditation, fasting, memorization, self-attention, reading, listening, and self-mastery (Hadot 1995c, p. 84). Such "spiritual exercises" were regarded to be directly connected with the overall philosophical view of life and were "intended to effect a modification and a transformation in the subject who practiced them" (Hadot 2002, p. 6).

2.3. Philosophy as a Communal Act

Finally, ancient philosophy was, in essence and in practice, a communal endeavor. While there is significant attention to individual responsibility and agency within ancient philosophical texts, the organization of the various philosophical schools ensured that philosophers were rooted within a community pursuing a similar way of life. Josephus's description of the Essene philosophy, which Josephus indicates contains around four thousand members, highlights that their exceeding virtue is primarily demonstrated within "their constant practice" in which they "hold their possessions in common" (Josephus 1965, §18.20). While not all philosophical schools instituted the extreme insular communal practices of the Essenes, communal locations like Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum, Zeno's Stoa, or Epicurus's Garden were constitutive of philosophical practice.[10] Hadot even goes so far as to contend that "there can never be a philosophy or philosophers outside a group, a community" (Hadot 2002, p. 3). Ancient philosophy, thus, was an open and communal engagement that was based on the ultimate goal of developing a particular way of life. Philosophers strove for a new way of life that was expressed in practice within a like-minded community.

Not only was ancient philosophy considered the communal pursuit of an entire "way of life," but there were competing and conflicting views of this pursuit. Roman satirist Lucian cheekily writes that the early Roman empire was a time when there were various types of philosophical ways of life "for sale" (Lucian 2007). While a satirical jab at the commercialization of ancient philosophy, Lucian's observations do highlight the plethora of philosophical schools competing for adherents in the broader marketplace of ideas. The relationship between the various philosophical schools has been and continues to be a matter of some dispute. Some perspectives see the different philosophical schools as "rival traditions of life" (Rowe 2016, p. 239). They see strong boundaries that completely distinguish the schools from one another. On the other hand, the first-century philosophical world has been described as a period of eclecticism in which the overarching trend was the merging of various traditions so that "it was no longer possible to be a 'pure-blooded' follower of any of the traditional schools" (Dillon and Long 1988, p. 1). Against both extremes, Engberg-Pedersen has suggested the interaction between schools should be conceived of as "fundamentally polemical, either in the form of explicit rejection or of subordinating

appropriation" (Engberg-Pedersen 2017, p. 25). While the various first-century philosophical schools did have knowledge of and interacted with other philosophical perspectives, sufficient distinctions remain, allowing us to (carefully) articulate distinct understandings and practices among the various schools.

3. Ancient Philosophical Dialogue

At least ideally, it was not market or economic considerations that would help perspective adherents distinguish between the potential options, pace Lucian. It was, rather, a careful weighing of the ideas and practices associated with each philosophical perspective—seeking a way of life that was consistent with reality and practically beneficial—that distinguish the various philosophical options from one another.

Because of the communal nature of ancient philosophy, "philosophizing originally took place in conversation" (Hösle 2012, p. 73), and so a careful examination of the various available philosophical traditions would need "a readiness to allow different positions to collide with each other powerfully" in conversation (Hösle 2012, p. 133). Yet, it would also require an approach that could illustrate the close connection between the philosophical traditions' theoretical considerations and the practical, ethical ramifications of their theories (Hösle 2012, p. xvi). What was required then, when engaging with multiple philosophical "ways of life," was philosophical dialogue.

3.1. The Goal and Structure of Philosophical Dialogue

Philosophical dialogue is a particular type of philosophical conversation that brings multiple perspectives into a back-and-forth discussion of a particular philosophical problem. Vittorio Hösle notes that philosophical dialogues can be distinguished from other philosophical conversations by their four essential components: (1) a plurality of participants or perspectives that provide (2) a linguistic articulation of (3) their attempted response to (4) a motivating philosophical question (Hösle 2012, p. 48). Thus, the central focus of philosophical dialogue is the evaluation of various responses to a particular crisis that demands a response (Hösle 2012, p. 120).

Ancient philosophical dialogue would often take the form a particular genre of writing in which at least two characters have a recorded conversation, often (but not always) in direct question-and-answer form. So, Diogenes Laertius summarizes a philosophical dialogue as "discourse consisting of question and answer on some philosophical or political subject, with due regard to the characters of the persons introduced and the choice of diction" (Laertius 1925, §3.48). In Laertius's opinion, it was Plato "who brought this form of writing to perfection" and who "ought to be adjudged the prize for its invention as well as for its embellishment" (Laertius 1925, §3.48). Laertius is aware of further various motivations and goals for Plato's philosophical dialogues that he identifies in various subdivisions as illustrated in Figure 1 below (Laertius 1925, §3.49).

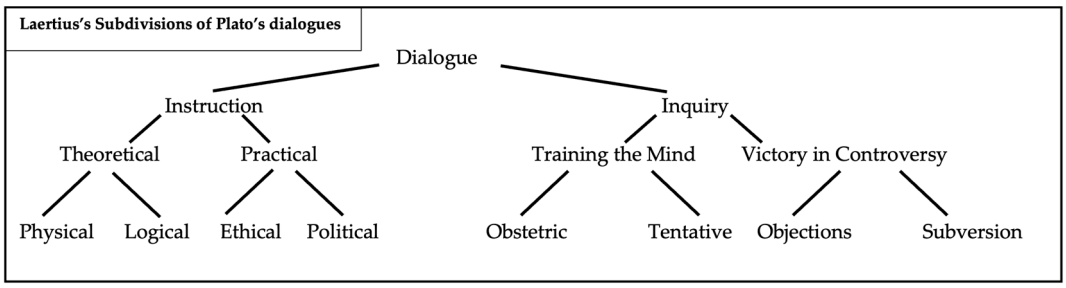

Figure 1. Laertius's Subdivisions of Plato's dialogues.

Philosophical dialogues, then, could be used both for instructing members in the particulars of a philosophy and for engaging with other "competing" philosophical perspectives.

Dialogues are a particularly helpful philosophical method for engaging with controversies and differences of opinion. Philo, echoing the *Theatetus*, maintains that dialogue is key to philosophical development (Niehoff 2010, p. 41). In *Her*. 247, Philo indicates that when various schools come to "different and conflicting opinions" (ἑτεροδοξοῦσιν), the man—Philo specifies an ἀνήρ—who is both "midwife" and "judge" must observe the disputation, discerning in particular "the products of each soul" (τὰ τῆς ἑκάστου γεννήματα ψυχῆς). It is an interesting point of focus. Indicative of ancient philosophy as a communal way of life that results in distinct practices, Philo maintains that what is to be evaluated within the philosophical dialogue is the "product of the soul". Once the observer has heard the dialogue of positions and seen the change in life they produce, he is to cast away that which is not worth keeping and preserve that which is worthy.

For a dialogue itself to be philosophically significant, it must go beyond merely categorizing potentially equal responses to the precipitating crisis. It must, rather, produce an evaluative determination. According to Laertius, in the *Dialogues* "Plato expounds his own view and refutes the false one" (Laertius 1925, §3.52). A dialogue ultimately aims at identifying a preferred perspective that provides the best practical response from the author's perspective to the focal challenge (Hösle 2012, p. 31). The philosophically significant dialogue, then, seeks to communicate a philosophical perspective that challenges and provokes the audience's current worldview, expecting that "a fundamental change of perspective" will occur within the audience (Hösle 2012, p. 121). It thus aims at persuading the audience that the author's philosophical perspective can provide a better "way of life" in light of the identified challenge than the other philosophical perspectives.

3.2. Philosophical Dialogue in the First Century

While Laertius highlights Plato's role in the development and utilization of the approach, philosophical dialogue was not limited to Plato. A number of extant texts demonstrate that the philosophical dialogue was a known and effective method of engaging with contrasting perspectives in the first-century world. Three particularly notable authors of first-century philosophical dialogues are Cicero, Plutarch, and Philo of Alexandria.

Cicero was a strong proponent of the dialogic form in Latin, using it frequently throughout the entirety of his writing career. Schofield suggests that Cicero's dialogues can be understood as dialogue treatises because of the extensive development that is often given to each philosophical perspective (Schofield 2008, p. 79). So, for example, in *De finibus*, Cicero conveys a dialogue between three friends concerning the ethical systems of Epicureanism, Stoicism, and the New Academy. The articulation of each school's philosophical system unfolds over the course of one book, and the critical engagement with the Epicurean and Stoic positions develops over an additional book.

In a historical letter to his friend Verro, Cicero confesses that he fictionalized an account of real philosophical discussions the friends had previously had at Cicero's villa. Being unable to wait for Verro's written philosophical position any longer before composing his dialogue, Cicero tells his friend: "I have therefore composed a conversation we had. [. . .] It is very likely, I imagine, that when you have read it, you will be surprised at our having expressed ourselves in that conversation as we have never yet expressed ourselves; but you know the custom in dialogues" (sed nosti morem dialogorum) (Cicero 1965, §9.8.1). Though Cicero maintains he is sure that the position attributed to his friend is conceptually accurate, he admits that the standard custom of dialogues is not a verbatim record but a literary creation designed to clarify various perspectives on a precipitating question.

After Plato, Plutarch is the next most significant Greek dialogist. Kechagia-Ovseiko counts sixteen distinct dialogues in Plutarch's philosophical works, making up about one-fifth of his total literary output (Kechagia-Ovseiko 2017, p. 9). Plutarch frequently employs the dialogical form when engaging with particularly significant questions or questions in which there is genuine contemporary debate. A delightful example is the dialogue *De Facie in Orbe Lunae*, where Plutarch constructs several layers of dialogue involving multiple speakers who attempt to account for the appearance of a face on the moon. The various

perspectives bring mathematics and physics—both terrestrial and celestial—to bear on the primary question.

In the case of *Non Posse Suaviter Vivi Secundum Epicurum*, Plutarch records a critical response to the philosophical perspective of Epicureanism. Indicative of the importance of the philosophical dialogue for engaging with alternative perspectives, Plutarch's first-person narrator maintains that it is necessary to "study with care the arguments and books of the men they impugn" (Plutarch 1967, §1086c). Further, one "must not mislead the inexperienced by detaching expressions from different contexts and attacking mere words apart from the things to which they refer" (Plutarch 1967, §1086c). Here, Plutarch's dialogue is not only engaging in the competing philosophical perspectives of his day, but it also lays out the significance of engaging in dialogue to have a proper understanding of an opposing perspective—especially one that will ultimately be rejected.

Dialogues feature within Jewish philosophical writings of the first century as well. There are two dialogues in Philo's extant corpus: the fragmentary *De Providentia* (Philo 1941) and *De Animalibus* (Philo 1981). In both texts, Philo participates in a dialogue with his nephew, Tiberius Julius Alexander. In both dialogues, the position of Alexander on the motivating philosophical question (providence in *De Prov.* and animal rationality in *De Anim*.) is articulated before Philo expresses his own philosophical perspective on the issue.[11] The philosophical dialogue was a significant methodological approach throughout the first-century world, in Latin and Greek, including Hellenistic and Jewish philosophies. For engaging in real, complex debates, philosophical dialogues provide a creative, literary way to bring multiple perspectives to bear on a precipitating philosophical controversy or question.

Philosophical dialogue also became a key feature of early Christian thought in post-New Testament writings. Indeed, Christian antiquity "is a period especially rich in dialogues" (Hösle 2012, p. 121), and we see early Greek and Latin examples of such dialogues from the second and third centuries CE with Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* and Minucius Felix's *Octavius* (Hösle 2012, p. 95). Hösle notes that early Christians imbued philosophical dialogues with an existential profundity that evidences the communication of an entire philosophical way of life (Hösle 2012, p. 94). While philosophical dialogues could often be fictionalized accounts of hypothetical conversations, early Christian dialogues would often "represent real theological debates without any literary pretensions" (Hösle 2012, p. 95). Early Christians after the first century found philosophical dialogue to be a meaningful way in which to engage in a comparison between Christianity and other philosophical perspectives. The art of philosophical dialogue was, thus, also well rooted in the early Christian movement in the decades after the New Testament writings, and these early Christian examples were not limited to hypothetical literary constructions. Rather, they could and did contain genuine philosophical and theological controversies in the experience of the community.

3.3. Philosophical Dialogue in the Epistolary Genre

While philosophical dialogues could often take the distinct generic form of questions and answers between two or more participants in a single text, the essential act of philosophical dialogue—a comparison of multiple philosophical perspectives on a particular problem or question—is not limited to a particular literary genre. Dialogue could take place as genuine conversation or in other written genres like letters. In *On Style*, for example, Demetrius recounts how epistles, though a distinct literary genre from dialogue, reflect several essential characteristics of dialogue (Demetrius 1902, §222–227). He notes that Artemon, who edited Aristotle's letters, referred to a letter as "one of the two sides of a dialogue" (εἶναι γὰρ τὴν ἐπιστολὴν οἷον τὸ ἕτερον μέρος τοῦ διαλόγου) (Demetrius 1902, §222).[12] Demetrius clarifies that this statement carries "some truth" but "not the whole truth," because "the letter should be a little more studied than the dialogue" (Demetrius 1902, §223).

Within the first-century world of Paul, Seneca's letters demonstrate the way in which philosophical dialogues could be composed in epistolary style. As Anderson notes, "Seneca's *Dialogues* are not dialogues with multiple characters speaking [...]. Instead, Seneca himself speaks the words of his interlocutors (when they are given), but most often follows the generic conventions of the letter form" (Anderson 2015, p. xiv). Indeed, Seneca's letters appear to be literary compositions (rather than real correspondence) that "like the dialogues of Plato [...] create an atmosphere of interpersonal philosophical exchange, with the difference that the medium of this exchange is not face-to-face conversation but intimate correspondence between friends" (Inwood 2007, p. xii). In place of the back-and-forth script-like style of the formal, generic dialogue, Seneca's letters evoke multiple philosophical perspectives through literary devices like rhetorical questions and the description of potential objections to the arguments. One short passage in "Letter 58: On Being," for example, demonstrates several of the literary means by which Seneca evokes a dialogue within the epistolary genre:

> You're asking, 'What is the point of this introduction? What's the purpose?' I won't hide it from you. I want, if possible, to use the term '*essentia*' with your approval; but if that is not possible I will use the term even if it annoys you. I can cite Cicero as an authority for this word, an abundantly influential one in my view. If you are looking for someone more up-to-date, I can cite Fabianus, who is learned and sophisticated, with a style polished enough even for our contemporary fussiness. For what will happen, Lucilius [if we don't allow *essentia*]? How will [the Greek term] *ousia* be referred to, an indispensable thing, by its nature containing the foundation of all things? So I beg you to permit me to use this word. Still, I shall take care to use the permission you grant very sparingly. Maybe I'll be content just to have the permission. (Seneca 2007, p. 4)

Seneca, here, evokes a fictionalized correspondence with a recipient by name—Lucilius, the second person "you"—and crafts a dialogical discussion, even appealing to philosophical authorities like Cicero and Fabianus, on the definition of an essential philosophical term: essentia. Seneca, is thus, able to include multiple philosophical perspectives while simultaneously establishing his preferred position on essential questions and issues of the Stoic way of life.

Thus, while a letter is generically different than the extemporaneous utterances of literary dialogues, it similarly captures the intersubjective communication evoked by a dialogue. And while Seneca constructed fictionalized correspondences to form a hypothetical dialogue, real epistolary correspondence could carry out a genuine exchange of opposing views among various voices. So, David Hume—one of the exemplars of the generic dialogue in more modern philosophy—also writes:

> I have often thought, that the best way of composing a Dialogue, wou'd be for two Persons that are of different Opinions about any Question of Importance, to write alternately the different Parts of the Discourse, &. reply to each other. By this Means, that vulgar Error woud be avoided, of putting nothing but Nonsense into the Mouth of the Adversary' And at the same time, a Variety of Character & Genius being upheld, woud make the whole look more natural & unaffected. (Hume 1932, 1:154)

Hume interestingly notes that genuine correspondence is perhaps the best means of conducting a genuine philosophical dialogue so that each side is able to present their first-hand perspectives.

Ultimately, philosophical dialogues, in whatever genre they appear, serve to "clarify substantive issues" (Hösle 2012, p. 44). That is, they engage with problems and questions that have direct impact on life and behavior. While they do include elements of theory, philosophical dialogues are not the place for esoteric, abstract philosophizing.[13] Rather, philosophical dialogues present various responses to questions that "are not mere intellectual puzzles but have consequences for the way we lead our lives" (Hösle 2012,

p. 51). Philosophical dialogues engage with metaphysical issues—including those that are frequently described as religious—because such questions are "not solely a matter of the intellect but rather deserving the attention of the whole personality" (Hösle 2012, p. 51). Because of this, comparisons of various available philosophical ways of life often take place, naturally, in the act of philosophical dialogue. The evaluation of philosophical perspectives that a dialogue accomplishes in its back-and-forth nature could be conducted in a variety of literary genres, including (perhaps exemplarily) in the writing of letters.

4. Reading Philippians as Philosophical Dialogue

These two components—the overview of ancient philosophy as a way of life and the way in which philosophical dialogue acted as a means of engaging in a comparative approach to dealing with philosophical crises that were practically relevant—establish the foundation for the analysis of Philippians as a philosophical dialogue. Philippians is certainly not written in a strict literary genre of dialogue; it is, rather, epistolary. Yet, as we have seen, letters were particularly well suited to carry out the primary aims of philosophical dialogue. At the beginning of the letter, in Philippians 1:9, Paul indicates his prayer for the recipients of the letter is that they abound in love, knowledge, and insight. This indicates that a key purpose that Paul has for the Philippians is for them to continue developing their philosophical way of life: knowledge and insight that leads to action.

Several recent studies of Philippians have also recognized several elements of the text that support examining the letter as an example of genuine communicative philosophical dialogue within a particular community. Several scholars have highlighted ways in which the letter reflects the structures and themes of broader philosophical discourse. Troels Engberg-Pedersen suggests that Philippians is "a letter of paraklesis" in which Paul encourages the recipients of the letter to continue progressing in their knowledge and insight of Christ (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, p. 105). He further suggests that in this way, "Paul is speaking and acting as a teacher in relation to his pupils in the way of the Stoic sage" (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, p. 107). Wayne Meeks highlights the significance of the ethical and intellectual elements of the letter, noting that "it is about the way believers ought to behave (περιπατεῖν) and, logically prior to that, how they ought to think" (Meeks 2002, p. 109). Paul Holloway's suggestion that Philippians is a letter of consolation designed to combat grief "through rational means" highlights a rhetorical focus of the letter in providing a practical response (primarily through a focus on emotion) to a problem or crisis through rational, philosophical reflection (Holloway 2001, p. 2). Elsewhere, Holloway states even more explicitly that "there should be little disagreement that Paul wrote to the Philippians as a philosopher" (Holloway 2013, p. 67). Bradley Arnold's study demonstrates structural and thematic parallels with ancient moral philosophy with a particular focus on associated athletic imagery in the letter's articulation of a virtuous life (Arnold 2014). Crispin Fletcher-Louis likewise maintains that "appreciating the extent to which Philippians is a letter written in a philosophical register is important" for understanding both the overall argument of the letter and specific exegetical issues (Fletcher-Louis 2023, p. 48). Each of these studies suggests that Philippians can profitably be read within the overall philosophical milieu of the first-century Roman empire. Even further, they help set the foundation for understanding Philippians as a philosophical dialogue that engages in the intentional comparison of philosophical perspectives in an attempt to persuade its audience of the positive implications of its theoretical approach to a particular question or crisis.

Philippians presents something of an interesting examination of the philosophical dialogue because only one perspective in the dialogue is extant. There is insufficient information to more fully understand the second party in the dialogue: the philosophical perspective that the letter engages. Modern readers of the letter only have brief and fleeting references to these "enemies of the cross" (Phil 3:18) because only the words of Paul remain. A more developed understanding of the second philosophical perspective (or even if there are multiple philosophical perspectives addressed) or an understanding of how accurately it is represented in Philippians is not possible. Only one voice remains.

Yet, by nature of its epistolary genre and as assumed genuine correspondence, Philippians assumes its original audience's knowledge of the contrasting philosophical perspective or perspectives (that of the "opponents"). In Phil 3:18, Paul indicates that he has discussed the teachings of the "enemies of the cross" "often" (πολλάκις) with the recipients of the letter, suggesting that the letter is but one part in an extended conversation with a community about two perspectives that were well known—or at least familiar—to the original readers of the letter. Philippians uses that prior, shared knowledge (which is lost for modern readers) in crafting the letter as a philosophical dialogue between the assumed position of the "opponents" and Paul's own perspective. Philippians itself, as a historical record of communication, and the shared knowledge it presumes between Paul and his original readers are evidence of an extended dialogue of which only one part remains. Approaching the text of Philippians as a philosophical dialogue allows for modern readers to engage with Paul's critiques of the position while recognizing that the exact identity of the opposing position or their exact philosophical perspectives cannot be conclusively determined.

The categories of philosophical dialogue can help shed light on the ways in which Philippians both promotes its own ideological perspective while simultaneously critiquing the opposing perspective. To claim that Philippians can be read as a philosophical dialogue is not an argument about genre but, rather, about the focus and content of the letter. In this dialogue, Philippians engages in a direct philosophical comparison of the goal of the competing perspectives, the understanding necessary for right perception and behavior, and finally the particular "way of life" that results from each philosophy. In each of his critiques of the opposing ideology, Paul attempts to articulate the ways in which it is insufficient as a coherent philosophy in comparison with his prescribed philosophical approach. These elements most clearly appear in Philippians 3, though several of the primary points of comparison are also developed elsewhere throughout the letter.

4.1. The Telos

Aristotle famously begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the image of an archer whose quality can only be evaluated based on his ability to accurately hit a defined target. Similarly, the quality of a human life, Aristotle claims, should be evaluated based on one's ability to accomplish a defined target: the τέλος, or goal, that acts as the ultimate end for life (Aristotle 1934, 1094a.2). The ultimate foundation for any philosophy is its articulation of the appropriate *telos* of human life and the ways in which it equipped individuals to attain that goal (Covington 2018, pp. 42–46). When conducting a philosophical dialogue, it would be natural, then, to compare the competing conceptions of the ultimate aims of both philosophical perspectives.

The strongest statement Paul makes in his dialogue concerning the "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18) is that their *telos*—the ultimate end to which they aspire and which guides their life in action—is misguided. The opposing philosophy's ultimate end will ultimately lead, Paul says, to destruction: ὧν τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια (3:19a). As Nanos points out, this phrase does not support the identification of a particular oppositional group. Indeed, it could even function as an "ironic criticism of the ultimate ends of several philosophical groups" (Nanos 2015, p. 211). More significant than identifying a particular perspective is the critique that the position's ultimate end (whatever it may be) has been fundamentally misperceived (Fowl 2005, p. 171). That which the opponents say brings about flourishing and fullness of life is quite the opposite. It is, rather, a way of life that results in utter destruction.

"Destruction" for the "opponents" was earlier mentioned in Phil 1:28, in which Paul indicates a strong contrast between the oppositional perspective (which is characterized by destruction) and the audience to which he writes (who are characterized by salvation).[14] While this is a dense section, it is telling that Paul's focus in 1:27, immediately before this contrast, is on the particular way of life he encourages the Philippian audience to express. It is the Philippians' way of life—their particular actions and behaviors that align with the Gospel of Christ—that act as evidence (ἔνδειξις in 1:28) of the contrast in the two groups'

teleological end. As Fowl has it, the audience's way of life "is something which stands as a concrete demonstration of what is the case" (Fowl 2005, p. 66). The distinctive ends of the philosophy can be demonstrated in the contrasting way of life they engender.

Whereas the *telos* of the opposing view is misperceived and actually leads to destruction, the teleological end of Paul's prescribed philosophical perspective—the one he exhorts the Philippian audience to accept—is salvation (σωτηρία in 1:28). In Philippians 3, Paul associates this ultimate *telos* of salvation with a host of similar conceptions: gaining Christ (3:8), obtaining righteousness from God through Christ-faith (3:9), knowing Christ (3:10), and attaining the resurrection of the dead (3:11). Yet Paul is clear to clarify that this ultimate end is still the focal pursuit of his own life. He, himself, has not yet attained the *telos* (3:12—Οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι); rather, he continues to orient his life towards the pursuit of this ultimate end, so that he, like an athlete who has completed his goal (σκοπός), might receive the prize for which he has been striving (3:14).[15]

Paul, using the categories of philosophical dialogue, creates a stark contrast between the teleological understanding of the opponents' perspective and his own. The end to which the opponents orient their life is misplaced, so Paul claims. It does not lead to flourishing but rather to destruction, and this is evidenced when seen in contrast with the way of life of the Philippian community. Conversely, Paul more clearly articulates the conception of his own *telos*: Christ, salvation, and resurrection, and he clarifies how this *telos* functions as the target or goal for all of life. The competing philosophy is thus incapable of adequately orienting the Philippians' lives from the outset because of its misplaced teleological end, whereas Paul's prescribed philosophical perspective is oriented towards the appropriate goal.

4.2. Phronesis

Having established the content and function of his own teleological conception, Paul mentions a second component in his philosophical dialogue: the mindset (φρόνησις) needed to correctly align one's actions and behaviors to the *telos*. Among ancient moral philosophies, *phronesis* was an essential component of a philosophy that was reflected in a particular way of life. More than rote knowledge, *phronesis* refers to the wisdom that is manifest in connecting the theoretical knowledge of a particular philosophy with specific actions or behaviors. As Engberg-Pedersen describes it, *phronesis* "constitutes the rational content of these virtues which turns them from being merely inborn or habituated states of desire and perception into fully rationalized moral virtues proper" (Engberg-Pedersen 2000, p. 51). While *phronesis* was not technically a virtue itself, the "right mind" was necessary to transform good ideas into good action.

As Reumann notes, *phronesis* is a "signature term" throughout Philippians (Reumann 2008, p. 574). The focus on *phronesis* throughout the letter echoes the significance of the term in other moral philosophies and is a key focus in the philosophical dialogue. Paul critiques the opposing philosophy's moral reasoning by claiming that it, like the perspective's *telos*, is misplaced. Whereas the opposing *telos* leads not to salvation but to destruction, the opposing *phronesis* is based on the wrong evaluative measure and will not lead to appropriate praxis.[16] It is based on "the things of the earth" (3:19—οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες) rather than the heavenly reality (3:20) that Paul will affirm to his audience. The distinction Paul makes between this perspective and that which he advocates is stark. The opposing philosophy cannot possibly provide a beneficial "way of life" because its moral reasoning (*phronesis*) and its ultimate end (*telos*) are both ultimately misplaced.

If the contrasting parallel between the "earthly" in 3:19 and the "heavenly" in 3:20 holds, Paul's critique of the opposition's *phronesis* may also entail a critique of their understanding of the community in which they conceptually locate themselves (Sergienko 2013, p. 128). In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle maintains that moral philosophy is, ultimately, a study of politics (πολιτική) because the ultimate goal to which humanity aims is understood in ancient philosophy by reflecting on the role of the individual within a composite, complex system (Aristotle 1934, 109ba.6–7).[17] Likewise, Stoics could articulate

an ethic of *oikeiosis* by which one comes to familiarize themselves with their ultimate location as a "citizen of the cosmos," as Epictetus says (Epictetus 1925, §1.9), rooting the ethical practice of Stoics in their cosmology. Even within this cosmic citizenship, Stoics were likewise encouraged to recognize the importance of acting as a citizen (πολίτεθσαι ἀνάσχου λοιδορίας) within their political locale (Epictetus 1928, §3.21.5). Both Aristotle's and Epictetuts's articulation of ethics locates individuals within the composite, complex system of the *cosmos* and *polis*, arguing that this location within a community has relevance for moral reasoning and praxis. Paul's prescribed community is the "heavenly citizenship" (πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς) from which they anticipate the savior, Lord Jesus Christ. This heavenly *politeuma* is the composite, complex system within which individuals should locate themselves for the task of moral philosophy. By emphasizing the "earthly" characteristics of the opposing philosophy's *phronesis* in 3:19, Paul may well be drawing a more specific critique by indicating that the moral reasoning of the opposing philosophical perspective is based on the wrong conception of the composite system within which moral reasoning takes place.

In contrast to this, Paul highlights that his own philosophical perspective allows for effective and meaningful *phronesis*. This is most explicitly laid out in Phil 3:15, in which Paul indicates that there is a divinely revealed moral reasoning that should be characteristic of those who have attained the true *telos* of humanity: Ὅσοι οὖν τέλειοι, τοῦτο φρονῶμεν· καὶ εἴ τι ἑτέρως φρονεῖτε, καὶ τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἀποκαλύψει. The reference to τέλειοι (often translated as "mature," though it more accurately reflects the attainment of the ultimate goal, hence the occasional translation as "perfect") in this verse has often been noted to be in conflict with Paul's statement just three verses earlier in which he claims to not yet have attained the telic goal. So, for example, Reumann interprets 3:15 to be an "ironic" use of the term since no one would rightly consider themselves perfected (Reumann 2008, p. 559). Yet, this seems to miss the significance of the exhortation that Paul has for the Philippians. Since the appropriate *telos* is known, it can be used as the "goal" towards which Paul and the Philippians orient their lives in the present. The *phronesis*—the moral reasoning—that is characteristic of those who attain the appropriate *telos* can be practiced in the present.

Because there is one common *telos* for the community, there also should be one common mind shared by the entire community. In Phil 3:15, Paul indicates that any other (ἑτέρως) mindset will be corrected by the revelation of God. Elsewhere, in Phil 2:2, Paul exhorts the Philippians to have in common the one *phronesis* associated with the correct *telos*. In Phil 4:2, Paul particularly urges two individuals known within the community, Euodia and Syntyche, to demonstrate the same mindset between them. The community's pursuit of Christ as *telos* will result in a shared, appropriate moral reasoning.

For Paul, it is in Christ Jesus that God reveals the appropriate *phronesis*. The introduction to the "Christ Hymn" of 2:6–11 begins with the exhortation for the Philippians to imitate the *phronesis* demonstrated by Jesus: τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. Meeks has suggested that this phrase could rightly be translated as: "'Base your practical reasoning on what you see in Christ Jesus'" (Meeks 2002, pp. 108–9). In Paul's account, Jesus is both the means of God's revelation of the appropriate philosophical way of life and the model par excellence of that way of life.[18] As Arnold has well noted:

> As φρόνησις in the moral philosophers is ultimately concerned with what is good or bad with respect to life as a whole, so too we can say something similar about how Paul is using the Christ hymn to inform the Philippians' moral reasoning with respect to life as a whole as he envisages it. And just as the life of the fully virtuous sage was to inform how one made progress in becoming virtuous in moral philosophy, so too is Paul using the fully virtuous life of Christ to inform the way in which the Philippians are to make progress. (Arnold 2014, p. 179)

This highlights the essential connection between Paul's comparison of the competing *telos* and *phronesis* and the practical way of life that forms the final element of Paul's philosophical dialogue.

4.3. Way of Life

In addition to comparing the conceptions of the *telos* and the moral reasoning of the oppositional philosophical perspectives and his own, Paul also engages in a detailed dialogical comparison of the practical ways of life between the competing philosophies. Several strong denouncements against the opposing philosophy are associated with the critique of its practical way of life. In Phil 3:2, Paul warns the Philippians to beware of the "evil workers": βλέπετε τοὺς κακοὺς ἐργάτας, suggesting that the result of their philosophy is a lack of morality. A misplaced *telos* and inappropriate *phronesis* lead to immoral actions. Using a standard Pauline idiom of walking (περιπατέω) to refer to one's overall way of life (Reumann 2008, p. 568), Paul describes the opposing perspective as "enemies of the cross of Christ" in Phil 3:18. The description of this way of life in 3:19, which describes their god "as their belly" (ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία) and their glory "in their shame" (καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν) further critiques the inversed ethics of the oppositional group. Their god does not transcend beyond the bounds of their own physical sensations, and their conception of glory is actually its polar opposite. As Nanos has noted, such critiques are "relatively common" within philosophical comparisons, demonstrating that the practical actions and behaviors of the group fall far short of the need for disciplined ethics within a community (Nanos 2015, pp. 211–12). Thus, in every way, the opposing philosophy is contrary to Paul's prescribed position. The goal, the reasoning, and the concrete actions stand in stark contrast to the position predicated on the crucified and resurrected Christ.

In contrast, Phil 3:17 uses the same idiom of walking (περιπατέω) to exhort the Philippians to act in a way consistent with the example of Paul and others within the community whose lives are characterized by the appropriate *phronesis* and aimed towards the ultimate *telos*. Demonstrating a way of life that works towards the accomplishment of the ultimate *telos* is also reflected in Paul's exhortation for the Philippians to "work out their salvation" in Phil 2:2. The verb κατεργάζομαι suggests a focus on achieving or attaining a particular result, state, or condition (BDAG 2000, s.v.), and the description of working towards attaining salvation reiterates the ultimate *telos* towards which the Philippians are to orient their lives. Paul reiterates that this way of life in pursuit of the *telos* is ultimately empowered by God: it is God who works within the Philippians both to will and to work towards the correct *telos* (Phil 2:13). This way of life stands in stark contrast to the "crooked and perverse" generation; in comparison, those whose lives are lived in pursuit of the ultimate *telos* "shine like stars in the cosmos" (Phil 2:15).

There are a number of specific actions and behaviors that Paul includes in his description of the appropriate way of life. Notably, Phil 4:8 contains a list of virtues that the Philippians are exhorted to account for: "whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things". As Fletcher-Louis notes, "in form and content this ethical list is characteristic of Greek moral philosophy" (Fletcher-Louis 2023, p. 53). In consonance with the way that philosophical schools articulated virtues, Paul identifies this list as an example of the appropriate way of life.

Yet, Paul also pays particular attention to the role of emotion within the prescribed way of life. Discussions of human emotions are a frequent component of ethical discourse within ancient philosophy, because in such discussions "rigorous philosophical analysis is wedded to philosophy as a way of life" (Knuuttila 2004, p. 1). Indicative of such emphasis is Plutarch's emphasis, in *De Virtute Morali*, that the material of moral virtue is "the emotions of the soul" (Plutarch 1939, §1). Individual emotions were also the focus of philosophical practice. So, for example, Seneca writes *De Ira* to Novatus in order to discuss a Stoic approach to anger, "the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions" (Seneca 1965, §1.1). It is particularly within human emotion that the theoretical foundation of a certain philosophical way of life impacts their practical way of life. While there was a common

focus on the significance of emotions within ancient philosophy, the various theoretical foundations resulted in varied conceptions of the role of emotions.

Philippians highlights, in particular, the emotional response of joy as a direct outworking of its overall philosophical way of life. As Marchal has noted, the letter's emphasis on joy and rejoicing is inextricably linked to other key themes throughout the letter, particularly with its emphasis on the proper mindset, or *phronesis* (Marchal 2017, p. 30). Further, joy and rejoicing appear at important intervals throughout the letter in association with "concerns about difference within and around the assembly community at Philippi" (Marchal 2017, p. 32). Indeed, Holloway's identification of Philippians as a "letter of consolation" highlights the key role of emotion throughout the letter: "The goal of consolation was to defeat grief, one of the four cardinal passions, and to replace it as far as possible with its contrary, joy (χαρά, gaudium, laetitia). Indeed, to experience joy in difficult circumstances was synonymous with being consoled" (Holloway 2017, pp. 2–3).

One particularly significant place in which Paul describes the outworking of his philosophy through the emotion of joy is in his own experience as a prisoner. Though he writes from a place of imprisonment, Paul's philosophical perspective allows him to respond with joy and rejoicing (for more on this topic, see Schellenberg 2021). In Phil 1:19, Paul uses the ultimate *telos* of salvation to reorient his experience of imprisonment. Thus, though he is in chains and though there are some seeking to increase his suffering (1:17), Paul does and will continue to rejoice (1:18) because he is moving towards the accomplishment of his ultimate goal.

5. Conclusions

Throughout Philippians, Paul engages in a thorough philosophical dialogue with an opposing perspective. Though the specific philosophy (or even philosophies) cannot be definitively identified from the text of Philippians alone, the letter itself demonstrates Paul's philosophical comparison between the opposing position, which he and his audience knew, and his own prescribed philosophy. Paul attempts to demonstrate to his readers the superiority of his philosophy in responding to a philosophical crisis.

In his dialogue, Paul contrasts the ultimate goal or *telos* to which each philosophy aims, arguing that the opposing philosophy leads not to flourishing but to destruction. His perspective, though, leads to salvation, resurrection, and ultimately to Christ. He further contrasts the moral reasoning (the mindset or *phronesis*) of the opposing philosophy and his own. Whereas the opposing philosophy's moral reasoning is characterized by a conception of "earthly things," Paul exhorts the Philippians to demonstrate a common *phronesis* as part of the heavenly citizenship, which has been divinely revealed and fully modeled in Christ Jesus. Finally, Paul contrasts the practical results of each philosophy. Whereas the opposing philosophical perspective results in immoral and evil actions that mark its adherents as "enemies of the cross of Christ," the way of life associated with Paul's philosophical perspective leads to moral behavior in response to practical challenges. In particular, the letter highlights the role of an appropriate philosophical way of life for controlling emotions in the midst of crisis—for Paul, his imprisonment and for his audience, their similar struggle (Phil 1:30).

Through this philosophical dialogue, Paul endeavors to demonstrate to his readers that the opposing perspective is an insufficient philosophy or "way of life" that will lead to destruction. He simultaneously presents his own philosophy as the one that is consistent with the appropriate "goal," the right "mind," and a consistent "way of life" that will lead to the appropriate *telos*.

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Notes

1 As Nanos notes: "Each of these two epithets ["dogs" and "evil workers"] has been approached as confirming Jewish identity" (Nanos 2017, p. 154).

2 Phillips Wilson says, "Paul does not warn the Philippians against Jewish 'legalists', and he does not here address only gentile Judaising" (Phillips Wilson 2023, p. 448). See also (Nanos 2017, p. 148): "The most likely referents of his vilification are neither Jews nor Judaism, nor Christ-followers (or from so-called Jewish Christianity)".

3 There have been a number of helpful works in the previous decade pushing back against this broad caricature in Pauline scholarship in general. The work of Troels Engberg-Pedersen has been a key catalyst in these works. For one recent example, see Joshua Jipp's *Pauline Theology as a Way of Life* (Jipp 2023). In regard to Philippians, Bradley Arnold's work (Arnold 2014) is a helpful study that examines Philippians in light of ancient moral philosophy.

4 Another cause for the misunderstanding of ancient philosophy in recent scholarshiphas also been noted within the work of historical philosophy itself. Davidson (1995, p. 19) has noted: "Many modern historians of ancient philosophy have begun from the assumption that ancient philosophers were attempting, in the same way as modern philosophers, to construct systems, that ancient philosophy was essentially a philosophical discourse consisting of a 'certain type of organization of language, comprised of propositions having as their object the universe, human society, and language itself. [. . .] Under these interpretive constraints, modern historians of ancient philosophy could not but deplore the awkward expositions, defects of composition, and outright incoherences in the ancient authors they studied". That is, Davidson criticizes some historical philosophers of adopting an understanding of the very nature of philosophy that is predicated upon modern conceptions to the neglect of the aims and endeavors of ancient philosophy. Davidson (1995, pp. 31–33) highlights three further historical aspects that led to the abstraction of the philosophical task: (1) An inevitable human satisfaction with philosophical discourse rather than action, (2) Christian adoption of philosophy as an aid for theological doctrine, and (3) scholastic (both academic and ecclesial) reinforcement of a separation between conceptual discourse and practical implication.

5 A key work in advancing the discussion of the porous boundaries between Hellenism and Judaism is that of Hengel (1974).

6 Seddon (2005, p. 175) sets the terminus ad quem around 150 CE, when there is a definitive reference to the text in one of Lucian's satires.

7 The Greek text comes from Parsons (1904).

8 There have been several competing suggestions of the philosophical perspective reflected in the *Tablet of Cebes*. Seddon (2005, p. 176) suggests that the text is fundamentally Stoic, while Meeks (1993, p. 24) suggests that it is, rather, Cynic. The text itself refers to Plato as an authority (§33.3) while simultaneously criticizing "hedonists, Peripatetics, and many others of the same sort" (§13.2). This perhaps indicates that the text communicates something of an eclectic approach to describing the philosophical way of life that cannot be too strictly associated with a particular philosophical school.

9 It should be noted that there is important debate concerning the terminology of "conversion" in relation to ancient texts and perspectives. Fredriksen (2017, p. 77), for example, notes that "what we call 'conversion' was so anomalous in antiquity that ancients in Paul's period had no word for it". Hadot's view has been by further critiqued by Cooper (2012, p. 17), who contends that this account fails to fully account both for the strong emphasis on human reason and the rational nature of ancient philosophy. Cooper's critiques do highlight an important part of ancient philosophy that could potentially be lost in Hadot's reading; however, Cooper's emphasis on reason—particularly in sharp distinction to an overly fideistic conception of early Christianity—perhaps errs too far on the other side by overemphasizing the undeniable presence of the rational aspects of ancient philosophy. Another critique of Hadot's work comes from Gerson (2002), who remarks that Hadot's work is overly synthetic and synoptic, failing to account for the myriad of differences between the ancient philosophical schools and argumentative and systematic arguments between them. Again, Gerson's view is legitimate, reminding us that ancient philosophy was far from monolithic; however, his critique seems to fail to recognize that the aim of Hadot's thesis is to describe shared similarities in the task and nature of ancient philosophy.

10 Note the significance of communal locations in the beginning of Book 5 in *De Fin.* (Cicero 1914, §5.1).

11 For more on the dialogic form of *De Anim.*, see Jażdżewska's helpful article (Jażdżewska 2015).

12 Hösle (2012, p. 19n.1) suggests that, in this quote, Artemon "confuses conversation and dialogue".

13 As Hösle says: "Philosophical ideas that are so abstract that they have hardly any meaning for human life are among the least appropriate for a philosophical dialogue" (Hösle 2012, pp. 49–50).

14 Some, including Fowl (2005, p. 64) and Fee (1995, p. 352), suggest that there is a different group in view in Chap. 3 that should be distinguished from the "opponents" of Phil 1. The close association between these passages in the light of teleological ethical perspective tends, to my mind, to favor seeing these as—if not the same exact philosophical perspective—ones which have the same exact characteristics when seen in contrast with Paul's prescribed perspective.

15 For more on the function of the athletic imagery in this passage in relation to teleological logic, see Arnold's *Christ as the "Telos" of Life* (Arnold 2014, pp. 197–202).

16 Arnold (2014, p. 172) rightly notes that while Paul uses only verbal forms of φρον- root words, the use "can be seen as functioning in a similar way to how φρόνησις functions in moral philosophy".

[17] See the discussion in Covington (2018, pp. 47–53) for further discussion of how ancient moral philosophy conceived of the *telos* as an individual's particular function within a complex system.

[18] It should be noted that Paul conceives of himself and others within the community as other models for the appropriate way of life in Phil 3:17. Yet the use of συμμιμητής (a word that is difficult to convey in English, with "fellow imitators" perhaps being the closest equivalent) suggests that even these direct models are ultimately based on an imitation of the ultimate model of Christ Jesus. This line of reasoning would reflect what Paul says to the Corinthian congregation: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1).

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All as σκύβαλα beside the μέγιστον τῶν ἀγαθῶν: Philippians 3:7–11 in Dialogue with Epictetus

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Abstract: In Philippians 3:8, Paul holds all things to be loss (ζημία) and even dung (σκύβαλον) in comparison with Christ. Similarly, beside a precise conception of the good (ἀγαθὸν), Epictetus considers earthly achievements and physical benefits as "indifferents" (ἀδιάφορα), which he defines as things that are neither good nor evil. This paper employs a comparative analysis of Paul and Epictetus to examine the tension inherent in both authors as they seek to explain the sufferings and enjoyments of human existence in light of humankind's ultimate end. Despite Paul's strong language, he still recognizes the value of temporal goods, including release from prison, recovery from illness, and financial assistance. Thus, a person can value these benefits when they are joined to the greatest good, as illustrated by Augustine's conception of ordered loves. Like Paul, Epictetus affirms the lesser value of indifferents, particularly when they enable participation in the good. This paper argues that both Paul and Epictetus acknowledge a secondary value in things that are joined to the supreme good, but that Paul differs from Epictetus in classifying them as goods that can be rightly desired and in acknowledging temporary sufferings to be an evil even as they can bring about good.

Keywords: Pauline studies; Philippians; Epictetus; σκύβαλα; ἀδιάφορα; τέλος; εὐδαιμονία

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1. Introduction

Scholars commonly read Philippians in its Greco-Roman context and particularly as it relates to Stoicism, the dominant philosophy of the time. Shortly after the death of Nero, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus gained his freedom from slavery and began teaching in Rome and Greece. A. A. Long, the classical scholar who has written more than anyone else on Epictetus, remarks that there are "clear traces of Stoicism in the Pauline books of the New Testament" (Long 2002, p. 259; cf. Eastman 2017, p. 32). Although he (Long 2002, pp. 17, 110; cf. Bonhöffer 1911, pp. 78–80; Sharp 1914, p. 135) still asserts that there is no evidence that Epictetus borrowed from Christian authors, Epictetus' references to Christians demonstrate his familiarity with Christianity (*Diatr*. 2.9.20–21, 4.7.6). Huttunen (2017) argues that these passages point to Christian concepts and phraseology in Epictetus' *Discourses*. Regardless of direct influence, striking similarities occur between Epictetus' teachings and Pauline theology. More specifically, Epictetus' conception of indifferents provides essential insight when interpreting Paul (Deming 2016, p. 61; cf. Sampley 1991, p. 11; Engberg-Pedersen 1995, p. 270; Arnold 2014, p. 151; Wilson 2022, p. 81). In opposition, Campbell (2013, p. 208) states that "this particular valuing of aspects of human life as indifferents does not facilitate a coherent understanding of the apostle". Campbell's rejection of the comparison arises from his misunderstanding that the term indifferents refers to "a certain detachment from life" in which a person's decisions lack significance (Campbell 2013, p. 208). This position fails to recognize Epictetus's use of indifferents as a means of assigning value to things explicitly in relation to the supreme good. When properly understood, not only the "deep parallels" between Paul and Epictetus (Bertschmann 2020, p. 257), but also a consideration of their dissimilarities assists in revealing the subtleties of their thought (Barclay 2009, p. 60). Even in differing from Engberg-Pedersen on the level of correspondence that can be found between Pauline and Stoic ethics, Eastman (2017, p. 33) still asserts that a close

comparison between Paul and Epictetus can "sharpen understanding of Paul's theology". Several scholars also particularly commend the heuristic means of better comprehending Paul's letters in light of their similarities and differences with Stoicism (Engberg-Pedersen 2015, p. 293; Deming 2016, p. 63; Wilson 2022, pp. 10–11). Building on their work, this paper narrowly examines Philippians 3:7–11 in juxtaposition with Epictetus. Rather than addressing questions of direct influence, it employs a theological reading of Philippians to consider the conceptual parallels between Paul's and Epictetus' thought as they engage with shared moral questions.[1]

As near contemporaries, Paul and Epictetus are addressing the same question along similar lines. In Philippians 3:7–11, Paul describes the aim of human life, the τέλος of knowing Christ, and his willingness to throw all else aside for this relationship. The passage is intense and personal. Presumably, Paul intended his self-revelation and the acknowledgement of his losses to encourage the Philippians to follow him in a passionate love for Christ that would completely overshadow all physical and temporary goods. Epictetus' teachings were also profoundly practical. He was uninterested in the hypothetical aspects of Stoicism and exhorted his students not to accumulate knowledge but rather to act upon it; otherwise, they would be like an athlete who flaunted his dumb-bells instead of the muscles in his biceps (*Diat*. 1.4.13–17). Epictetus' own sufferings were evident, from his former slavery to his lameness, but he was convinced that happiness was still within his grasp. Although philosophy would not offer him externals like health or wealth, he believed it enabled him to address and overcome the misfortunes of life through the attainment of his true good (1.15.1–5, 1.20.15–16). For Paul and Epictetus, the identification of the greatest good carries implications for how a person should regard and respond to all lesser things. Tension develops between life's τέλος, the enjoyment of secondary goods, and the suffering that results from their loss. Both authors resolve this inherent complexity in different ways that bring a greater understanding of their own nuance and illuminate the other's approach. This paper argues for a strong correspondence between Paul's use of σκύβαλα and Epictetus's use of ἀδιάφορα, even as Paul differs from Epictetus in upholding the intrinsic good of externals and affirming that their presence or privation can rightfully bring enjoyment or sorrow.

2. Paul's Approach in Philippians

Although Paul does not employ τέλος or ἀγαθός in Philippians 3:7–11, τελειόω appears in 3:12 and τέλος in 3:19, and the passage as a whole demonstrates that he is speaking in terms of the Stoic concept of the supreme good (Engberg-Pedersen 1995, p. 269; Fowl 2005, p. 153; Arnold 2014, p. 193; Wilson 2022, p. 89). Using the language of financial accounting, he calculates his gains and losses with regard to what is most valuable. In 3:4–6, he lists seven credentials that would render him equal or even superior in righteous achievements to other Jews (Keown 2010, pp. 121, 136). Then, in 3:7–11, he evaluates them in terms of his ultimate goal.

Verse 7 establishes that the things Paul previously regarded as profit (κέρδη), his recounted achievements of Jewish lineage, zeal, and righteousness according to the law, he now counts as loss (ζημία) on account of Christ. Verse 8 goes a step further, with Paul regarding all things (πάντα) as loss "on account of the excelling value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (διὰ τὸ ὑπερέχον τῆς γνώσεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ τοῦ Κυρίου μου). A matter of potential controversy arises at this point on whether Paul's designation of πάντα refers to the type of things he mentioned earlier, ones that are beneficial in gaining salvation, the successes that could potentially gain him standing and approval before God, or whether πάντα is absolute in meaning all things whatsoever, including the goods of this earthly existence that have no bearing on winning salvation such as friendship, wealth, and physical health. Biblical scholars often concentrate solely on righteous standing before God in this passage (Airay 1864, pp. 230–32; Eadie 1977, pp. 177–78; Moyter 1984, p. 160; Martin 1987, pp. 148–50; Keown 2010, pp. 140–42; Aquinas 2012, pp. 46–48), thus removing the ability for this passage to be applied more generally to the enjoyments of life. Certainly,

Paul is adamant that the personal accomplishments he strove so hard to obtain could not merit the salvation that comes only through Christ's work. The legal language in verse 9 of righteousness or justice (δικαιοσύνη) and the dichotomy between the righteousness of the law (νόμος) versus the righteousness of faith (πίστις) support a soteriological interpretation. However, this reading need not exclude the other. The emphatic beginning of verse 8 (ἀλλὰ μὲνοῦνγε καὶ), the repetition of πάντα, and the context of Paul's sufferings in losing all things (πάντα ἐζημιώθην) for the sake of Christ demonstrate that Paul's meaning of πάντα is all-encompassing. Verse 8 should be taken to indicate that Paul is rejecting anything that stands in competition with Christ (Hunsinger 2020, p. 98; Fee 1995, p. 317; Hawthorne 2004, p. 190; Bruce 1989, p. 112; Michael 1948, p. 145; Jowett 1910, p. 120; Meyer 1893, p. 155).

Paul emphasizes that his true profit, the *summum bonum*, is to gain Christ (ἵνα Χριστὸν κερδήσω), or more specifically, the knowledge (γνῶσις) of Christ Jesus (3:8). Verses 9–11 detail the aspects of salvation that this knowledge entails. This knowledge is not merely an intellectual assent, but is relational, practical, and experiential (Plummer 1919, p. 74; Hendriksen 1962, p. 167; Melick 1991, p. 132; Reumann 2008, p. 490). It is a knowledge of "personal experience and intimate relationship" (Fee 1995, p. 318) that cannot be separated from love (Bockmuehl 1998, pp. 205–6; Koperski 1996, p. 342). Hansen (2009, p. 235) summarizes that this knowledge embraces "personal relationship, moral action, and intellectual reflection". In coming to Christ, Paul experienced an "epistemological renovation," which not merely reordered his current priorities, but gave him a completely new valuing system (Carr 2022, pp. 155–56).

Any gains or losses, therefore, when set in comparison with this relationship with Christ, become as nothing, or as Paul heightens the expression in verse 8, as σκύβαλα, even worse than nothing. This is extreme language. Although not all scholars agree on the translation, with some preferring a mild one like rubbish and others holding to dung or excrement (Martin 1987, p. 150; Maier 2020, p. 15; Punch 2014, pp. 370–71; Bird and Gupta 2020, p. 137), it is most likely that Paul intends the strongest expression (Silva 2005, p. 157; Cook 2020, p. 103). Regardless of the translation, the implication holds true that no nourishment remains in these things, nothing that can be put to use in attaining the ultimate good, one so complete that nothing else is necessary in addition to it.

It is important to note that this calculation of the supreme good in comparison with other things is not a new development in Paul, but rather a clear imitation of Christ and his words. Michael (1948, p. 148) notes the parallel language of gain (κερδαίνω) and loss (ζημιόω) in Mark 8:36, where Christ proclaims that gaining the whole world will not profit a man if he loses his soul (cf. Matthew 16:26; Luke 9:25; Hawthorne 2004, p. 188; Silva 2005, p. 158). Mark's conception of the "whole world" (κόσμος ὅλος) is captured by Paul in his designation of losing "everything" (πάντα) for Christ. Closely corresponding with this concept is Jesus' reiteration that one must lose one's life (ψυχή) in order to find it (Mark 8:35, Matthew 10:39, Luke 9:24), even to the point of a man hating his own life (John 12:25) as well as his parents, siblings, wife, and children (Luke 14:26). Christ requires nothing less than the complete sacrifice of everything else in order to be his disciple. The parallel with Christ also exists in Philippians itself, when Paul (2:5–8) encourages Christians to have the mind of Christ, who counted his own life as loss and became obedient unto death (Koperski 1996, p. 134; Hansen 2009, p. 232). A tight linguistic link appears between Christ's and Paul's accounting: just as Christ did not consider (ἡγέομαι) equality with God the prize to be grasped (Phil. 2:6), so also Paul did not consider (ἡγέομαι) his former achievements to be gains when compared with Christ (Phil. 3:7). Despite Bertschmann's (2018, p. 246) emphasis on the distinction that exists between Paul's mindset in 3:8 and Christ's in 2:6, Paul's consideration still mirrors that of Christ in calculating and surrendering one's gains.

If all human and earthly goods count as σκύβαλα beside the knowledge of Christ and the fullness of the relationship that such knowledge entails, this does not mean that Paul views all other things as inherently rotten. They are useless insofar as they can assist in obtaining Christ and also worth nothing in comparison with Christ, but Paul, just like Jesus before him, never disparages the value of earthly goods like one's relationship with one's

parents, the physical nourishment of bread and water, or even life itself. Certainly, Paul is single-minded in his focus on Christ and the spiritual well-being of the Philippian saints. His prayer for them focuses solely on spiritual benefits rather than the goods of life (1:9–11). In the first and last chapters of Philippians, when mentioning physical goods, he employs the contrasts of life or death (1:22) and hunger or being fully fed (4:12) to show that they are matters of indifference to him (Jaquette 1995, pp. 108–11). Unlike those who seek Christ as their end, others define the *summum bonum* in terms of the physical and temporary. Those whose god is their belly (ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία) and whose knowledge and purpose are fixed on earthly things (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες) are actually pursuing the τέλος of complete destruction (3:19). In contrast, the supreme good of knowing Christ outweighs all other goods to the point that no earthly goods are necessary and they are all spurned in light of it. As Bertschmann (2014, p. 144) notes in regard to their "citizenship in the heavens" (πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς, 3:20), the Philippian Christians are ruled by a "heavenly reality". Like Paul, Epaphroditus serves as an example of one who disregarded his own life (ψυχή) in service to Christ (2:30). At the same time, despite Paul's strong language of σκύβαλα in 3:8, he still recognizes the value of temporal goods, including release from prison (1:19), recovery from illness (2:27–28), and financial support (4:16). The very existence of the financial gift that is one of Paul's motives in writing the letter (4:14–16) points to physical need on the part of the one receiving and to the good of the assistance that is offered by others. Additionally, the requests that Paul encourages the Philippian Christians to make to God in everything (ἐν παντὶ) would include earthly goods as well as spiritual ones (4:6; cf. Belleville 2022, pp. 89–90). When Paul assures them that God will fulfil their needs (χρεία, 4:19), he is referring to physical as well as spiritual provision (Bird and Gupta 2020, p. 192). Paul's indifference in 1:23 regarding his own earthly life is not based on a contempt for life itself but rather on his passionate desire (ἐπιθυμία) and ultimate good, to be with Christ, which he emphasizes is by far the better choice. His indifference in 4:11–12 in regard to being hungry or fed is the result of learning through experience and being initiated into the mystery of what it means to be self-sufficient (αὐτάρκης).[2] The ability to be content in troubling circumstances depends on the fact that those circumstances are acknowledged, as Paul does, to be ones of lack and need. If the circumstances did not matter or were easy to handle with one's own strength, Paul would not need to overcome them through the power of God, as he declares he has done in 4:13. Finally, although he counts as σκύβαλα the circumcision and Jewish lineage that he mentions in 3:5, Paul elsewhere affirms their value (Rom. 3:1–2, 9:4–5). The apparent conflict between counting all earthly things as σκύβαλα and yet desiring and even seeking these things can be reconciled by viewing them through two different lenses. Through one lens, that of comparative worth, all physical and earthly goods are σκύβαλα. Although Cook (2020, p. 106) asserts that σκύβαλον should not be considered a "relative devaluation" since he fears that it will diminish the severity of Paul's expression, most scholars agree that Paul is speaking in terms of comparison and relative worth (Punch 2014, p. 373; Campbell 2013, pp. 213–14; Plummer 1919, p. 73; Michael 1948, p. 145; Lightfoot 1963, p. 148; Wilson 2023, p. 442). As Koperski (1996, p. 15) states, "Despite the ardour of Paul's rhetoric, there endures a real reluctance on the part of his interpreters to consider all things to be σκύβαλον in an absolute sense". Paul is not referring to the intrinsic value of these things, but rather to his own reckoning (ἡγέομαι) of them in relation to the greatest good (Bockmuehl 1998, p. 204). In comparison with Christ, everything else becomes a matter not only of indifference but σκύβαλα. However, through another lens, that of inherent worth, earthly goods can have value.

If earthly, temporal, and physical things can be simultaneously affirmed as goods while also being reckoned σκύβαλα, a person's response to them can reflect a similar dynamic. It would seem that the loss of something that is counted σκύβαλον should not result in suffering, and that the gain of it should not result in rejoicing. However, Paul allows for suffering and rejoicing in regard to these things even though a person's supreme good is found in Christ alone.

Human flourishing ultimately requires only Christ, the one who is sufficient for happiness with nothing else being required. Hence, the continual rejoicing that Paul enjoins: "rejoice in the Lord always" (Χαίρετε ἐν Κυρίῳ πάντοτε, Phil. 4:4). The person who possesses intimate knowledge of Christ can take pleasure and delight in that relationship regardless of circumstances and even in the loss of external goods, as Paul can rejoice (χαίρω) in being poured out as a drink offering on the faith of the Philippians and can expect that they will rejoice together with him (συγχαίρω, 2:17). Suffering that results in the spread of the gospel leads toward the *summum bonum* and is therefore embraced, just as Paul rejoices in his chains and imprisonment that have led people to hear the gospel and become bold in proclaiming it (1:12–14). In this sense, a person could attain human flourishing and happiness even if he is in the well-known situation Plato describes in the *Republic* (361c–e), when the just man is stripped of reputation, gifts, and honors, and is whipped, stretched on the rack, enchained, and suffers all evils.

Although a person can be happy when all else is taken away, the surfeit of joy and delight that comes from knowing Christ does not rule out the ability to sorrow in the loss of physical and temporary goods. Unshaken rejoicing in possessing the greatest good and the perspective that regards that good as outweighing all others to the point that they are σκύβαλα in comparison can exist concurrently with profound sorrow about earthly things. The human flourishing that was shattered at the Fall will not be fully restored on every level for embodied human beings until the eschaton, or as Paul describes it, the "day of Christ" (Phil. 1:6, 1:10, 2:16; cf. Rom. 8:22–25, 1 Cor. 15:26–28). Until that time, a person deprived of legitimate earthly goods will inevitably suffer. Paul affirms this in Philippians when he says that if Epaphroditus had died, he would have experienced "sorrow upon sorrow" (λύπην ἐπὶ λύπην, 2:27). This repetition highlights the depth of the grief Paul would have felt, not only for the sake of the work that would have been hindered by the loss of his fellow worker, but also for the loss of one whom he loved as a brother (1:25).[3] Similarly, a person can also desire, seek, and rejoice in external goods. Due to God's mercy in sparing Epaphroditus' life, the Philippians will rejoice (χαίρω) in seeing him again and Paul will be less sorrowful (ἄλυπος, 2:28). Epaphroditus himself was greatly desiring (ἐπιποθέω) to be with the Philippians and was sorely distressed (ἀδημονέω) at their own grief when they heard he was ill (2:26). Thus, Paul employs the language of rejoicing and sorrowing in regard to the earthly good of relational connections, particularly those of family members in Christ. Even in a cosmos ruled by divine sovereignty, needs and sufferings do not cease to be such. This theme is evident throughout the letter, from Paul's assertion that he and the Philippians suffer (πάσχω, 1:29) for the sake of Christ,[4] to his designation of Epaphroditus as the minister of his need (χρεία, 2:25), and his commendation of the Philippians for sharing in his affliction (θλῖψις, 4:14) and sending him financial assistance to meet his physical needs (χρεία, 4:16).

Augustine's well-known and influential concept of ordered loves proves helpful in determining the extent to which a person can value and rejoice in external goods that also are reckoned σκύβαλα. Although Augustine engages with Philippians 3 in his writings, he does not mention ordered loves within this specific context.[5] However, Augustine's theological concept of ordered loves directly addresses the issue of external goods, dealing with the tension that arises between the *summum bonum* and all other things. Like Paul, Augustine employs a comparative lens to explain how a person can value God's gifts in relation to God himself. Arnold (2015, p. 585) confirms that in Philippians 3:7–11, Paul is engaging in the same kind of teleological consideration as the ancient philosophers and that "gaining Christ can clearly be seen as the *summum bonum*". Similarly, Augustine identifies God as the "the true and highest good" (*verum ac summum bonum, De civ. D.* 8.8; cf. *Conf.* 2.12), the one who is the "fount of our supreme happiness and the end of every desire" (*ipse enim fons nostrae beatitudinis, ipse omnis appetitionis est finis* (*De civ. D.* 10.3). Within this framework, Augustine then defines virtue as an order of love (*ordo amoris*), saying that although every created thing is good, it can be loved rightly and wickedly; it is loved rightly when it preserves the proper order but wickedly when it confuses that order (*Cum enim bona*

sit, et bene amari potest et male, bene scilicet ordine custodito, male ordine perturbato, De civ. D. 15.22; cf. *De doctr. christ.* 1.27). Created things (*creatura*) like wealth, honor, status, and even friendship are external goods (*extrema bona)* and gifts (*dona*) from God that are beautiful and bring pleasure, but when detached from the supreme good they are abandoned and ruined because they lose their goodness and sweetness apart from him (*Conf.* 1.31, 2.10–11, 4.18; cf. McCurry 2011, pp. 49–52). Following Augustine, Traherne (1908, pp. 125–27) asserts that earthly things are gifts from God and cannot be loved too much when God is loved as the end and all earthly things are loved proportionately "in God, and for God: and God in them" with a "well-ordered Love" (cf. Naugle 2008, pp. 48–49). Paul hints at a link between physical goods and God's gifts to his saints when he mentions the financial gift (δόμα) sent to him by the Philippians (4:17) and refers to God as the one who will satisfy every need (πληρώσει πᾶσαν χρείαν, 4:19). Elsewhere, the Pauline tradition makes the link even clearer, stating that "every created thing of God is good, and nothing rejected if it is received with thankfulness" (πᾶν κτίσμα Θεοῦ καλόν, καὶ οὐδὲν ἀπόβλητον, μετὰ εὐχαριστίας λαμβανόμενον, 1 Tim. 4:4; cf. 1 Cor. 10:26).[6] Thus, a person can desire, value, love, and rejoice in earthly goods when they are properly ordered in relation to God as the greatest good. Their inherent worth comes only through relation to his goodness and because they are gifts that he provides. To fail to delight in a gift or to give thanks for it is a spurning of the gift and its giver. If God is loved rightly, his gifts will also be valued, but when they are loved in the wrong proportion, in competition with him, in a way that he prohibits, for themselves alone apart from his goodness, or without the praise and gratefulness to him that must accompany one's enjoyment, they become σκύβαλα. This is the significance of Augustine's distinction between the terms to use (*uti*) and to enjoy (*frui*), where God is enjoyed as the *summum bonum* and all else is used in the sense that it is only loved for God and on account of him (*De doctr. christ*. 1.4, 1.22, 1.27).[7] Although they are good, external things can never serve as their own end. They cannot bear such a weight. Therefore, Augustine's comparative ordering of loves echoes and further clarifies the paradox that occurs when Paul ascribes value to earthly goods but also counts them as σκύβαλα in relation to the *summum bonum* of knowing Christ.

3. Epictetus' Approach in Light of Paul

What was the true problem between the brothers Polynices and Eteocles, who battled for the throne of Thebes? Epictetus traces it not to power or status, but to a mistaken notion about the worst of evils and the greatest of goods (τὸ μὲν ἔσχατον τῶν κακῶν, τὸ δὲ μέγιστον τῶν ἀγαθῶν, *Diatr*. 4.5.29–30; cf. 1.18.3). In striving for the good life (εὖ ζῆν) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία, 1.4.31–32), people must know how to correctly distinguish between what is good, bad, or neither (ἀγαθὰ καὶ κακὰ καὶ οὐδέτερα, 1.20.6; cf. 2.5.4, 2.7.3, 3.22.23).[8] When people confuse these things, striving earnestly after the wrong ends like Polynices and Eteocles, they become enmeshed in sorrows.

Epictetus is not unlike Paul when he states that "the end is to follow the gods" (τέλος ἐστὶ τὸ ἕπεσθαι θεοῖς, *Diatr*. 1.20.15; cf. 1.30.4). In the same way that Paul advocates in Philippians 3:7–8 for a personal and relational knowledge of Christ, Epictetus' language when he speaks of god or the gods is also deeply personal.[9] Even in this mortal life, he says, a man should resolve to have communion with Zeus (πρὸς τὸν Δία κοινωνίας, 2.19.27). However, the relational aspect of Epictetus' portrayal of god should not lead readers to think that he is speaking of Zeus in the same terms that Paul does of God, since Epictetus also refers to god in terms of nature (φύσις), mind (νοῦς), and right reason (λόγος ὀρθός) and affirms that each person is a piece of God (1.17.14–18, 4.11.9, 2.8.2, 2.8.11). While affirming the similarity between the language and commitment to the divine that is seen in Paul and Epictetus, Long (2002, pp. 143–44) cautions against associating them too closely (cf. Bonhöffer 1996, pp. 117–20). Nevertheless, Epictetus' placing of the supreme human good not in the physical and temporal things of life but rather in the spiritual and divine parallels Paul's prioritization of the knowledge of Christ.[10]

Also akin to Paul, Epictetus engages in an act of ordering and comparing other things in their relation to the supreme good. He constantly returns to the theme of the true nature of good and evil (οὐσία τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ…καὶ τοῦ κακοῦ, *Diatr*. 2.1.4; cf. 4.13.24), which he defines in terms of προαίρεσις, which is a conscious act of the will. More specifically, as Dobbin (1991, p. 114) explains, προαίρεσις is a deliberate choice involving "*both* reason and desire, so that it has both a strong intellectual *and* ethical component".[11] Unlike the body, προαίρεσις is a person's true self (1.1.10–12, 3.1.41). All good and evil things fall within the bounds of προαίρεσις, which enables a person to respond correctly to external impressions (1.1.7; cf. 2.1.4; Rist 1969, p. 228). Good things include "the virtues and all that partakes in them, while evil things are the vices and all that partakes in them" (ἀγαθὰ μὲν οὖν αἱ ἀρεταὶ καὶ τὰ μετέχοντα αὐτῶν, κακὰ δὲ κακίαι καὶ τὰ μετέχοντα κακίας, 2.19.14; cf. 1.30.4, 2.9.15, 4.5.32). All other things are external (ἐκτός), outside of a person's προαίρεσις (4.4.4, cf. 3.8.1–4, 3.20.1–2, 3.24.3). Epictetus counts all these as indifferent things (ἀδιάφορα), whether positive ones that bring pleasure such as the body, a spouse, children, friends, horses, wealth, clothes, and a house, or negative ones that cause pain such as exile, imprisonment, death, and ignominy (1.1.14, 1.30.2–5, 2.19.13–14, 4.1.66–67; cf. Gill 2023, p. 98). The greatest thing (μέγιστον) is the right use of προαίρεσις, while the greatest harm (μεγίστη βλάβη) that can befall a person is its destruction (1.18.8). Unfortunately, people tend to be concerned about indifferent things rather than the greatest thing; for instance, they worry about losing physical sight, which is an indifferent thing, instead of worrying about losing intellectual sight, which is the greatest thing (1.20.12). A person who honors any indifferent thing destroys προαίρεσις (4.4.23). Thus, a person must strive "to learn what is the greatest of existing things and to pursue this in everything, to be earnest about this, having considered the other things secondary to this" (τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ὄντων καταμαθεῖν καὶ τοῦτο ἐν παντὶ μεταδιώκειν, περὶ τοῦτο ἐσπουδακέναι, πάρεργα τἆλλα πρὸς τοῦτο πεποιημένον, 2.23.34). In his own reframing of losses in light of the greatest good of knowing Christ, Paul also highlights that this perspective is one that he had to learn (μανθάνω, Phil. 4:11).

Although superficial differences appear in their perspectives, Epictetus' language in regard to ἀδιάφορα mirrors Paul's conception of σκύβαλα. Both employ their respective words in distinguishing between higher and lower levels of goods. A small divergence appears between Paul's willingness in a specific context to call external things good (καλόν, 1 Tim. 4:4) and assign them profit (ὠφέλεια, Rom. 3:1) and Epictetus' insistence that indifferent things cannot be classed as good or evil (2.16.1–2, 4.5.32), even as he ascribes some value (τις ἀξία) to them (2.23.25). Epictetus refuses to use the common language of humankind in designating externals as good or evil since such language may serve as a trap, tricking people into the lie of supposing that happiness can be found in externals and that they contribute to the supreme good (1.22.12–13). On the other hand, Epictetus' reckoning of external things as indifferents appears more positive than Paul's stronger use of σκύβαλα. Overall, a deeper examination reveals that Epictetus' assessment of ἀδιάφορα is essentially the same as Paul's valuation of σκύβαλα.

Both authors view physical things as potentially instrumental in a person's pursuit of the supreme good. For Paul and Epictetus, it is only when the supreme good is sought for itself alone that indifferents can be valued rightly. Just as Paul prizes the Philippians' financial gift because it produced spiritual fruit in their lives (Phil. 4:17), so also Epictetus affirms the lesser value of indifferents when a proper use of them enables a person to participate in the good. For instance, a person's father, brother, or country are not good in themselves, but the safeguarding of these relationships becomes good when one protects and cares for them on account of the supreme good (*Diatr*. 3.3.5–8). Epictetus goes further, arguing that only those who prioritize a right προαίρεσις, thereby valuing virtue over self-interest, will be able to uphold those relationships (2.22.20–21, 3.3.6–7). Only the wise man who correctly identifies the good truly possesses the power to love (φιλεῖν, 2.22.3), just as Socrates loved his children and Diogenes loved everyone he met, but both as servants of Zeus with their ultimate allegiance to him (3.24.60–65; cf. Reydams-Schils 2005, p. 123).

Similarly, Paul speaks of the love of Christ generating a genuine love for others (Phil. 2:1–3). Thus, externals can serve as means to the end and become valuable in that context, but they can never serve as ends in themselves or they lose all value. Externals are like beautiful inns on the road; a person on a journey passes through the inns but never stays there (*Diatr*. 2.23.37; cf. August. *De doctr. christ*. 1.4). Additionally, in the same way that Paul's imprisonment served in the proclamation of the gospel (Phil. 1:12–13), Epictetus views external pains or the loss of external pleasures as a potential means of attaining the good (*Diatr*. 3.3.8–9, 3.20.12).

Both authors also view external things as gifts that require thankfulness on the part of the recipient. Paul's assertion that Christians should receive good things from God with thankfulness (1 Tim. 4:4; cf. Smith 2004, p. 237) is given an even stronger emphasis in Epictetus' *Discourses*. Repeatedly, Epictetus refers to God (θεὸς) as the giver (ὁ διδούς, 4.4.47; cf. 1.12.24). As a king and father, he bestows favors (χάρις), including life, the body, the senses, food, wine, possessions, the seasons, the light of the sun, and family members, for which people ought to return thanks (1.6.40, 2.23.5, 4.1.102–111, 4.10.16).[12] Epictetus emphasizes that these externals do not belong to a person; they have been given for a short time and they can be taken away without blame: "the one who gave takes away" (ὁ δοὺς ἀφαιρεῖται, 4.1.101–110).

Inherently, however, these gifts matter little to Epictetus in comparison with a right προαίρεσις. He compares Athens and the Acropolis to stones and a refined rock (2.16.33) and considers all externals only a mixture of figs and almonds thrown on the ground (4.7.23–24). Even further, because externals contribute nothing in attaining εὐδαιμονία (Jaquette 1995, p. 51), Epictetus declares that they are "nothing to me" (οὐδέν πρὸς ἐμέ, 1.30.3; cf. 1.29.24). Lightfoot (1963, p. 322) disapproves of this viewpoint, declaring that Jesus departed from the Stoic position when he affirmed that "ye have need of all these things" (Matt. 6:32). However, Lightfoot fails to mark Epictetus' distinction between physical needs and one's supreme good. Epictetus is not denying that food is required for physical life; he even states that food and drink are prepared for the body; rather, he is denying that death is the true evil and urging that a deeper kind of food is needed (*Diatr*. 1.16.1, 3.26.38, 2.16.39).[13] In the same way that Paul speaks of counting all things loss for Christ (Phil. 3:8), Epictetus urges people to cast aside externals in their pursuit of the ultimate good: "throw it away, it is nothing to you" (ἀπόβαλε, οὐδὲν πρὸς σέ, *Diatr*. 3.3.15, cf. 4.1.112, 4.5.17).[14]

Nevertheless, even as he counted externals as σκύβαλα from a spiritual perspective, Paul was willing to call externals good in a physical context so long as they remained tethered to the supreme good. Although initially a minor difference with Epictetus, Paul's classifying of externals as good has broader implications for how a person should respond to the gain or loss of them. In their views on the proper attitude to external things, Paul and Epictetus diverge. In a way that is not true for Epictetus, Paul is able to seek and rejoice in externals as inherently significant. They derive their goodness from the ultimate good and gain value through their relation to it. Paul prayed for Epaphroditus' healing, desired it, and rejoiced when it came. On his part, Epictetus does not utterly rule out the potential for the enjoyment of externals. God invites his children to participate in life as a festival, with dancing, applauding, calling upon the gods, and singing hymns (4.1.108, cf. 3.5.10). However, Epictetus does not consider externals worthy of desire or avoidance unless they are required for virtue. If one can be virtuous without them, they are unnecessary. Seeking or desiring them will only cause unnecessary sorrow, and the wise man will be just as willing to leave the festival and have externals taken away as he is to retain them. Thus, a person must limit desire (ὄρεξις) and avoidance (ἔκκλισις) to what is within his will, never yearning after or fleeing from externals (3.12.5–8, 1.4.19, 1.12.15, 4.1.81–84, 4.4.33). Εὐδαιμονία and yearning for externals are incompatible, as seen in the example of Odysseus, who wept for his wife during their long estrangement (3.24.17–18).

In regard to a person sorrowing over externals, Paul and Epictetus have an even greater difference of perspective. Both view God's will as ultimately good. Paul accepts

either life or death so long as Christ is magnified (Phil. 1:20), he tells the Philippians to follow the example of Christ who was obedient even to death (2:8), and he affirms that God works in them so that they might will (θέλω) what is in accordance with his good will (2:13). However, while Paul would clearly accept God's will no matter the outcome, he still says that Epaphroditus' healing saved him from experiencing "sorrow upon sorrow". Barclay (2009, p. 67) observes that this grief "contrasts sharply with Epictetus' denial that others can fundamentally cause us harm" (cf. DeSilva 1995, p. 561; Fletcher-Louis 2023, p. 52; Peterman 1997, p. 137). On one level, Paul can gladly yield his will to God and experience God's promised peace (εἰρήνη, 4:7), and on another level he can still grieve over externals and urge Christians also "to weep with the weeping ones" (κλαίειν μετὰ κλαιόντων, Rom. 12:15). Like Paul, Epictetus emphasizes acceptance and complete submission to God's will, asking about the loss of an external, "will you not yield it joyfully to the giver?" (οὐ χαίρων παραχωρήσεις τῷ δεδωκότι, *Diatr*. 1.12.24). Epictetus' aim is absolute alignment between his will and God's: "for I believe that the thing God wills is better than what I will. As a servant and a follower, I will devote myself to him; I move together with him, I reach out to him, in short, I have the same will as him" (κρεῖττον γὰρ ἡγοῦμαι ὃ ὁ θεὸς θέλει ἢ ὃ ἐγώ. προσκείσομαι διάκονος καὶ ἀκόλουθος ἐκείνῳ, συνορμῶ, συνορέγομαι, ἁπλῶς συνθέλω, 4.7.20; cf. 2.7.13). Hence, if God willed illness or poverty for him, Epictetus declares that he would embrace that while rejoicing (ἀλλὰ χαίρων, 3.5.9). Thus far, Epictetus and Paul would agree. Epictetus sounds like an echo of Paul's command to "rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4; cf. 1 Thess. 5:16–18). However, unlike Paul, who was sorrowful yet rejoicing (λυπούμενοι ἀεὶ δὲ χαίροντες, 2 Cor. 6:10), Epictetus does not believe he can rejoice and sorrow at the same time. A person who grieves (λυπέω, *Diatr*. 3.11.2, 3.2.16, 4.4.32) is in opposition to the person who possesses happiness and all peace (εἰρήνη πᾶσα, 3.22.105; cf. 1.24.9; Long 2002, p. 192).

Epictetus' rejection of grief and sorrow is based on two foundational and separate premises, both of which are orthodox Stoic positions. First, because the world is well-ordered, whatever happens will always be good (*Diat.* 4.7.6–7, 3.17.1, 3.24.19–20, 3.26.28–29; cf. Sandbach 2018, p. 167; Cochran 2014, p. 213). The only evil that Epictetus identifies is a wrong use of προαίρεσις, when a person makes the conscious move away from virtue, a problem that can still be fully remedied through his own efforts (*Diatr*. 1.7.40–43, 3.24.23). As Long (2002, p. 145) affirms, "Epictetus rejects the existence of any evil principle in the universe" (cf. Long 1968, p. 335; Bonhöffer 1996, p. 37; Aquinas *ST* I-II, q. 59, a. 3). The universe is free from a devil, innate human corruption, or a fallen creation. Sufferings do not implicate God's goodness because the only sufferings that exist are those that derive from a person's deliberate choice. Thus, a profound disparity arises between Epictetus and Paul. Both authors believe that the loss of externals can result in good, for Epictetus as the result of one's own conscious will and for Paul as the result of God's power. Epictetus issues the challenge, "bring whatever you wish, and I will make it good" (ὃ θέλεις φέρε κἀγὼ αὐτὸ ἀγαθὸν ποιήσω, *Diatr*. 3.20.12). On his side, Paul boldly declares that "God works all things together for good" (εἰς ἀγαθόν, Rom. 8:28). However, Paul also affirms the presence of evil in the spiritual realm, in nature, and in the human condition (Eph. 6:12, Rom. 8:22, Rom. 3:23, Phil. 3:2). Sorrow is the proper response to this evil, whether the death of a friend, an earthquake that destroys homes, an ancient forest ravaged by fire, warfare between nations, loneliness, divorce, illness, lack of resources, the pain of aging, disability, infertility, or even the loss of a beloved pet. God does not desire for evil to reign, and one day he will cause it and all sorrows to end; thus, the person whose will is aligned with God's will both grieves over present evil and desires its termination. Barclay (2009, p. 71) notes that "it is only on the eschatological horizon that Paul sees the well-ordered universe that Epictetus takes for granted as the present condition of life" (cf. Bertschmann 2020, p. 272). While Epictetus is able to acknowledge a positive value in externals even though he does not label them good, he never views externals like natural disasters, illness, or even death as partaking to any extent in evil. In this context, sorrow would be an irrational and self-tormenting response.

The second premise that underlies Epictetus' rejection of sorrow is the Stoic doctrine that virtue alone is sufficient for happiness. The question of whether externals are necessary for εὐδαιμονία was a contested one in antiquity. Aristotle identified three kinds of goods (ἀγαθῶν), those of the body, the soul, and those external to a person (*Eth. Nic.* 1098b. He argued that the happy person requires perfect goodness in action with an adequate amount of external goods (1101a), since it is nonsense to say that a good man will be happy even if he falls into the greatest ill fortunes (1153b). Breaking with Aristotle and the Peripatetics, the Stoics held the unique position that virtue was enough for happiness, the τέλος of human life (Long 1996, p. 184; Brunt 2013, p. 12; Annas 1993, p. 392; Annas 2000, p. 337; Long and Sedley 1987, p. 357).[15] The dilemma is more difficult than it might initially appear, with direct implications for life, since it addresses whether a person who suffers grave misfortunes can hope for happiness or not. Cicero wrestled with the question throughout his life and at times provided different answers, although he eventually agreed with the Stoics (Brunt 2013, p. 183). He concluded that human beings face a multitude of severe misfortunes in life, including poverty, loneliness, bodily pains, loss of one's possessions, blindness, the destruction of one's country, exile, and slavery (*Tusc*. 5.29); if virtue is not sufficient for happiness, then happiness will be destroyed (5.40). Both Aristotle's and Cicero's arguments are compelling. It sounds ludicrous to assert that a man in the utmost agony can be happy, but it sounds equally problematic to assert that a person can be happy when his happiness depends on externals. Siding wholeheartedly with the Stoic position, Epictetus refuses to call externals good, regarding them as accomplishing nothing in regard to happiness (Dobbin 1998, p. 170).

Paul takes a nuanced position that paradoxically agrees with both Aristotle and the Stoics, although it is closer to the Stoics. Both Paul and Epictetus aim at a τέλος, but it is a matter of debate whether Christianity is compatible with the ancient pursuit of εὐδαιμονία. Wolterstorff, for instance, believes that εὐδαιμονία is "similar to egoism in that it too is self-oriented" (Wolterstorff 2015, p. 5), and therefore, he argues that it is inconsistent with Christianity's call to love (Wolterstorff 2008, p. 194; cf. Toner 2010; Hare 2000, pp. 34–35). Long (2002, p. 200) responds to this kind of argument by saying, "There are not two dispositions, a self-interested one and an altruistic one, but a single attitude that treats concern for others as integral to concern for oneself". Additionally, Wolterstorff is mistaken to view the Stoic εὐδαιμονία as unrelated to love of something outside the self. The single disposition that Long identifies is driven by love, which causes a person to passionately pursue virtue as an objective and external reality. In voicing the Stoic position, Cicero says that virtue possesses a beauty that awakens desire and compels love, drawing humans to seek it for itself alone (*Off*. 1.15; *Leg*. 1.48; *Fin*. 2.46, 2.49, 2.51–52, 3.21). Finally, the question of the *summum bonum* is inherently framed in terms of the human good; for Epictetus, the answer is virtue, for Paul, it is intimate knowledge of Christ, but both can be framed in terms of εὐδαιμονία, a person's wellbeing or flourishing.[16] God is both the highest good in himself and also the highest good for the individual. The link between Paul's τέλος of knowing Christ and εὐδαιμονία is seen in Augustine's search for the *summum bonum* of happiness (*beatum, De civ. D*. 8.8) when he calls God "the highest good and my true good" (*summum bonum et bonum verum meum, Conf*. 2.12).[17] Aquinas also situates εὐδαιμονία within a Christian perspective, identifying both happiness and God as the final end of man (*ultimus finis hominum est beatitude*. . .*Deus est ultimus finis hominis* (*ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 8). He reconciles this apparent contradiction by saying that an end is twofold, consisting of the good itself and the use or attainment of that good (*ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 8); thus, "happiness includes two aspects, certainly the highest good itself, which is the greatest good; and the attainment or the enjoyment of that good" (*beatitudinis duo includuntur, scilicet ipse finis ultimus, qui est summum bonum; et adeptio vel fruitio ipsius boni, ST* I-II, q. 5, a. 2). A person's *summum bonum* consists of God and his enjoyment of God. To separate the enjoyment from the good itself is to make it no longer a person's own good. In this context, the search for εὐδαιμονία is neither a "personal-relative or an intense hedonistic pursuit," but rather "the condition of genuine human fulfillment and flourishing rooted in a relationship with God"

(Naugle 2008, p. xv; cf. Strawn 2012, p. 318; O'Donovan 1980, p. 156; Traherne 1675, pp. 4, 34, 548). Thus, a better distinction between the Stoic and Christian view is not in regard to the notion of εὐδαιμονία itself, but in regard to whether one is motivated by the love of virtue or the love of God. Like Epictetus, Paul believes that a person's εὐδαιμονία does not depend on externals. For the one who possesses knowledge of Christ, that is enough and nothing else is ultimately needed, no matter the circumstances. Otherwise, how could Paul rejoice in his chains (Phil. 1:18), face death as a gain (1:21), and promise the Philippians that God's peace would guard their hearts and minds in the midst of a troubled world (4:7)? With Epictetus, Paul believes that the τέλος of life can be reached without externals, so they are unnecessary for it and even σκύβαλα in comparison. Full human flourishing consists in being in an intimate relationship with Christ. In contrast to Aristotle, Paul views this as a happiness that can withstand the loss of all earthly things. Paul's focus echoes that of Christ, who said not to be like the Gentiles in striving after food, drink, and clothing, but rather to strive for a heavenly good (Matt. 6:31–33). However, while acknowledging the "telos-formation" of the command to seek first the kingdom of God and the resulting relative devaluing of physical necessities, Betz (1995, pp. 428, 471, 483) asserts that the promise is given that these physical necessities will also be provided. This tension also appears in Paul. At the same time that he places the *summum bonum* in Christ alone, Paul is also in agreement with Aristotle on the inherent value of earthly goods; they are needed for embodied human flourishing. Although a person's complete happiness is found in Christ, that happiness will not be complete until the restoration of all things, physical and spiritual (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:4; Aquinas *ST* I-II, q. 5, a. 3). In the meantime, part of the delight in human life derives from the things God created for people to enjoy as good, and the loss of these legitimate goods is undeniably a sorrow since it results from evil that will one day be no more. Thus, through the lens of comparative worth, Paul is in alignment with Epictetus, but through the lens of inherent worth, he agrees with Aristotle. Nevertheless, even as he validates sorrow, Paul mitigates it with an ordering of gains and losses that parallels Epictetus. For Epictetus, the loss of external things cannot be compared with the greater value that comes from exercising right moral judgement (*Diatr*. 4.3.1). His first injunction is not to wail at pain, but he modifies that: "I do not say that it is forbidden to groan, but you must not groan from deep within," 1.18.19). Similarly, Christians should not be undone by sorrow. Paul reminds them that no tribulation or distress can separate them from the love of Christ (Rom. 8: 35), and he tells them that when they grieve, not to do so as those who lack hope (1 Thess. 4:13). In contrast to Epictetus, Paul would acknowledge a loss to be such, but he also engages in the same proportionate accounting as Epictetus, which causes him to count the losses as σκύβαλα in comparison with his desire to know Christ and, through his own losses, to share in Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10). In the end, Paul reckons that affliction is light in weight (2 Cor. 4:17) and that the "sufferings of the present time do not weigh as much as the future glory" (Rom. 8:18; cf. Muir 2022, p. 258).

4. Conclusions

Identifying a τέλος that ensures human flourishing causes Paul and Epictetus to evaluate all other things in light of it. An apparent contradiction appears in both their writings, that physical and temporary things do not matter and also that they have value. In comparison with the greatest good, externals are ἀδιάφορα or even σκύβαλα. However, while Epictetus acknowledges the value of externals when they participate in the ultimate good, unlike Paul, he neither recognizes them as inherently good or evil nor thinks that they are something humans should desire or avoid. On one level, similar to Epictetus, Paul assures Christians that they are completely secure in Christ and can rejoice no matter the circumstances. On another level, Paul views externals as gifts from God, ones that he has affirmed as good from the beginning of creation. Until the new creation, these gifts will properly gladden the hearts of humankind, and their loss that comes through evil will also entail sorrow. Nevertheless, externals cannot serve as an end in themselves, but can only be loved, desired, and sought when they are rightly ordered in relation to Christ. Despite

their differences, Paul and Epictetus are working diligently to explain what people should prioritize in life and how they can cope with suffering. In a society that is currently wealthy but not happy, plagued with depression, anxiety, and a lack of purpose, Paul and Epictetus would not provide precisely the same answers to the problem, but they would both suggest the identification and reordering of goods.

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Notes

1 Lee (2020, p. 515) points to the importance of interactions that take place between texts, not in regard to direct engagement with each other, but in regard to how they address the common ethical categories of the ancient world. For a summary on what distinguishes a theological reading of Scripture, see (Spinks 2007, p. 7; Sarisky 2019, pp. 71–72, 328–29).

2 For Paul's use of αὐτάρκης in Philippians 4:11 and its potential connection with Stoicism, see (Malherbe 1996; Engberg-Pedersen 2006; Pevarello 2015; Arnold 2017; Schellenberg 2021, pp. 130–49).

3 Paul's sorrow is focused on human relationships, which could lead to the conclusion that he would feel sorrow for them but not for the loss of other external goods like wealth or natural disasters. For instance, he also speaks of anxiety, but only within the context of his care for relational and community connections (Becker 2017, p. 59). However, Paul's concern for the poor (Rom. 15:26, Gal. 2:10), his request for prayer for physical deliverance (2 Cor. 1:10–11), his acknowledgement of tribulations and distresses such as beatings and imprisonment (2 Cor. 6:4–5), and his mention of the groaning of creation (Rom. 8:21–22) all bear witness that these externals matter significantly to Paul and can factor into sorrowing and rejoicing.

4 See Muller (1972, p. 117) for the nature of these sufferings as including not only persecution for the sake of Christ but "all suffering, bodily or spiritual, which overtakes the believer by virtue of his new manner of life". This could be further extended to include all suffering that a believer experiences and responds to in the spirit of Christ, declaring "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42).

5 For Augustine's engagement with Philippians 3, see (Eelen 2011; O'Daly 1977, p. 269).

6 In asserting the intrinsic goodness of the gifts of creation, Paul is drawing on an Old Testament tradition that affirms an earthly happiness including physical and temporal things. The goodness of physical and tangible externals in the Old Testament and their role in happiness is helpfully addressed in Strawn (2012); in particular, see the chapter by Lapsley for this emphasis in Isaiah, by Newsom for Proverbs, and by MacDonald for the Torah.

7 Augustine has been misunderstood as saying that things other than God, including human beings, are only used as instruments in an objectifying way (Stewart-Kroeker 2017, pp. 218–19). In support of the view put forward here, see (Cahall 2005, pp. 119–20; Baer 1996, pp. 56–57; O'Connor 1983, pp. 58–59). Even in concluding that Augustine's classification involves unresolvable tensions, O'Donovan (1982, pp. 386–87) also highlights that Augustine employs *frui* to refer to loving God for his own sake and *uti* to refer to loving other things on account of God. Cameron (2023, p. 111) suggests that Augustine gives "a new connotation" to the term *uti.*

8 See Long (1967, p. 60) for the connection between the μέγιστον ἀγαθῶν and εὐδαιμονία; (cf. Long 1996, p. 179; Sandbach 2018, p. 41).

9 Thorsteinsson (2010, p. 62) points to the rarity of this in other works of Stoicism.

10 As Long (2002, p. 28) notes, Epictetus differentiates between the self and the body despite his commitment to Stoic materialism.

11 See Dobbin's full article (1991) for Epictetus' focus on προαίρεσις in contrast to other Stoics; cf. Eastman (2017, p. 36) who describes προαίρεσις as "the central faculty for human identity and freedom. . .a share in the divine nature. . .the rational exercise of the soul's commanding part".

12 At the same time, these gifts can take on a more negative connotation when they distract a person from correctly choosing between true goods and evils. Epictetus warns that physical things can bind and entangle us (*Diatr.* 1.1.8), becoming our tyrants (4.1.88).

13 One might compare Jesus' statement that he is the "bread of life" (Jn. 6:35, 48, 51).

14 Even as he urges this, however, Epictetus also maintains that an external should not be thrown away if it is part of fulfilling one's moral purpose or contributes to it (*Diatr*. 1.16.14).

[15] Irwin (2007, pp. 28–29, 99–100) takes Plato as concurring with Aristotle, but Socrates as upholding the notion that virtue is sufficient for happiness. Annas (1998, p. 46) also views the Stoics as aligning with Socrates on this question.

[16] More specifically, the personal knowledge of Christ that Paul refers to in Philippians 3:8 is the "path of salvation" (DeSilva 1994, p. 41). Although Bertschmann (2020, p. 256) distinguishes between the end of happiness in Epictetus and the end of salvation in Paul, salvation is a person's εὐδαιμονία since it points to an intimate relationship with Christ and restored union with God (cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2000, p. 47; Shantz 2012, pp. 199–200). Significantly, Paul uses σωτηρία (salvation) in Philippians to refer not only to eternal security but also to physical deliverance. As Alexander (1989, p. 96) states in regard to physical and spiritual wellbeing in Philippians, "the one word σωτηρία (1.28; 2.12) does duty for both". Although some take a purely soteriological interpretation of Phil. 1:19, believing that it refers only to eschatological deliverance, others argue that it should be taken here in its lesser definition of wellbeing to refer to Paul's physical deliverance from prison (Hawthorne 2004, pp. 49–50; Reumann 2008, p. 210). Even if this specific reference is taken to refer to the eternal salvation, this salvation will eventually include the complete restoration of all spiritual and physical things. Thus, no matter which meaning is adopted, when Paul is speaking of salvation, he is referring to a holistic deliverance, part of which occurs in this life and the whole of it in the life to come (cf. Engberg-Pedersen 2015, p. 303).

[17] See Tkacz (2013, p. 81) for Augustine's transformed conception of Aristotelian eudaimonism: "the Christian union with God the supreme measure of the universe through Christ who is incarnate wisdom".

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Essay

Shedding Some Light on Economics in Philippians: Phil 4:10–20 and the Socio-Economic Situation of the Community

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Abstract: This essay considers what conclusions may be drawn concerning the socio-economic situation of the Philippian community from Paul's response to the Philippians' gift in Phil 4:10–20. It contributes to the recent discussions of the socio-economic situation of the Pauline communities, as well as to the current understanding of the possibilities, challenges, and limitations of a social-scientific interpretation of this letter. Phil 4:10–20 includes several potential hints about the Philippians' socio-economic situation. These could indicate that their situation is quite precarious under shifting economic circumstances. Immediately after Paul founded the community, the Philippians supported him twice (4:15f). Afterward, however, they did not have the opportunity to do so, although they kept it in mind (4:10: ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ ἐφρονεῖτε, ἠκαιρεῖσθε δέ). Eventually, they were able to send another, apparently large, gift to the imprisoned apostle (4:18). As a part of his response to this gift, Paul explicates his self-sufficient lifestyle (4:11–13), possibly as an example for the Philippians. He also promises them that God will satisfy all their needs (4:19), which may be understood as a consolation in view of socio-economic distress. This study reconsiders the potential socio-scientific interpretations of these hints. It explores to what extent they (even collectively) may shed light on the socio-economic situation of the Philippian community. In doing so, it also points out the uncertainties and challenges such an interpretation must address. It thus shows how the scope of social-scientific interpretation, at least in this case, is limited.

Keywords: Philippians; social-scientific interpretation; poverty and wealth; Early Christianity

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1. Introduction

The last few decades have seen a growing interest in the milieus from which the early Christian communities drew their members and what can be known of their socio-economic status. In this regard, a social-scientific reading of the Pauline letters has gained increasing significance, as it asks what hints concerning the social and socio-economic status[1] of early Christians can be found in these letters. Two current trends may be observed: first, the use of socio-economic models to classify the community members into socio-economic status groups (Longenecker 2010, pp. 237–49; Öhler 2018), and second, a tendency to see the communities as not merely consisting of poor people but of people who are living above subsistence level and even possessing a surplus (Öhler 2018, pp. 266–86; Weiß 2015). Both trends seem to be linked insofar as socio-economic models break with the idea of a dichotomous Roman society that consists only of a small elite and the poor masses.[2]

Concerning the question of the socio-economic status of early Christians, Phil 4:10–20 may be of special interest. In this section, Paul responds to a material matter, namely, the gift that the community sent him. In doing so, the apostle reflects on his current and former material support from the community. This essay considers to what extent it is possible to gain information regarding the socio-economic situation of the community and its members from the remarks on the Philippians' gifts in this section. What conclusions may be drawn? What uncertainties remain? Thus, it contributes to the recent discussions of the socio-economic situation of the Pauline communities, as well as to the understanding of

the possibilities, challenges, and limitations that a social-scientific interpretation of Paul's letter to the Philippians and the Pauline letters as a whole, must address.

Initially, it should be considered what sorts of socio-economic situations could fit the information found in Phil 4:10–20. To do so, a look at some passages from 2 Cor will also be necessary. Thereafter, the potential of a social-scientific interpretation (in this case, a specifically socio-economic reading) can be demonstrated based on these reconstructed scenarios. This will also allow for a methodological requirement inherent to the social-scientific approach to be illustrated.

2. Phil 4:10–20—Hints on a Precarious Socio-Economic Situation

A study that tries to shed some light on the socio-economic situation of the Philippian community should start with the observation that there is evidence of repeated, though inconsistent, financial support for the apostle Paul. Regarding Phil 4:15–16, the community supported Paul at least two times shortly after its founding.[3] Following this, the support obviously stopped. A few years later, after hearing of Paul's imprisonment, the Philippians again sent him a financial gift. Herein lies the central issue: What could the repeated support and its interruption imply regarding the wealth or poverty of the community members? Does the initially frequent support point to some wealth, and is the interruption caused by the diminishment of said wealth? Above and beyond Philippians, this question must be considered in light of a statement from 2 Cor 8:1–5. Probably shortly after supporting Paul again, the Macedonian communities were, as Paul writes, much engaged in the collection for Jerusalem, although they were in "deep poverty" (βαθὺς πτωχεία [2 Cor 8:2]).

In Phil 4:10, Paul initially expresses his joy at the fact that the Philippians "had blossomed anew" (ἤδη ποτὲ ἀνεθάλετε) in their concern for him. However, he immediately rejects the idea that this implies a rebuke of the addressees' previous behavior. They were always concerned, but they lacked the opportunity (ἐφ' ᾧ καὶ ἐφρονεῖτε, ἠκαιρεῖσθε δέ). Both the speaking of a new blossoming and of a previous lack of opportunity clearly indicate that an interruption of the former support must be assumed.[4] The imperfect ἐφρονεῖτε and ἠκαιρεῖσθε might point to an extended period during which the support was interrupted (Fee 1995, p. 430; Bockmuehl 1997, p. 260). This would fit with Paul in 4:15f only referencing examples of former support which took place shortly after the community's founding.[5] Crucial for our question is the meaning of ἠκαιρεῖσθε δέ. What kind of opportunity was lacking (presumably, even for some years)? It is often assumed that it (at least partly) might have resulted from insufficient material means (Standhartinger 2021, p. 285; Bockmuehl 1997, p. 260; Walton 2011, p. 229). Given that 4:15–16 (even in connection with 2 Cor 11:9, the support by "brothers coming from Macedonia") points to a once relatively high material capacity[6], it seems that, on this understanding, a severe drop in this capacity must be assumed. Likewise, it must be assumed that, at least to some degree, the material capacity had increased again. The new gift to Paul was apparently large (Phil 4:18), just as the Macedonian contribution to the collection (2 Cor 8:2) would be.

Whether the interruption of the support was caused by economic problems, two factors must be present when considering the former and the current socio-economic situation of the Philippians: (1) The former support, the actual gift, and the collection were bound up with travel costs. These costs imply travel and, in places without Christian communities or other persons to contact, accommodation expenses. This factor is left out of most accounts (cf. Crook 2017, pp. 200–201; Concannon 2017, pp. 354–355 as exceptions), although the financial means that are required for it might be anything up to, but less than, those required for the gift itself.[7] (2) The traveling community members might have lacked income. Therefore, in addition to Paul, they also had to be supported (Öhler 2018, pp. 272–273). At least, this must be assumed for the member (or even members) of the collection's delegation[8], but likely for the community's legate Epaphroditus and the "brothers" who supported Paul in Corinth (2 Cor 11:9) as well. Regarding these factors, the financial needs go considerably farther, or even far, beyond that which is needed for the gift per se. So, the community's

activities in support of Paul and his mission only seem conceivable if a (perhaps more than rudimentary) surplus is presumed.[9]

Indeed, if Phil 4:19 (the promise that God will supply all the needs [χρεία] of the addressees) is understood as a consolation in view of the community's socio-economic distress (Standhartinger 2021, p. 299; Bird and Gupta 2020, p. 192; Wojtkowiak 2012, p. 281), then its current material capability might have been in some way limited. Furthermore, 4:11–13 (Paul's remarks on his autarky) could function as a reference to the apostle's exemplary role in dealing with socio-economic suffering (Wojtkowiak 2012, p. 281) and may also serve as a reassurance to poorer community members who could not contribute to the actual gift (Walton 2011, p. 229). The assumption that these passages address a tricky socio-economic situation fits with Paul's speaking of the Macedonians' "deep poverty" in 2 Cor 8:2. This phrase should be taken seriously and must also be understood as related to the Philippians because of two considerations: (1) Although the socio-economic situation in Thessalonica and Berea might be worse than in Philippi (Witherington 2011, p. 4), the Philippian community is likely to be included here. It would be very confusing for the addressees if Paul did not intend this community to be included, especially considering the use of "Macedonia" in 2 Cor 11:9, apparently for Philippi only.[10] (2) The socio-economic situation of the Macedonian communities must have been noticeably worse than that of the Corinthians. Otherwise, it would be inappropriate for Paul to encourage the Corinthians to participate in the collection in 2 Cor 8:1–5 by holding up the example of the poorer communities. The reference to the habit of poorer communities as an ethical motivation only seems to be expedient if it reflects reality and if the addressees are aware of their superior socio-economic status (Wojtkowiak 2023, p. 317; Oakes 2015, p. 77).[11]

All in all, the hints about the socio-economic situation of the Philippians seem to be ambiguous. There was, and now is again, a situation of material surplus. However, at least the actual surplus might be to some degree limited and is most likely smaller than the surplus of the Corinthians. This ambiguity fits with the assumption that the support was interrupted because of economic problems. It might be best explained by the precarious socio-economic situation of the community members. 'Precarious', in this case, should be understood in the narrower sense of material and financial insecurity.[12] In what follows, the task will be to examine how far it is possible to strengthen this assumption and to obtain a clearer picture of the community's economic situation. Which circumstances might have led to the case that repeated support for Paul stopped, and then only a few years later, support for him and the church in Jerusalem resumed (perhaps under aggravated material conditions)? This question should be treated on three different levels: (1) What argues for the assumption that the support was interrupted because of socio-economic distress? (2) What kind of situation may be assumed that could have effected these changes in material capacity? (3) What sorts of socio-economic backgrounds may have made up the Philippian community?

First, the hapax legomenon ἀκαιρέομαι, which Paul uses in Phil 4:10 to describe the circumstances that lead to the interruption of the support, can be understood in two ways: (a) Paul's situation gave the Philippians no occasion to support him, or (b) they themselves lacked the possibility to support the apostle. The first way of understanding this verb (specifically the phrase ἠκαιρεῖσθε δέ) fits with the current support that is in response to Paul's imprisonment. Otherwise, it does not seem to fit with the previous support, either. Even though Paul mentions his need when he was in Corinth (2. Cor 11:9), the frequency of the former support (probably two times in Thessalonica[13]) suggests regular giving to Paul rather than giving dependent on specific circumstances. As such, some form of financial commitment between Paul and the Philippians (Ogereau 2014, pp. 280–89; Briones 2013, p. 130) seems to be conceivable and would fit the close relationship which Paul still stresses in Phil 1:5 (Briones 2013, p. 108). Therefore, the cause of the interruption might rather originate in the community itself. Since there are no hints of a long-lasting crisis between Paul and the Philippian community, other reasons must be found to explain why the community did not support Paul for about three years.[14]

Second, not the least of the experiences of suffering faced by the early Christians could have been economic (Oakes 2001, pp. 89–96; Oakes 2015, pp. 78–79). This specifically applies to the experiences of the Philippian community. That they must face sufferings because of their religious orientation is obvious from Phil 1:30, where Paul qualifies these sufferings as "the same fight, that you once saw in me and now hear from me" (τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες, οἷον εἴδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί). Indeed, oppression most likely only originated from pagan fellow citizens or officials (Oakes 2001, pp. 87–89). There is no evidence of a Jewish community or even a Jewish portion of the population in Philippi (Wojtkowiak 2012, pp. 61–62; Pilhofer 1995, pp. 231–33).[15] Although official Roman persecution of the community members as Christians in the 50s is historically highly unlikely, conflicts with local officials because of real or only alleged offenses against the Roman ius maiorum (cf. Acts 16:20–24) and non-attendance at official pagan cult ceremonies are plausible. Both might result in the social and socio-economic isolation of Christians by their fellow citizens, too. Peter Oakes highlights that in the Graeco-Roman world, "economic activity depended more on relationships and power than on the market" (Oakes 2015, p. 79).[16] Hence, the socio-economic relevance of conflicts with the majority population is not to be underestimated. Socio-economic consequences could well explain why the frequent support that started subsequent to the community's foundation stopped after one or two years. Even the specific circumstances would correspond well to the likelihood that it would take some time for a social conflict to develop and for the community members' reserves to be exhausted. Finally, it would fit with the observation that the socio-economic situation at the time of Paul's letter to the Philippians is worse than it was about half a decade earlier, although it would not explain why there may be new financial means to support the apostle and the Jerusalem community.

Third, to obtain a more concrete picture of the community members' socio-economic status, the stratification models of Steven Friesen and Bruce Longenecker seem to be well-suited (Friesen 2004, p. 341; Longenecker 2010, p. 45). Since Longenecker adopts Friesen's model, both are identical, except that Longenecker speaks of "economy scale" ("ES"; Longenecker 2010, pp. 44–45) instead of "poverty scale" ("PS"; Friesen 2004, pp. 340–341).[17] In the following, the less tendentious designation "economy scale" will be preferred:

ES1	Imperial elites	imperial dynasty, Roman senatorial families, a few retainers, local royalty, a few freedpersons
ES2	Regional or provincial elites	equestrian families, provincial officials, some retainers, some decurial families, some freedpersons, some retired military officers
ES3	Municipal elites	most decurial families, wealthy men and women who do not hold office, some freedpersons, some retainers, some veterans, some merchants
ES4	Moderate surplus resources	some merchants, some traders, some freedpersons, some artisans (especially those who employ others), and military veterans
ES5	Stable near subsistence level (with reasonable hope of remaining above the minimum level to sustain life)	many merchants and traders, regular wage earners, artisans, large shop owners, freedpersons, some farm families
ES6	At subsistence level (and often below minimum level to sustain life)	small farm families, laborers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (esp. those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and traders, small shop/tavern owners
ES7	Below subsistence level	some farm families, unattached wi dows, orphans, beggars, disabled, unskilled day laborers, prisoners

(Friesen 2004, p. 341; Longenecker 2010, p. 45)

Regarding the financial means necessary to support the apostle and Jerusalem (the gift, the travel costs, and the costs for the sustenance of the community's delegates), there must be some community members who are above ES6. In view of this, Justin J. Meggitt's

thesis that the Pauline communities "shared fully the bleak material existence that was the lot of the non-élite inhabitants of the empire" (Meggit 1998, p. 153) falls short. It does not explain where such quite extensive means might stem from.[18] However, against Markus Öhler, living above the poverty level does not have to be assumed for the community as a whole (Öhler 2018, p. 273). Three scenarios are imaginable, all of which might fit the ambiguous hints about the socio-economic situation:

(i) At the outset of the community, there was a large number of people from ES5 and even ES4. People from these socio-economic status groups have a small surplus that soon fades when they are in socio-economic distress. They tend to descend to ES6 and ES5, respectively, so they cannot offer gifts as extensively as before. For those who are scaled down to ES6, this would be all but impossible.

(ii) Initially, the community consisted primarily of poor people (ES 6 or even ES7), while there was a small number of people from ES4 or above who were responsible for nearly the entirety of each gift. If these few wealthy people had left the community, e.g., in the face of oppression, its financial capability would have collapsed. This scenario fits Paul's insistence on abandoning status (Phil 2:3–8; 3:4–11; cf. Wojtkowiak 2012, pp. 145–49, 179–82). Furthermore, the turning away of some community members because of oppression seems to be the background of Paul's words about the "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18).[19] This scenario can be combined with Oakes' assumption that women comprise a large part of the community. If the community is supported by elite women who are financially dependent on their husbands, the non-Christian husband could stop this support (Oakes 2015, pp. 74–75). However, this might not apply to Lydia (Acts 16:14f), who seems to be unmarried and possibly a wealthy widow, which, according to Roman law, would give her proprietary rights broadly equal with those of men.[20] As the widow of a seller of purple who continues her husband's business, she might be classified as ES4. Eva Ebel points to the possibility that the use of an ethnicon (e.g., a woman from Lydia) refers to a former slave. If this is the case, Lydia might not belong to the social elites, even though some financial means (not at least for practicing her business) must be assumed (Ebel 2012, pp. 25–26, 32). Therefore, if Ebel's assumption about Lydia as a freedperson is correct, then this woman would be an example of the disparity between social and socio-economic status.[21]

(iii) There might be a combination of both scenarios, i.e., the social decline of many community members with a small or moderate surplus, and the turning away of a few wealthy members.

3. Possibilities, Challenges, and Limitations

The fact that there are three imaginable scenarios points to the uncertainties as well as limitations that every attempt to shed some light on the socio-economic situation of an early Christian community must face. Usually, the literary evidence is too small to furnish one with a clear scenario. However, socio-scientific models can help to illustrate which of the socio-economic conditions might be the sine qua non for making plausible sense of Paul's statements. Therefore, the models serve to clarify a reasonable spectrum of poverty and wealth as a background for reading the apostle's letters. For example, if Paul's argument in 2 Cor 8f is only plausible if the Corinthian community is almost entirely made up of people above ES6 (Wojtkowiak 2023, pp. 325–29), for the Philippian community as a whole, a lower socio-economic status is likely. Nonetheless, its support of Paul and his mission requires either many members with a small or moderate surplus (ES5 and probably ES4) or a few members with a moderate-to-high material surplus (ES4 and above). Thereby, it becomes clear that a general socio-economic classification of early Pauline Christians is insufficient. Rather, every single community must be evaluated based on the information that may be gleaned from the Pauline epistles and Acts.[22]

Furthermore, it must be appreciated that socio-economic circumstances are influenced by divergent factors. Beyond religious conflicts, socio-economic distress can be caused

by earthquakes, economic crises (e.g., bad harvests), riots, or wars. In these cases, not only the Christian community but all the people in the city and landscape are faced with a loss of material capability. Likewise, the situation of social and religious outsiders may be sharpened as well as the situation of the already previously poor members of the society. So, for reconstructing the socio-economic situation of Christian communities, the relevance of these factors must be considered as a kind of double-check on one's methodology. Otherwise, they constitute a blind spot that leaves the results questionable.

This can be illustrated with Philippians as an example. As expounded in this essay, the interruption of the support for Paul is best explained by straightened socio-economic circumstances caused by oppression. As this thesis can appeal to literary and historical evidence, other factors that could cause socio-economic distress might not falsify but even help to strengthen or specify it. During the first century, wars and riots may be negligible in the senatorial province of Macedonia. However, if Oakes' assumption about the centrality of agriculture for Philippi's economy is correct (Oakes 2001, p. 70), bad harvests are a factor not to be underestimated. Provided that Peter Garnsey's calculation for Larisa, Athens, and Odessa can be transferred to Philippi, there may be a bad harvest of wheat about every fourth year (Garnsey 1988, p. 17). Therefore, during the roughly four years between the first support of Paul and the gift mentioned in Phil 4:10–20, one bad harvest is very probable. The effect of this factor should not be overstated, however. Two succeeding years of a bad wheat harvest might only happen every decade. The same counts for only one bad harvest of barley (Garnsey 1988, p. 17). A challenge and limitation regarding bad harvests and earthquakes is the lack of a comprehensive transmission of such incidents, which can be further connected with the problem of dating them (cf. Deeg 2016, pp. 163–164 concerning the earthquake on Crete). Nonetheless, as Macedonia is a seismic area, earthquakes must be considered as a relevant factor. Sen., Nat. quaest. 6,1,13 mentions an earthquake that happened "last year" (anno priore) in Achaia and Macedonia. This earthquake is dated to 61 (Deeg 2016, pp. 155, 162–163) and so would only be a factor in case of a (highly problematic) late dating of Paul's letter to the Philippians to the time of his Roman imprisonment.[23] In conclusion, for the socio-economic decline of the Philippian community, non-religious factors seem to be of only limited relevance. This strengthens the thesis that this decline results from oppression.

However, it may be that not every development can be explained. It requires a great deal of speculation to explain why the community resumed their support of Paul and, beyond that, gave to the church in Jerusalem. Did the Philippian community gain some new wealthy members?[24] However, this explanation raises the question of how it could be brought in line with Paul's speaking of "deep poverty" in 2 Cor 8:2. Did instead the already non-wealthy members collect some surplus? Then, it could be supposed that this surplus was not sufficient for regular support, as in the initial period of the community. Instead, the money must now be collected over a long period of time and treasured for special circumstances, like Paul's imprisonment. In this case, ἠκαιρεῖσθε δέ (Phil 4:10) would acquire particular significance (including both understandings mentioned above), to the effect that the Philippians surely now found the moment (καιρός) to use the rare reserves according to their appropriation. This assumption would fit Julien Ogereau's understanding of the heavily discussed phrase κοινωνεῖν εἰς λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως (4:15 ["having partnership in the matter of giving and receiving"]) as referring to a financial fund that the Philippians installed to serve the apostle's missionary needs (Ogereau 2014, pp. 280–89), a fund that once took in enough money for frequent support, but now only allows for support in response to specific circumstances.[25] Indeed, this second explanation also raises another question, namely, why the community supposedly shortly afterward is able to give a considerable financial contribution to the collection for Jerusalem (exclusive of the costs for the member or members of the collection's delegation). According to that, it might be worth considering that the phrase "deep poverty" applies to the majority of the Macedonian (including the Philippian) Christ-Believers, notwithstanding that there are some wealthy community members who raise the bulk of the financial requirements.

Finally, there seems to be no evidence in Phil 4:10-20 or in other Pauline epistles that would enable going beyond such speculations about the economic reasons why the Philippians were able to send gifts again.

4. Conclusions

Despite the challenges and limitations that a socio-scientific interpretation of New Testament texts must face, it can be shown how it is quite possible to shed some light on the socio-economic situation of the Philippian community. At least, one can determine what spectrum of the community members' material capacity must be assumed in order to enable a reasonable understanding of the texts. According to the two current trends mentioned at the beginning of this essay, first, it can be shown how socio-economic models serve the clarification of this spectrum. Second, even if the Philippian community as a whole had a lower material capacity than the Corinthian, a significant portion of the community with material surplus must be assumed, at any rate, at the time of its founding. Based on this second result, the issue of the socio-economic status of early Christ-Believers should be critically evaluated in further research.

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Notes

1 Although social status and socio-economic status were connected in Roman society, they cannot be equated. E.g., material means were required for belonging to the ordo decurionem as the municipal elite. However, even extensive wealth cannot compensate for an unfree birth, which excludes one from such offices and their associated status. The same applies to the elite status groups of senators, equestrians, and decurions (Scheidel and Friesen 2009, p. 77–78).

2 For a fundamental critique of the dichotomic model of Roman society, see (Scheidel 2006).

3 In 2 Cor 11:9, Paul mentions material support from "brothers coming from Macedonia" (οἱ ἀδελφοὶ ἐλθόντες ἀπὸ Μακεδονίας). Relying on Paul's assertion in Phil 4:15 that, when he left Macedonia, no other community besides the Philippians had partnership with him "in the matter of giving and receiving" (εἰς λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως), this can only mean support from the Philippians—even though in this case Paul's speaking of other "churches" in 2 Cor 11:8 is exaggerated or it denotes to the households in Philippi (Bockmuehl 1997, p. 264). That prompts the question of whether this support is included in Phil 4:16 (ὅτι καὶ ἐν Θεσσαλονίκῃ καὶ ἅπαξ καὶ δὶς εἰς τὴν χρείαν μοι ἐπέμψατε), or 2 Cor 11:9 relates to a third gift that Paul does not explicitly mention in Phil 4:15f (for a discussion of the possible interpretations, see Reumann 2008, pp. 664–65, 708). The second solution may be preferred precisely because it enables a literal reading: in 4:15, Paul refers to the support in Corinth when he "left Macedonia" (ἐξῆλθον ἀπὸ Μακεδονίας), while in v. 16 (connected with ὅτι καί) he complements the reference to two-time support in Thessalonica (Fee 1995, p. 439–40). A parallel to such a (apparently spontaneous) reference to a similar event can be found in 1 Cor 1:16 (the baptism of the house of Stephanus).

4 Hence, there is no scholarly discussion about whether the support stopped, but only how it came to be interrupted.

5 Ephesus is by far the most plausible place of origin for Paul's letter to the Philippians. So, it is highly likely that the letter was written in 54 or 55, about four or five years after the founding of the community and their first material support for Paul when he was in Thessalonica. Between the support received in Corinth and the support for the imprisoned apostle lies the at least two-year stay in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:10) and the (albeit historically uncertain) events Luke describes in Acts 18:18–19:1. For the problems regarding Caesarea (57–59) or Rome (60–62) as a place of origin (the long travel distance and the implausible reasons for such a long journey) and for the plausibility of an imprisonment at the end of Paul's stay in Ephesus, see (Wojtkowiak 2012, pp. 66–70).

6 A minimum of two, probably even three, gifts must be reckoned with (one or two times in Thessalonica and one time in Corinth (cf. n. 3). Even supposing that the support was not sufficient and that Paul still had to work for his livelihood (Oakes 2015, p. 76; cf. 1 Thess 2:9; Acts 18:3), the frequency of the support is worth noting.

7 Regarding the estimated prices for a journey from Philippi to Corinth, see (Concannon 2017, p. 355). Concerning Philippi and Ephesus, Concannon states: "We should also pay careful attention to the fact that Paul must have developed a tremendous amount of resources and effort to sustain a connection between Ephesus and Philippi 692 km apart" (Concannon 2017, p. 354). It may be added that the Philippians also needed some resources in order to send Epaphroditus to Ephesus.

8 The Philippians' participation in the collection for Jerusalem not only arises in 2 Cor 8:1–5, but also in the meeting of the delegation in Philippi (Acts 20:6). The fact that no member of the Philippian community is named as part of the delegation might result from

the fact that they are the authors of a collection report which Luke adopts in Acts 20:5–21:17. In this case, they would be included in the 1st person plural "we" (Koch 2014, p. 339).

9 These factors are left out of the account by (Oakes 2015, p. 76). Therefore, his conclusion, as well as his cross-cultural reference, may not fit the circumstances of the Philippian community: "It [=supporting Paul] might well involve some financial sacrifice, but it does not require a significant average of wealth among the group. To say it cross-culturally: there are many churches of the very poor that manage to provide for at least the part-time financial support of a pastor".

10 2 Cor 11:9 might stem from a letter that was written earlier than 2 Cor 8. Here, the use of the "synonym" Macedonia for only one community is possible because the addressees in Corinth know where the "brothers" came from.

11 However, this does not preclude some rhetorical exaggeration.

12 For such an understanding of 'precarious' with special regard to freedpersons and women, see (Oakes 2015, pp. 73–75).

13 Cf. n. 3.

14 Cf. n. 5.

15 It is significant that, according to Luke, the missionaries meet the god-fearer Lydia, a woman sympathetic to Judaism, at a προσευχή (an unspecified place for praying, cf. Acts 16:13).

16 For a more detailed exposition of this circumstance, see (von Reden 2015, p. 168–69).

17 Correspondingly, Longenecker assumes a larger percentage of people in the Roman Empire who belong to intermediate groups (Longenecker 2010, p. 46).

18 It is a deficiency of Meggits work that he does not sufficiently consider the Pauline passages that point to certain financial means. So, Phil 4:10 is not considered at all, and 4:15f only regarding Paul's situation as the receiver of the gift (Meggit 1998, p. 77). For more on this problem regarding Meggit's socio-economic classification of the Corinthian community members, see (Wojtkowiak 2023, p. 316).

19 Not only the phrase ἐχθροὶ τοῦ σταυροῦ but also their description as people who are living (περιπατεῖν) orientated towards earthly things (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες) point to people with, in Paul's view, an improper relationship to suffering. That Paul speaks of their destiny as destruction (ὧν τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια) implicates that they are not members of the (according to the Pauline theology) effective holy church. His assertation that he 'now' talks about them crying (νῦν δὲ καὶ κλαίων λέγω), as well as some further hints on an actual conflict over experiences of suffering in Phil suggests that these people have left the community quite recently (Wojtkowiak 2012, pp. 193–99).

20 On the proprietary status of women, especially regarding the Roman inheritance law, see (Koch 2014, p. 63).

21 Cf. n. 1. For the discrepancy of Lydia's social (non-elite) and socio-economic status (anything but poor), see (Sterck-Degueldre 2001, pp. 235–38). Sterck-Degueldre categorizes Lydia as one of the better-off *humiliores*, which matches ES 4.

22 For another example of the comparison of Thessalonica and Corinth, see UnChan Jung. While Jung suggests a very low socio-economic level for nearly all community members in Thessalonica (Jung 2021, pp. 75, 137–38), he expounds a more diverse socio-economic structure of the Corinthian community with "semi-elite, upwardly mobile people, and the poor" (Jung 2021, pp. 184–86, 239; cf. n. 24).

23 Cf. n. 5. A late dating, even on 61 or 62 (Witherington 2011, p. 11), must recognize that, in this case, the renewed support for Paul would probably happen at the same time as a regional crisis.

24 This would be analogous to the scenario Jung considers for the Corinthian community. Based on 1 Cor 4:6–13, Jung assumes that there was a certain amount of "upwardly mobile people or nouveaux riches" (Jung 2021, p. 169) who possibly became community members just after Paul left Corinth (Jung 2021, p. 168–69).

25 For a review of the scholarly discussion about the type of partnership which Paul might describe (patronage, 'societas' [e.g., Ogereau 2014, p. 349 as a general description of the partnership], friendship, etc.), see (Standhartinger 2021, pp. 290–96; Ogereau 2014, pp. 271–80). Ogereau's understanding of the specific phrase in Phil 4:15 has the advantage of fitting the context (Paul's reference to repeated financial gifts), while using a literary understanding of the phrase λόγος δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως.

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Brave Priestesses of Philippi: The Cultic Role of Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2)

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Abstract: When Paul, in Phil 4:2, "pleads" with Euodia and Syntyche to "agree with one another in the Lord", he is both commending them for their priestly role as gospel workers among his group of converts and at the same time calling them back to a single-minded focus on gospel mission. Throughout the letter, the apostle has forged a link between gospel mission and cultic imagery, depicting himself and his gospel co-workers as priestly agents accomplishing sacrificial service. Thus, when he comes to this climactic exhortation at the letter's close, he deploys this imagery as a way both to commend and correct these female leaders within the Philippian community of Christ-believers.

Keywords: Philippians; women in ministry; cultic metaphors; Pauline ethics

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1. Introduction

If one were to try uncovering female leaders within the early Christian movement, Philippi would be a great place to begin the search.[1] Women were uncommonly prominent in leadership roles within this Roman colony during the Imperial era. As Valerie Abrahamsen's extensive work on this subject has shown, the epigraphic evidence stemming from this site shows females in many prominent roles, particularly among the religious groups of the colony. Inscriptions present women as leaders in the Diana cult, as priestesses of the prominent Imperial cult to the divinized Empress Livia, and then as leaders (together with other men) in the emerging cult of Isis (Abrahamsen 1995).[2] The evidence prompts Abrahamsen to conjecture that "the overall socio-political atmosphere of the city had to have been somewhat egalitarian and supportive of women, girls, goddesses and divinized females" (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 81).[3] To be sure, there is "evidence of Greek women with Roman citizenship who held high civic office and were priestesses in the imperial cult [throughout] Asia" (Witherington 1994, p. 108).[4] Still, the "predominance of females among the inscriptions in Philippi" makes this particular locale a hotbed for female leadership amid the Greek East (Keown 2017, p. 39). Serving in priestly roles, in Philippi, we see that women "were active participants in liturgies, composed hymns and rites, administered temple and cult finances, organized feast day celebrations, played music and made leadership decisions that affected large numbers of people" (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 194).

Hence, for Abrahamsen, as well as for others, it is not surprising that "women figure in Christian lore at Philippi from the very beginning" (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 82). On the contrary, the influence of the many leadership roles held by female cult officials in the colony would have created an expectation, an "*assumption* that women were to be among the leaders of any religious organization", and this expectation, Abrahamsen argues, would have been "felt by the Christian community" (Abrahamsen 1995, p. 91 [italics original]). As Marchal states, rather than being viewed as anomalous for the early Christian community in Philippi, "women's leadership and participation in cultic life. . .would have been *expected*" there (Marchal 2006, p. 90 [italics original]; cf. Ascough 2003, pp. 134–36). And so, when we find Acts depicting Paul's first encounter when crossing over into Macedonia as being with a group of women leading a prayer gathering beside the river (Acts 16:13), from among whom Lydia steps forward into the role of hostess for the wandering preacher,

the picture coheres well with the egalitarian and female-supportive portrait of the colony that Abrahamsen uncovers in the archeological data. Similarly, when Paul mentions two women, Euodia and Syntyche, in his letter to this fledgling assembly at Philippi, women who seemingly hold a prominent leadership role among the community (Osiek 2000),[5] we find again a picture of female leadership within Philippian religious life. In contrast to Malinowski's study, which relegates Euodia and Syntyche to the status of courageous but lay-level workers among the Philippian community,[6] Winter's insightful work on the new Roman woman shows that "Christian women were not relegated to the private rooms in first-century households. That was an ancient Greek custom, . . .but not the convention that operated in either of the Roman colonies of Corinth and Philippi or Rome itself" (Winter 2003, p. 194). Instead, women could and did undertake roles of leadership within their spheres of influence in the Roman world into which Paul stepped as itinerant preacher upon entering the Roman colony of Philippi.

It is these two women, Euodia and Syntyche, that form the basis of the following study, which argues that the apostle, in what looks like a biting reprimand, instead commends this female pair for their priestly role among his group of converts, while at the same time calling them back to a single-minded focus on the gospel mission that formed the basis of their leadership role from the very beginning. In order to show how Paul's language can be viewed as a commendation for cultic ministry,[7] I first undertake an analysis of the letter as a whole that shows how the apostle appropriates cultic language into the service of gospel mission.[8] Next, I show how the context of Paul's address to the women (4:2–4) commends them for just such gospel service. Finally, I show how Paul's repeated imperative that these two women "think the same thing in the Lord" (4:2) indicates a return to the gospel mission that constitutes the basis for their cultic role as priestesses among the Philippian congregation.

2. Gospel Mission as the New Cult of the Spirit in Philippians

Paul employs cultic language in Philippians in a way that some have referred to as "spiritualized". We need to be careful, however, because it is not true that Paul is setting up a contrast with the Jerusalem cult (Schüssler Fiorenza 1976);[9] rather, the apostle follows a trajectory of inwardly appropriating cultic realities, a trajectory which had prior roots in Judaism. Tassin traces the historical development of cultic elements from biblical Israel into the intertestamental period, where he finds the Qumran community being forced, through their experience of temple-less exile, into "spiritual creativity" to maintain their sense of sacred identity (Tassin 1994, p. 99).[10] Particularly, Tassin uncovers at Qumran "the 'spiritualization' of the cult", in which this community enlarged upon the expression of the "interior cult", that is, taking the law into the heart, focusing intently upon ethical engagement with the law (Tassin 1994, p. 100).[11] Gupta posits the following plausible reason for Paul's appropriation of cultic language for his own communities and ministry: "Though persecution and social ostracization would have been devastating to the identity of the community, Paul's use of cultic language offered them a chance to see their experiences from God's perspective" (Gupta 2010, p. 139).

Thus, when Paul draws on purity language that would have been fitting for cultic sacrificial practice, terms like εἰλικρινής (pure), ἀπρόσκοπος (blameless), ἄμεμπτος (faultless), ἀκέραιος (innocent), and ἄμωμος (without blemish),[12] these descriptors are now applied to communal conduct and behavior.[13] Rather than a cult that consists of traditional priests offering animal sacrifices, the apostle displays himself in his gospel work presenting his converts as holy offerings to God (Phil 2:17; cf. Rom 15:17).[14] Therefore, purity within this spiritual cult is determined by one's relation to the gospel. It is those who live "worthy" of the gospel (1:27) that attain to this status of purity and, hence, acceptability as an offering within this new cult of the Spirit.[15] As Newton describes, the apostle "utilizes terms, taken from the cultic language of purity, which embrace the whole realm of the believer's life in Christ. . .they must be, like the sacrificial offerings of the Jerusalem Temple, free from

blemish" (Newton 2005, p. 86). Vahrenhorst discusses the way in which Paul uses "cultic vocabulary" in 2:15 in order to mark the goal of his ministerial labors, which he introduced earlier in his central imperative ("live worthily of the gospel") from 1:27. Vahrenhorst summarizes that the apostle's paraenesis throughout the section of 1:27-2:18 explicates how a gospel-worthy way of life looks and that its goal is explicitly a "cultically-connotated blamelessness" (Vahrenhorst 2008, p. 245).[16]

Paul engages in active gospel mission, both through his ministry when present in Philippi and now while absent through his letter writing, with the explicit purpose of bringing about such cultic purity. Paul prays for this purity within his converts (Phil 1:9–11), and he strives and labors toward this end. When faced with powerful opposition to his ministry and even tempted to give up, Paul reaffirms his priestly vocation to remain with the Philippians so that his presence with them might entail "fruitful labor" (1:22) and might further their "progress and joy in the faith" (1:25), a progress that then culminates in their becoming "blameless" when Paul presents them to God as an offering on the day of Christ (2:15–16).[17]

Paul's own priestly role of consecrating pure offerings to God is conjoined with the priestly activity of the community of Christ-believers at Philippi as well. In 2:17, Paul envisions a possible outcome for his upcoming trial verdict, over which he sees reason to rejoice, in which he is "poured out on the sacrifice and offering" of the Philippian believers' faith. It is clear from this that Paul views his apostolic role as involving priestly service. In the words of Daly, "Paul sees his apostolic life and mission as a 'priestly—i.e., sacrificial—service,' as a liturgy of life" (Daly 2009, p. 58). Similarly, Denis argues that the context of cultic imagery in Phil 2:15-16 (that is, Paul calls his converts irreproachable and pure children of God) substantiates a cultic understanding of 2:17, where Paul shows that "the faith, that is, the life of the Christians is a liturgy comparable to that of the temple, and it is joined to the idea of a libation, accomplished, or rather suffered, by the apostle" (Denis 1958, p. 630).[18] Hence, the Philippian believers enact a "liturgy of the temple", which Paul then furthers through his additional libation (σπένδομαι) over-above their liturgical sacrifice (τῇ θυσίᾳ καὶ λειτουργίᾳ τῆς πίστεως) (Denis 1958, p. 629). In this case, both Paul and his converts participate in sacrificial activity within the new cult of the Spirit.[19] He puts himself forward in kenotic, sacrificial gospel labor to the extent that he becomes a thing sacrificed (much like Christ does in the hymn at 2:8), whereas the believers enter into the role of liturgists of their faith, offering their own pure lifestyles in accord with the faith of the gospel as a sacrifice (θυσία) to God. As Strathmann summarizes about the Philippian believers' participation in cultic activity: "In virtue of their faith they are both a sacrifice to God and priests who offer God sacrifices" (Strathmann 1967, p. 227).

The believers again are connected with cultic offerings when Paul turns to discuss the issue of their financial gift to Paul at the end of the letter.[20] Here again, at 4:18, the Philippian believers are depicted as having presented a "sacrifice" (θυσία) to God by means of their renewed financial support to the imprisoned apostle.[21] Paul richly commends them for this liturgical effort, indicating that, just as the sacrificial offerings of ancient Israel's cult, the Philippians' sacrifice is "acceptable" (δεκτός), something that is "well-pleasing (εὐάρεστον) to God".[22] In order to capitalize on the nature of the Philippians' sacrificial generosity as pleasing to God, Paul labels the offering a "fragrant aroma" (ὀσμὴν εὐωδίας),[23] which recalls a rich olfactory tradition associated with Israel's cult (e.g., Lev 1:9; 2:2; 3:5; 8:28; 23:13).[24] Hence, just as Paul has developed in the letter a new form of cult that takes place in the Spirit and centers around the gospel,[25] so too does this new cult of the Spirit have its own version of sacrificial offerings.[26] In Phil 1:10 and 2:15, the offerings that Paul—as priest par excellence in this new cult—presents to God on the final Assize are the transformed lives of the Philippian believers themselves. In Phil 2:17, Paul spends himself sacrificially, while the Philippians offer their own faith(fulness) as their portion of sacrifice. Then again at the end of the letter, the Philippian assembly's financial contribution to Paul's gospel ministry becomes the sweet-smelling fragrance of this new cult.

Not only does the liturgy of the new cult have its own spiritualized, internally and morally pure sacrificial offerings, it also has its own system of liturgical worship. The gospel around which this cult centers proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord (Phil 1:2). He has acquired this lordly status through undergoing his own sacrificial self-emptying (note the thematic connection between Jesus's kenotic self-giving in 2:6 with Paul's self-emptying sacrifice in 2:17), and the exaltation Jesus received from God on the basis of (διό, 2:9) this obedient self-offering becomes the foundation of a new cult of worshippers committed to confessing (ἐξομολογῶμαι) "that Jesus Christ is Lord" (2:11). Among those who are, thus, cultically committed to Christ, Paul, of course, counts himself, along with his Philippian audience, with whom he later joins himself in a communal self-description that "*we* are the circumcision", that is, "those who worship (λατρεύοντες) by the Spirit of God and who cultically celebrate (καυχώμενοι ἐν) Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:3).[27] Just as this new cult centers around the person of and message about Christ, so its liturgy is empowered by the Spirit of God. Members of this cult, having become sharers of Christ, have also become sharers in his Spirit (cf. 2:2), which now provides a new mode of worship, enabling liturgical activity that appropriately expresses their identity as God's own covenant people (the "circumcision", cf. 3:3). This is a radical assertion from the Jewish Paul, who presents this Gentile assembly as a true conduit of God's chosen people, accomplishing the key cultic markers and practices, namely circumcision and worship, in this new Spirit-empowered mode which Christ's Lordship has ushered in.[28]

Not only is the mode of worship in this new cult shifted so that it is now accomplished "*by* the Spirit" (reading the ἐν as indicating the means of action), but also the sphere of worshipful joy becomes reoriented around the person of the newly proclaimed Lord. Paul describes his own party as constituting those who "boast in Christ Jesus" (3:3). This activity of worship, which represents "cultic adoration devoted to God",[29] is what separates the Jewish circumcision-of-flesh party from the Christ-believers, who are circumcised of heart and, therefore, are God's true people.[30] The activity of boasting has rich cultic resonances within Israel's worship, and Paul shows how such cultic joy and pride now occur "in" (ἐν) the Messiah.

Thus, we have seen how Paul has gone out of his way to incorporate numerous elements from Israel's cultic system into the gospel movement of Christ for which he energetically labors, thereby crafting a new liturgy of the Spirit.[31] He presents the offerings of this new cult in morally transformed lives and in sacrificial giving, and he depicts the form of the new worship as Christologically-focused and Spirit-empowered. In what follows, however, we still need to address the question of who makes up the cultic personnel devoted to serving in this new cult. While we have already discussed the ways in which Paul presents himself as a priest in the letter (i.e., he is the one offering to God the sacrifice of the transformed lives of his converts),[32] we next turn to the other liturgists that arise within the letter, among whom stand the two women Euodia and Syntyche.

3. Priestly Personnel in the New Cult of the Spirit

First, though, we find Epaphroditus, the Philippian assembly's representative whom they sent to transport their financial gift to Paul and to aid him in prison, depicted as occupying a liturgical role. We saw earlier in our brief look at Phil 2:17 that the Philippian believers en masse are enacting a "liturgy" (λειτουργία) of their faith, most likely in connection both with their commitment to moral purity and their dedication to financially supporting the imprisoned apostle (cf. 4:18). This widespread participation in the new cult of the Spirit by the whole assembly then becomes focused through the efforts of their apostle, Epaphroditus. Having been sent out by the assembly, Epaphroditus is a "liturgist" to Paul's needs (2:25).[33] While the cultic undertones might get overlooked here,[34] becoming subsumed under the broader idea of help and service, the cultic associations resurface with a repeated use of the λειτουργ- root at the end of the passage. Whereas in the imperial Roman context of first-century Philippi, *leiturgia* "entailed public works projects that Roman and provincial elites often took on at their own expense, as a means

of enhancing their status in the eyes of the people", Paul transforms the use of the term so that it "takes on [the] sense of 'sacrificial service' to God and on behalf of the gospel community" (Agosto 2000, pp. 427–28). Here, the imprisoned Paul commends Epaphroditus because, like Christ and like Paul himself, this beloved brother has been engaged in sacrificially expending his own life for the work of the gospel (2:30). In so doing, Epaphroditus is filling out whatever was lacking in his assembly's λειτουργία to Paul (2:30). As Paul presents it, the Philippian believers' participation in the new cult of the Spirit entails that they owe a liturgy to God and Christ but also to Paul as the servant of Christ.[35] They are, thus, simultaneously engaged in fulfilling this liturgy both to God (2:17) and to Paul (2:30; 4:18) through Epaphroditus. Thus, in his role as conveyor of this sacred financial offering, Epaphroditus possesses an important mediating, even priestly, role within the new cult of the Spirit.[36] His status as a "co-laborer" (συνεργόν, 2:25) alongside Paul combined with his energetic, sacrificial efforts on behalf of the "work of Christ" (2:30) earn him a glowing commendation from Paul such that he is then included within the list of godly models (Paul, Christ, Timothy, etc.) held forth in the letter.

When, in the letter, Paul turns at 4:2 to the two women, Euodia and Syntyche (and it is a noticeable turn in light of the direct address through using their proper names),[37] the apostle's attitude is not so glowing, yet his overall treatment of the women still issues in commendation, particularly on account of their energetic efforts for the gospel ministry of establishing the new cult of the Spirit.[38] Paul's positive description of how these women have behaved in the past shows their prominence as leaders within the new cult of the Spirit that is dedicated to gospel ministry, and it does so by recalling key language from earlier in the letter.[39] Paul recollects how Euodia and Syntyche have "striven together" (συνήθλησάν) with him "in the gospel" (4:3).[40] This repeats language that Paul used earlier in his central admonition to the entire assembly, urging them in 1:27 to "strive together" (συναθλοῦντες) in the faith "of the gospel".[41] Hence, the apostle can commend the two women for modeling precisely that type of behavior to which he exhorts the entire group, namely a perseverance in and participation with Paul's own sacrificial, cultically described labors of proclaiming the gospel so as to produce a fruitful offering of holy lives for God.[42] Striving for the gospel leads directly to bringing about a "sacrifice and service of faith" (in 2:17),[43] and it is likely that the same cultic outcome holds true for Euodia and Syntyche's gospel-striving as does for the assembly as a whole.

Secondly, Paul refers to these two women as numbering among a larger group whom he labels "my fellow-workers" (συνεργῶν, 4:3).[44] This is the same term used to commend Epaphroditus earlier in the letter, where this title of "fellow-worker" is linked explicitly with that individual's important cultic function as the community's liturgist. In light of this connection between Paul's commendation of Euodia and Syntyche with two earlier key references to cultic activity on the part of the Philippian Christ-believing assembly, it is possible that these two women are being held forth as occupying important, leading cultic roles within this budding Christian community,[45] hence my reference to them in the title of this study as "priestesses".[46] Such a cultic role would, of course, reside within the redefined cult of the Spirit that, as has been shown above, Paul is developing throughout the letter.[47] These women's laudatory commitment to gospel work is what the apostle acknowledges, holding them forth to the wider community as praise-worthy for their past contributions to the central focus of the cultic community, which is the progress of the gospel.[48] Such a role, as praise-worthy priestesses in the past, however, would not exempt them from receiving admonishment in the present to a renewed focus on their priestly task. So now, in the final section of this study, I address the apostle's admonition that these two women "think the same thing in the Lord" (4:2).

4. Auto-Phronos as Unified Purpose of the New Cult

Just as Paul's language of commendation for the women recalled key language from earlier in the letter, so too does Paul's injunction to them that they "think the same thing in

the Lord". Shortly after the epistle's central imperative that the community "strive together for/in the faith of the gospel" (1:27), Paul gives a second, corollary imperative that they would complete his joy by "thinking the same thing" (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, 2:2).[49] It would seem that gospel labor, which forms the central driving focus of the new cult of the Spirit, is intricately linked with unified thinking. Shared work requires a shared mind, and so this letter that aims at celebrating and fostering gospel partnership is riddled with references to one's pattern of thought. The version of *auto-phronos*, of unified thinking, envisioned throughout the letter encompasses commitment to sacrificial self-giving, which reflects the new version of sacrificial offerings within the newly established cult of the Spirit. Hence, Paul speaks of this community embracing "the same" (τὸ αὐτόν) struggle and sacrifice that he is undergoing (1:30). This unity in the face of struggle and opposition is balanced by a similarly unified experience of cultic celebration and joy, since after both he and they enact their cultic sacrifices in 2:17, Paul rejoices and "in the same way" (τὸ…αὐτό) the Philippians are invited to rejoice (2:18). Sharing a communal stake is an important element of the new cult of the Spirit, and thinking with—or rather patterning one's life around—this unified purpose is the goal of Paul and of all his fellow-workers.

Ultimately, thinking "the *same* thing" involves thinking "*this* thing" (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε), namely becoming unified around the pattern of Christ's thinking (2:5). Quite likely this is what Paul implies when he pleads with Euodia and Syntyche to think the same thing "*in* the Lord". He is calling them back into the kind of cultic priestly leadership that embraces Christ for a model,[50] willingly expending oneself in kenotic self-sacrifice rather than jealously pursuing "one's own things" (τὰ ἑαυτῶν, 2:4). This other, selfishly motivated form of leadership, with a pattern of thought and behavior that diverges from Christ, appears in 3:15 as a form of *hetero-phronos* (thinking otherwise) and stands opposed to the *auto-phronos* (thinking the same) or *touto-phronos* (thinking like Christ) into which Paul invites his audience throughout the whole of the letter.[51] Rather than each individual pursuing her or his own goal, the new cult of the Spirit established by Christ's exaltation and proclaimed by the apostle calls its adherents to gather around one unified goal, namely the advance of the gospel about this exalted and eagerly awaited Savior. Within this new cult of the Spirit, Christ models appropriate priesthood, which involves surrendering the penchant for "considering one's own things" so as instead to "think the one thing", the advance of the gospel which alone will bear the kind of fruit which serves as "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (4:18). These two women, Euodia and Syntyche, have committed themselves as priestesses to just such a gospel ministry in the past, and it is to this that Paul is inviting them to return once again in the present here at the close of his letter. Hence, when understanding Euodia and Syntyche, rather than primarily envisioning a pair of quarrelsome and catty women with some petty—or even significant—interpersonal strife, we should call to mind a team of committed and faithful female ministers of the gospels. They might need a reminder about the main focus of that ministry, but their overall characterization by Paul, when seen in light of the letter's larger flow, is glowingly positive.

5. Conclusions

What this study has argued is that Paul's appeal at the close of his letter to the Philippians, given to two named female individuals, must be understood within the context of the redefinition of cult depicted throughout the letter as a whole. Paul has envisioned a new cult of the Spirit, which is empowered by the Spirit's presence in the community and which focuses on the exalted Lord Jesus, and it is as liturgists within this new cult that Paul and his co-workers enact their labors. Euodia and Syntyche are members of this union of co-laborers, fellow liturgists alongside Epaphroditus, Clement, and even Paul himself, all of whom expend themselves for the sake of the community's progress in the gospel. Having begun this good work, the apostle finds it necessary to call them back to this foundational focus of their ministry, namely to re-pattern their mindset in leadership around Christ. Ultimately, we discover at the end of this warm letter from Paul

to his friends at Philippi a picture of shared leadership within the community of faith that is committed to serving others through the power of and after the manner of Christ Jesus.

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Notes

1 (Ascough 2003, p. 52): "The women of Macedonia had a reputation and tradition of initiative and influence".

2 On the shift of female allegiance from the cult of Diana to that of Isis, (Marchal 2006, p. 78), notes that, because there was a temple to Isis, serving the Isis cult allowed for more status than that of Diana.

3 We must balance, however, this optimistic appraisal of the situation in Philippi for women, with Abrahamsen's sobering statement in a later publication, (Abrahamsen 2015, p. 25): "In the patriarchal and imperial Greco-Roman culture of Philippi, women at all levels of society—slave, free, and freed—suffered certain degrees of oppression and marginalization".

4 (Burnett 2020, p. 132), uncovers numerous inscriptions from first-century Philippi indicating "that women were cultic officials of nonofficial cults and exercised some authority over men".

5 Cf. (Luter 1996, p. 412), who presents the following as one reason for the "importance" of women disciples in Philippians: "The mention that Euodia and Syntyche were formerly 'striving together in the gospel' (Phil 4:3) indicates that they had previously been models of the kind of behavior Paul was now urging (1:27) for the Philippian congregation". Cf. (Belleville 2021b, p. 86): "Paul's public appeal. . .says something about their stature within the Christian community".

6 (Malinowski 1985, p. 63), specifically delimits the two women off from being among the leadership roles of the "overseers and deacons" whom Paul mentions in Phil 1:1. Even worse than Malinowski's relegation of Euodia and Syntyche to lower levels of ministry is the slighting jab by (Furnish 1985, p. 103), that the situation Paul depicts in Phil 4:2 entails "just a case of two bickering women". This criticism of the two women continues in the scholarship, with their being described as "wrangling" (Garland 1985, p. 172), "squabbling and cavilling" (Peterlin 1995, p. 103), and "quarrelsome" (Caird 1976, p. 149).

7 Along these lines, see (Fellows and Stewart 2018, p. 223), who argue also that Euodia and Syntyche have a "leadership function within the church" and, additionally, that Paul's opaque reference to the "loyal yokefellow" in 4:3 is in fact a "compliment" for the entire Philippian Christ-believing community.

8 On Paul's appropriation of priestly service for gospel work, see (Bloomquist 2016, p. 282): "Paul invoked priestly discourse, which concerns sacrificial life performed for the purpose of beneficial exchange between God and humans". See also (Ware 2011, p. 317), who draws on 2:17 and 4:18 to present the Philippians as a "community of priests". Cf. (Patterson 2015, p. 101).

9 (Finlan 2004, pp. 50–51), helpfully distinguishes between six ways in which Paul "spiritualizes", among which he places Paul's strategy "to redefine terms" as he does in Phil 3:3 within Level Four spiritualization, namely, the "metaphorical application of cultic terms to non-cultic experiences". In Finlan's analysis, p. 63, this version of spiritualization "rethink[s] cult by reinterpreting. . .the cult's rationale". I disagree, however, with Finlan's proposal, p. 219, that in Phil 2:14-17, "Paul's 'high-group' side comes out", such that he uses cultic metaphors "to encourage subjugation to the group". For a thorough discussion of the issues involved, see (Marlatte 2017, pp. 17–33). Cf. (Song 2021, pp. 6–8).

10 Cf. (Schiffman 1999, p. 272): "Once the [Qumran] sectarians had decided to refrain from Temple rituals, two basic strategies were adopted: seeing the sect as a substitute for the Temple, and using prayer as a substitute for sacrifice". (Schiffman, p. 274), notes that, in light of the fact that the sect itself was regarded as a Temple, "it was obligatory to maintain Temple purity laws within the context of the life of the group".

11 (Stettler 2014, p. 539), uncovers a similar trajectory in which Paul's reference to spiritual offerings brought by the church (in 2:17 and 4:18) hearkens back to the idea at Qumran of the community as a spiritual temple.

12 This term reproduces the privatized version of μώμος, which the LXX translator of Deuteronomy employs to render מום when describing the rebellious nature of Israel (Deut 32:5).

13 See (Vahrenhorst 2008, p. 241), who comments on the fairly uniform way in which Paul in Philippians makes use of cultic language "zur Charakterisierung gemeindlicher Lebensführung".

14 (Vahrenhorst 2008, p. 230), argues that the cultic terminology within Philippians serves Paul's greater purpose in the letter of exhorting these believers to unity and to a lifestyle corresponding to Christ's example. (Schlier 1968, p. 256), concludes his treatment of Paul's liturgical ministry in Rom 15:15–19 with a recognition of the existential nature of this ministry: "Dann den Opferdienst der priesterlichen 'Liturgie' des Evangeliums durch den Apostel, der sich in seiner Hingabe an und für das Evangelium auch existentiell vollzieht".

15 I draw here on the phrase "new liturgy in the Spirit" from the title of the seminal article on the subject by (Denis 1958). Note the similar notion in the characterization by (Baldanza 2006, p. 53), of Paul's cultic language in Phil 3:3 about the Pauline community

being those who worship in the Spirit of God: "the Spirit is the principle, the dynamic fount of the *new cult*" (translation and added emphasis are mine). Cf. (Dürr 2021, p. 244).

16 Cf. (Stettler 2014, p. 541), who points out that the *Hauptmotivation* for holiness in the letter is the gospel itself, which is the source of the believers becoming holy and that which then motivates them to continue living "worthily".

17 The apostle's hope that the transformed lives of his converts will furnish "boasting" (εἰς καύχημα) for him on the day of Christ could indicate that Paul envisions himself as participating in the glorious adornment which was the prerogative of the high priest. Elsewhere, Paul can claim that his converts represent "his crown of boasting" (στέφανος καυχήσεως) (1 Thess 2:19; cf. Ezek 16:12 LXX; Prov 17:6). See the conglomeration of the καυχ-lexeme when describing the high priest Simon's glorious apparel in Sir 50, on which, see (Aitken 1999). Cf. (Burton 2019, p. 295), who points out that תפארת (often translated καύχημα throughout LXX) "as a form of garment is entirely confined to the category of priestly wearers". While Paul does not speak of *dressing* himself in καύχημα at 2:16, he does describe the glory arising for him from the Philippians' faithful adherence to Christ as constituting them to be his "crown" (στέφανός μου, 4:1), which proves a wearable and, in light of this connection, a priestly form of glory. On the mutuality of boasting in the letter, see (Blois 2020).

18 My translation.

19 (Strathmann 1967, p. 227), argues, in light of the proximity to θυσία, for a "cultic nuance for λειτουργία" in Phil 2:17. He concludes that through these two terms, Paul intends "the sense of cultic and priestly ministry" to characterize "either the missionary work of Paul or the Christian walk of the Philippians".

20 See the insightful discussion by (Patterson 2015, p. 106), where she describes the movement of the financial gift "from the hands of the Philippians to those of Epaphroditus, to those of Paul", which ultimately becomes "reinscribed" by Paul "as an ascent to God". Thus, through "this fairly simple sacrificial metaphor, Paul has enlarged the context in which all of the actions of the Philippians are to be interpreted".

21 Cf. (Strathmann 1967, p. 227), discussing the Philippian financial gift to Paul in Phil 4:18: "The collection is thus brought into sacral and cultic relation", though Strathmann then denies the possibility of such cultic relation in light of his opinion that in Paul's use of λειτουργία in Phil 2:30 "there is no sense. . .of the priestly cultus".

22 Note the possible connection with Phil 2:13 between εὐάρεστον (4:18) and εὐδοκίας (2:13); the latter term links up to Jesus's baptism (i.e., Mk 1:11).

23 Note also the similarity to Euodia's name. This is no coincidence; Paul has intentionally chosen a way to describe the sacrificial financial gift of the community in a way that links it with (one of) the two women, thereby further praising them through his commendation of the community's commitment to financially supporting the apostle's gospel ministry.

24 (Denis 1958, pp. 432–33), argues in connection with 2 Cor 2:11–14 that Paul's usage of this olfactory image is "stereotypical" in the LXX for characterizing "sacrifices that God accepts as pleasing" (cf. Sir 24:15). Denis notes that in Sir 39:14 "the spiritualization has become moral", since the actions of the just are characterized there by the same expression, thereby linking Wisdom and cultic traditions together.

25 (Brunner 1968, p. 327), argues for a close connection between the early church's usage of liturgical language and its gospel proclamation, noting that both of these tools enable believers to span the gap between the church today and those early experiences of God's saving wonders in the Christ-event. Brunner goes so far as to say that it is precisely the New Testament's liturgical language that prompts the "Aktualisierung der biblischen Botschaft" (p. 328).

26 Note the astute observation of (Nasrallah 2019, p. 126): "The rapid-fire exchange of images and terminology renders cash, or things, into sacrifices".

27 For a justification of this translation, which links the boasting terminology of this passage to the cultic worship of Israel, see the chapter on pride in my forthcoming LNTS monograph on the Role of Emotions in Philippians.

28 See (Zoccali 2011, p. 31), whose careful analysis of how Paul's Gentile converts relate to the apostle's Jewish heritage concludes thus: "While the question of the place of the other nations *vis-à-vis* Israel in God's redemptive purposes was answered in various ways in early Judaism, with no real consensus view, the understanding of what Paul had come to embrace was that with the coming of the Christ and dawning of the new age Jews *qua* Jews and Gentiles *qua* Gentiles were joining together into a single, and necessarily unified community of the redeemed".

29 (Cipriani 1994, p. 232), discusses the key eschatological expectation of Israel that God would circumcise their hearts in Deut 30:6 in connection with Paul's description of the believing community at Philippi in Phil 3:3, noting the cultic aspects of this hope, since the heart-circumcision prepares God's people explicitly for worship (Deut 10:16).

30 (Weiß 1954, p. 359), notes how Paul's depiction of worship "by the Spirit" in Phil 3:3 is divinely producing the "kultische Qualität" of circumcision. (Gathercole 2002, p. 265), discussing Romans 1–5, notes how Jewish emphasis on boasting "in the law" (cf. Sir 39:8) becomes redefined by Paul into a new version of boasting in Christ: "Paul's boast in God was defined as a boast through the Lord Jesus Christ" which "excluded a reliance on obedience to Torah leading to final justification".

31 (Strack 1994, pp. 304–6), argues in reference to Phil 2:17 that Paul employs the help of "einer kultischen Deutungskategorie" when enumerating (1) his own ministry of gospel proclamation and (2) the faith of the Philippian believers.

[32] See also (Klauck 1986, p. 115), who in discussing Rom 15:16 writes that Paul "hat einen besonderen Auftrag, und den umschreibt er mit sakralen Termini, die er aber aus dem kultischen Bereich ins Christologische und Eschatologische überträgt. Sein Dienstherr ist Christus, sein Priesterdienst besteht in der weltweiten Evangeliumsverkündigung, die sich vor einem endzeitlichen Horizont vollzieht".

[33] (Strack 1994, p. 47), summarizing his analysis of the Greco-Roman and Second-Temple Jewish usage of λειτουργός, argues that, while a cultic connotation is not necessitated in Paul's usage of the term, it is possible. (Strack 1994, p. 45) shows how in pagan usage the term began with describing public service to the polis but then acquired an extended sense "im sakralen Bereich". (Strack 1994, pp. 45–46) similarly uncovers numerous instances of emphatically cultic ways in which the λειτουργ- root appears in early Jewish texts (Test Levi 4:2; 2:10). While, in Josephus, λειτουργία occurs exclusively describing the priestly cult (e.g., *Bell*. 2.417; *Ant*. 20.218), Philo uses it to describe spiritual worship apart from the temple cult (*Post.* 185). On the whole, though, (Strack 1994, p. 46) argues that in Philo and across the LXX, λειτουργία is used as a "terminus technicus für den priesterlichen Kult".

[34] Although, (Williams 2013, p. 337), similarly notes that the title of λειτουργός that Paul applies to Epaphroditus "denotes distinguished service, *likely of a priestly type of activity* which resembled Paul's service" (emphasis added).

[35] Cf. the interesting conjecture that Paul viewed his prerogative to financial support in terms of the priestly right to eat a portion of the sacrificial offerings in (Weiß 1954, p. 357): "Wie konkret Paulus seine Rolle als Priester gesehen hat, wird durch Phil 4:17–18 beleuchtet, wo er die ihm für seine Bedürfnisse überbrachte Gabe als Opfer bezeichnet und also die Regel anwendet, daß die Priester Anteil haben am Altare".

[36] On the important role that Epaphroditus played in mediating the relational connection between Paul and the Philippian community, see (Metzner 2002).

[37] (Cassidy 2020, p. 132), points to the two women's names as evidence for the possibility that either of them "was a slave or a former slave", which thereby heightens the significance that such individuals of lower status were held in "prominence" among the community and by the apostle. Cassidy notes that Pliny "identified two slave women as 'ministers' (*ministrae*) within the Christian community of Bithynia-Pontus before he tortured them" (*Letters* 10.96.8).

[38] Cf. (Sergienko 2013, p. 106), who argues against Malinowski: "The fact that Paul puts them alongside other 'co-workers' who struggled *for the sake of the gospel* puts them into an active role, meaning 'that these women were involved in the evangelization of nonbelievers'" (citing from (Osiek et al. 2009, p. 227)). (Frederickson 2013, p. 117): "the repetition of τὸ αὐτὸ φρόνειν in 4:2 casts Euodia and Syntyche into a favorable light by connecting them to longing, the central theme of the Christ Hymn, just as other leaders, Timothy and Epaphroditus, were earlier linked to Christ's passion".

[39] Many scholars see 4:2 as climactic and summative for the message of the letter as a whole. See (Garland 1985, p. 173). In the view of one scholar, (Marchal 2015, p. 164), "reflecting upon the role of Euodia and Syntyche in this letter reveals the arc and disposition of the letter overall". Cf. (Belleville 2021a, p. 87), who, discussing Paul's description of the letter's recipients as "overseers and deacons" (1:1), argues that "Euodia and Syntyche could well have been part of this group of leaders".

[40] (Pfitzner 2013, p. 105): "Agonistic language no longer expresses competition and rivalry in the human quest for honor and status. It instead illustrates *the vocation Paul shares with his audience*; they are in a common contest (*agon* or *athlesis*) for the gospel, and that in a double sense: it is a struggle to promote the gospel (Philippians 1:27, 4:3) and to withstand opposition in the process (Philippians 1:30). . . Individual achievement here gives way to total teamwork as fellow believers strive together 'in one spirit, with one mind' (Philippians 1:27)" (emphasis added).

[41] Cf. (Amadi-Azuogu 2007, p. 14), who points to the honorific context of these two women's role as Paul's "fellow athletes", constituting their enjoyment of the "highest privileges available in the community".

[42] Noting the counterintuitive nature of the claim, (Frederickson 2013, p. 118), points to Paul's striking athletic commendation of the two women: "thinking of Euodia and Syntyche as leaders is like imagining females showing up at the stadium and digging in at the starting line with the men. . . [I]t is precisely in the athletic prowess (in Philippians a metaphor of longing for communion) they share with Paul that Euodia and Syntyche excel".

[43] Cf. (Strack 1994, pp. 306–7), who notes how Paul's usage of πίστις in 2:17 recalls the similar idea of striving for the "faith of the gospel" in 1:27, such that the holiness entailed in the Philippian believers' participating in cultic ministry at 2:17 represents the *Ziel* toward which Paul's entire ministry of *Evangeliumsverkündigung* has been aiming.

[44] (Ollrog 1979, p. 72), conclusively states about Paul's usage: "Der Begriff συνεργός ist. . .ein höchst *sachlicher Titel*" insofar as it indicates both a common task and a shared labor in the gospel; hence, it is for Paul both a "Zentralbegriff und terminus technicus für die mit ihm in der Missionsarbeit stehenden Personen".

[45] See the observation in (Hull 2016, p. 6): "That [Euodia and Syntyche] are included 'with Clement and the rest' of Paul's 'co-workers'. . .underscores their status as missioners [*sic.*], with the same standing as Paul's male associates". Cf. (Cotter 1994, p. 353), who argues that, on account of their belonging "to a team of men and women evangelizers, . . .Paul joins both in his praise".

[46] On the notion that two female evangelists might be viewed as "priestesses", despite the acknowledgment that women were excluded from the priesthood in Jewish tradition, (Grenz 2021, p. 315), argues that *all* believers are brought into the role of priests, with no gender exclusions: "Because Christ has qualified all believers to stand in God's presence, regardless of race, social status,

or gender, we are all ministers within the fellowship. As priests of God—and only because we are priests—we are called by the Spirit to ministries among Christ's people, and some of these ministries include positions of leadership".

47 (Dahl 1995, p. 14), argues convincingly that this admonition serves as a climax for the entire letter.

48 As (Dickson 2003, p. 142), comments: "The exact form of gospel proclamation cannot be ascertained, but that these women engaged in such missionary activity (most likely at the local Philippian level) seems clear". (Keown 2008, pp. 198–99), argues that "without a doubt women were involved in evangelistic ministry in the Paulines", showing that Euodia and Syntyche's "function was active proclamation".

49 For an insightful treatment of the inherent connection between thinking "the same thing" (τὸ αὐτό φρονεῖν, 2:2b; 4:2) and thinking "the one thing" (τὸ ἓν φρονεῖν, 2:2e; cf. 3:13), see (Heriban 1983, pp. 190–91).

50 Note the astute observation by (Hull 2016, p. 6): "It is important to emphasize the function of these women as both positive and negative examples in the letter. . . They are negative examples, because they do not 'think the same in the Lord' (4:2). At the same time, they are positive examples because have 'struggled together with [Paul] in the gospel' (4:3), which is precisely what Paul indicated in 1:27 as his hope for all the Philippians. . . But note that Paul ends on a positive note, aligning the two 'with Clement and the rest of my co-workers whose names are in the book of life' (4:3)".

51 See (Becker 2020a, p. 255), who, in discussing the paradigmatic function of the other *exempla* besides Paul in the letter (i.e., Christ, Timothy, Epaphroditus), speaks of how the apostle develops "eine brieflich vermittelte *Isophronie*" (most likely drawing on the language of 2:20, ἰ**σόψ**υχον). Elsewhere, (Becker 2020a, p. 318), speaks of the "*Henophronesis*" between his own manner of thinking and that of the Philippian believing community which Paul seeks to forge throughout the letter (drawing on Paul's exhortation in 2:2 that they would be those who τὸ ἓ**ν** φρονοῦντες). Cf. (Becker 2020b, p. 80): "The apostle requires from the Philippians a τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες (2.2), a 'one-mindedness,' a *henophronesis* or an *ipsophronia*, which applies to the individual. . .in the life of the community". Cf. (Keown 2017, pp. 63–66). For a contrasting view, see (Marchal 2006), who highlights reiterated appeals for "sameness" across the letter but criticizes this as a tactic for Paul to reinforce his own authority.

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Prefigurative Peace in Philippians

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Abstract: Paul refers to peace twice in Phil. 4:7 and 4:9. This paper argues that the peace of God is a prefiguration of the eschatological peace to come in God's world. It is be proposed that as Philippians is dealing with a social order (i.e., that of life in Christ) that is distinct from the dominant social order of the Roman empire or that of the colony of Philippi, political implications are at the very least a corollary of what Paul is writing to the Christ devotees in this city. The main points that will be argued are that peace is best understood as a key dimension for God's upcoming new world that is already present "in Christ". The Philippian community is called upon to stand firm in Christ (Phil. 4:1), which is, due to devotional and ethical practices, to result in the experience of God's peace or the God of peace. This must be understood as both a present and a future reality. Accordingly, the Philippian community can be seen as prefiguring God's future world by inhabiting this world now already in their communal life.

Keywords: peace; Philippians; Paul; New Testament; prefiguration; early Christianity

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1. Introduction

In Phil. 4:7 and 4:9, Paul refers to peace twice,[1] once to the "peace of God" (v. 7) and once to "the God of peace" (v. 9). At the same time, the text has a distinctly eschatological feel, as it is apparent in v. 5 with its reference to the Lord's being near; also, the notion of being preserved or protected in Christ Jesus (v. 7) may point to an eschatological orientation. This paper will proceed to take this eschatological dimension of the text as a starting point for also interpreting the peace of God as something eschatological that is, at the same time, already present and can be experienced in the ἐκκλησία. This experience amounts to a prefiguration of the peace that is to come when the Lord, who is near, will indeed come (on the "day of Christ", cf. Phil. 2:16).[2] The attitudes that Paul calls for in this passage, then, such as being gentle (v. 5), or prayerful (v. 6), and the list of laudable forms of behavior mentioned in v. 8, can, in a next step, also be interpreted as anticipations of God's peaceful world. In this way, the moral meets the eschatological, as the various forms of virtuous behavior that Paul mentions remain, on the one hand, precisely that: morally recommendable attitudes; yet, they also become, on the other hand, anticipatory performances of God's future. In fact, this paper will argue that it is precisely the eschatological expectation that was, presumably, shared by Paul and the Philippians which created the space required for persisting in such behavior and for remaining faithful to Christ by such persistence. The paper will make use of theoretical insights about this kind of prefiguration, i.e., of the ἐκκλησία prefiguring God's new world, derived from philosophical reflection on this mode of thinking, which can, even though developed in the course of the 19th and 20th centuries,[3] nonetheless help to elucidate the *modus vivendi* of Paul and the Philippians.[4]

In what follows, first general observations about peace in Philippians and the Pauline correspondence will be offered. These are followed by a consideration of the relationship between peace and the presence of God in the same sources, as well as of the coincidence

of the presence and the absence of peace. In a next step, this is further developed with the help of insights from the aforementioned discourse on prefigurative politics, which feeds into a consideration of peace, as it occurs in Phil. 4:7.9, in the social and political context of the Roman world.

2. Peace in Its Literary Context

Apart from its occurrence in the letter's salutation (1:2: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη), peace occurs prominently in Paul's Letter to the Philippians in chapter 4. In a section demarcated from the preceding exhortations directed at individuals (Euodia, Syntyche, an unknown 'yoke fellow', and Clemens), by the emphatic and more general call to 'rejoice' in v. 4 (χαίρετε ἐν κυρίῳ πάντοτε· πάλιν ἐρῶ, χαίρετε)[5] and a shift of topic between vv. 9 (on the God of peace) and 10 (on the concern the Philippians have shown for Paul), accompanied by a shift to the first person singular from more general statements in the preceding verses, two references to peace occur, first to the 'peace of God' (ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ) in v. 7 and subsequently to the 'God of peace' (ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης) in v. 9.

In fact, each statement concludes a segment of the general paraenesis that Paul issues in Phil. 4:4b–9, as τὸ λοιπόν in v. 8 clearly subdivides this section of the letter,[6] even if there is thematic continuity, which, in turn, continues the concerns of Phil. 4:1–4a on a more general plane by now not addressing individual members of the community by name but focusing on the behavior of the community at large. In fact, both the admonitions in 4:2–4a and the general exhortations in 4:4b–9 can be seen as being governed by Paul's call in 4:1 στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ.[7]

Both the rejoicing and thanksgiving, the focus of vv. 4b–6, issues into a statement on peace and, therefore, as does the exhortation to display all kinds of virtuous behavior that runs from v. 8 to the beginning of v. 9. In the first case, divine peace is said to guard the heads and minds of the Philippians in Christ Jesus (φρουρήσει τὰς καρδίας ὑμῶν καὶ τὰ νοήματα ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ)—the use of the military expression φρουρήσει is striking and will require more attention—in the second case, the statement is that the God of peace will be with the Philippians (ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ' ὑμῶν).

In both cases, the connection between the exhortation and the remarks about peace is made through the conjunctive copula καί, which seems innocuous but does raise questions, as one could wonder whether the (desired) behavior of the Philippians can, as it were, produce God's peace or compel it to be amongst them; alternatively, it can be taken as an indication that v. 9 goes beyond v. 7 by stating that not (merely) God's peace will be there but that the God of peace will himself be present. This will be returned to below. For now, it has been established that divine peace, resp. the God of peace, plays a central role in the clearly demarcated section Phil. 4:4b–9 and is closely connected to the behavior of the Philippians as a community.

3. Peace and God's Presence

A next question to ask is what the role of the divine peace and the God of peace is precisely in these verses. When surveying commentaries, there is considerable anxiety resulting, in fact, from the conjunctive copula καί, as it is argued that the peace or the presence of the God of peace resulting from the Philippians' behavior ought not to be understood along the lines of the result of God's reconciliation with God's people that also results in peace (as in Rom. 5:1). Such anxiety, resulting from the reception of Paul in the confessional traditions of Christendom (and of which I am part as well), is always a good reason for taking a second look. A starting point for such a second look can be a survey of the use of the noun εἰρήνη in Paul's (undisputed) letters. When inventorying this use, the following picture emerges (leaving out Phil. 4:7.9).

First, Paul uses the term εἰρήνη in his salutations, such as in Rom 1:7, 1 Cor. 1:3, 2 Cor. 1:2, Gal. 1:3, Phil. 1:2, 1 Thess. 1:1 and Phlm. 1:3 (see also a wish such as Rom. 15:13 or 15:33, or also 1 Cor. 16:11, 2 Cor. 13:11, Gal. 6:16), where it is typically coupled with χάρις. This use is both relatively generic, as it uses a greeting common among Jews, such as

Paul, in letters, and is specific, as it adjusts the common Greek χαίρε or (more commonly) χαίρειν to χάρις,[8] thereby giving it a particular theological twist, especially as usually a specification is also added, such as in Phil. 1:1 χάρις μῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, of which especially the final part is of significance, as it is so specific (the expression ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν—"from God our father"—could, in theory, refer to any number of deities). Paul does not elaborate on the meaning of peace in his salutations; yet, given the general use of εἰρήνη (and its Hebrew and Aramaic equivalents), it can be assumed to refer to a situation of well-being that goes beyond the absence of war and life but consists of the good life (with the note that the source of this is Jesus Christ).[9] If this interpretation of Paul's salutations is right, then the use of εἰρήνη here agrees with that found in, for instance, Rom. 2:10, where 'honor and peace (τιμὴ καὶ εἰρήνη) is the outcome of God's judgment for the righteous. Again, peace can be taken here to refer to something like the good life; it goes beyond the absence of strife. Something similar occurs in Rom. 3:17, where reference is made to those who do not know the way of peace (ὁδὸν εἰρήνης οὐκ ἔγνωσαν), which is here both a walk of life in agreement with and leading to the good life, which is characteristic of the just. The reference to peace in Rom. 8:6 can be seen to concur with this, as here also a quality of, in this case, the mind, is indicated by means of a reference τὸ δὲ φρόνημα τοῦ πνεύματος ζωὴ καὶ εἰρήνη. This also goes for Rom. 14:17, where the quality of God's kingdom is described as consisting of δικαιοσύνη καὶ εἰρήνη καὶ χαρὰ, Rom. 14:19, which agrees with the aforementioned use of the term (see also, albeit less forcefully 1 Cor. 7:15, compare 1 Cor. 14:33). The expression ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης (Phil. 4:9) agrees with this when it occurs in Rom. 16:20 (cf. also 1 Thess. 5:23), God is the one representing peace and accordingly stamping out evil (in this verse: Satan). Along similar lines, peace is mentioned among the fruits of the Spirit in Gal. 5:22.

A second, distinct but related, use of the term εἰρήνη appears in 1 Thess. 5:3, where a(n imperial) slogan is quoted that refers to εἰρήνη καὶ ἀσφάλεια, which Paul problematizes subsequently.[10]

A third kind of use of εἰρήνη can be found in statements about reconciliation, for instance in Rom. 5:1, where a statement like εἰρήνην ἔχομεν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν refers more to a situation of conflict that has been ended and a relationship that has been restored than to 'the good life.' This is also suggested by the language of enmity and conflict resolution in Rom. 5:10: . . .γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ. . .[11]

This survey shows two things. First, two or three distinct uses of the term εἰρήνη can be found in Paul's letters, of which the first is much more prevalent than the second two. Even when breaking down the first or first two categories down further, e.g., by distinguishing between statements about peace and formula's wishing it on others, the distinction in terms of content remains, with one emphasizing a general state of well-being, which seems to both social and spiritual in nature (and thereby goes beyond being at peace psychologically), and another the resolution of a conflict through forms of mediation and peace brokering.

4. Peace: Both Present and Absent

One dimension of Paul's remarks about peace is that it appears to be both a present reality and an absent or future one.[12] On the side of the present there is, for instance, Paul's notion that there is now peace between God and humankind (Rom. 5:1) but also the idea that peace belongs to the fruits of the Spirit and (Gal. 5:22) refers to the present experience of the ἐκκλησία, while also 1 Cor. 7:15 mentions peace as something that ought to govern the community now, which also goes for 1 Cor. 14:33. The various wishes for peace, as they have been listed above, point to peace as something that the congregation is hoped to experience, clearly in the present, but as wishes point to a future reality, they are more than a statement about the current state of affairs. This also applies to the two references to peace in Phil. 4:7.9, given that here a particular kind of behavior is to lead to the presence of peace or (even) the God of peace;[13] καί in both v. 7 and v. 9 should, therefore, be understood

in a consecutive way,[14] which suits the future tense that is used, expressive as it is of a certain development.[15] Clearly eschatological is the reference to peace in Rom. 2:10, while a statement about peace as one of the qualities of the kingdom of God, such as in Rom. 14:17, is somewhere in between, referring both to the state of affairs in God's future reign as well as to the situation as it ought to be in the church.[16]

For the interpretation of the statements on peace in Phil. 4.7.9, this relation of peace to both the present and the future is of relevance. To begin with, the idea that certain practices of the Philippians will lead to Christ's peace encompassing them and the presence of the God of peace with them shows that (the God of) peace is both an absent reality as one that can be expected to be experienced in this world (as distinguished from the world to come). Beyond this, one can argue that this peace is also related to something that is in the past and that determines the future, i.e., the reconciliation through Christ that leads to peace between God and humankind, if Paul subscribes to this idea expressed in Rom. 5:1 already in his letter to the Philippians.[17] In addition, one can argue that peace also has an eschatological dimension and that it will determine the world to come, governed by the God of peace (e.g., Rom. 2:10, 14:17).

A weakness of this approach is that it uses rather a lot of (possibly later) Pauline epistles to interpret Paul's remarks in Phil. 4:7.9. However, the idea that something that is experienced now already is at the same time a foreshadowing of the fullness of God's new world and also occurs in Phil. itself. This applies to both positive and negative experiences of this ἐκκλησία. A positive example is when Paul describes the (desired) behavior of the Philippians, the quality of which he seems to remember from his time among them in 2:14–18; whatever causes the Philippians to shine like stars in the world now (2:15) can be regarded as announcing their eschatological salvation (2:16). Interesting enough, Paul is even more keen to interpret negative experiences in the present as pointing towards future salvation. This is the case, for instance, in ch. 3, where he views both his own suffering (and rejection or loss of social status) as a form of identification with Christ (as described in the "hymn" in 2:5–11) and the difficult situation of the Philippian ἐκκλησία as well; both are not so much harbingers of further future humiliation but rather foreshadow future glorification. With regard to himself, Paul writes about knowing the power of Christ's resurrection and identifying with his suffering, in the hope of once participating in the resurrection as well (τοῦ γνῶναι αὐτὸν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν κοινωνίαν τῶν παθημάτων αὐτοῦ, συμμορφιζόμενος τῷ θανάτῳ αὐτοῦ, εἴ πως καταντήσω εἰς τὴν ἐξανάστασιν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν). With regard to the Philippians, he announces that the Lord will transform the humiliated bodies of the Philippians to those akin to his body of glory (μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ).

Paul's remarks of peace can be understood in a similar manner: they lead to an experience of God's peace or the presence of the God of peace in the here and now that, at the same time, points to the fullness of peace in God's future. This way of thinking about Paul's remarks about peace in Phil. 4:7.9 also has another advantage, i.e., the notion that the Philippians somehow "earn" God's peace (or the presence of God), which would sit strangely in the context of Paul's general emphasis on *not* earning anything from God, can be sidelined. This is to say that the behavior that the Philippians ought to display according to Paul (4:5b–6; 4:8) does not so much earn them anything but rather aligns them with God's (eschatological) reality of peace, which then can be experienced in their midst and as determining their outlook on life.[18] Their life of rejoicing in Christ and of thanksgiving prayer as well as of living a virtuous life (after the example of Paul)[19] resonates in such a way with God's peace that it can be said that this is present among the Philippians. Their lives in Christ are lives that go beyond behavior that is morally appropriate but are lived as if they have already arrived in God's world fully, of which the experience of the quality of this world, i.e., its peace, is a consequence.

These observations give rise to another consideration that has to do with the difference in formulations between Phil. 4:7 and 4:9, i.e., between εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ and ὁ θεὸς τῆς

εἰρήνης that is often commented upon, especially in terms of an increase in intensity: first "merely" God's peace is the prospect that Paul offers, which is then surpassed by an outlook on God's own presence. This (supposed) increase is odd, given that it is hard to see why Paul would feel the need to make this distinction within the scope of only a few verses, in which twice a rather similar line of though it espoused. If, however, the devotion and virtue in the life of the Philippian community are of a quality that can be said to be a form of the presence of God's peace, then one can also wonder whether this peace does not communicate the presence of God in the community. Imagining God's personal presence would go beyond Paul's awareness of God's otherness, yet viewing the *praxis pietatis* of the Philippian community as something through which God's peace becomes present and the idea that this peace communicates God's presence at the same time, given that God is the God of peace, circumvents this problem and also makes it possible to view the statements in Phil. 4:7 and 4:9 as referring to the same reality in two different ways, rather than seeing them as referring, somewhat oddly, to a lesser and superior effect of the praxis of the Philippians. At most, Phil. 4:9 goes beyond 4:7 by unpacking that the experience of God's peace amounts to experiencing God's presence, which is mediated through this experience of peace,[20] but it does not seem to be the case that in v. 9 something is announced that is qualitatively different from what was said in v. 7.

5. Peace and Prefiguration

Having argued for an understanding of the experience of God's peace as a mode of the presence of the God of peace mediated by the praxis of the Philippian community,[21] this can be contextualized further in two ways. First, it can be contextualized by tying it to Paul's overarching concern in his Letter to the Philippians, i.e., encouraging to the Philippians to allow themselves to be drawn into a further life in Christ. Second, it can be placed in a broader eschatological context, which, as such, is also an important dimension of the epistle; it is here that an argument can be made that the peace in Phil. 4:7.9 has a prefigurative dimension.

First, the idea that the Philippians are to show a particular kind of behavior does not occur for the first time in the letter in its ch. 4. In fact, Paul's exhortations begin much earlier and these earlier instances of paraenesis provide an important context for what he says in Phil. 4. In particular, at the end of Phil. 1, in vv. 27–30, and the beginning of Phil. 2, in vv. 1–4, and subsequently following the "Christ hymn" in Phil. 2:5–11 (in vv. 12-28), Paul exhorts the Philippians to behave in a particular manner, following his own example (cf. 1:30 τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες οἷον εἴδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί), especially by having the attitude that is also there in Christ (2:5 τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). As the Philippian Christ devotees are "in Christ" (cf., e.g., the salutation: πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), they are also to align themselves with Christ's attitude, which is described in the hymn as a basis for the Philippians' walk of life. In turn, such discernment of the right way of life Paul has earlier on indicated as a fruit of righteousness through Jesus Christ (1:11—πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης τὸν διὰ ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἔπαινον θεοῦ, see the emphasis on grown in love and discernment in the preceding verses). The development of a Christ-like praxis in the Philippians community can, therefore, be seen as a form of living into the reality in which they have been placed, i.e., that of being in Christ and based on the righteousness received through Christ. These observations are reinforced when noting that the call that governs all of Phil. 4:1–9, i.e., στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ, results, in fact, from Paul's eschatological vision of the heavenly citizenship in Phil. 3:20–21; it is by standing firm in Christ and inhabiting, as it were, this citizenship now already that God's peace can be experienced.[22]

Second, the eschatological dimension of peace and, with that, its relationship with the world to come requires attention. At first, there might be little reason to think that the peace in Phil. 4:7.9 has an eschatological dimension at all. One could also imagine, as it has often been done, that it is all about experiencing a kind of divinely imbued mindfulness.[23] However attractive this may be for forms of proclamation in late capitalist

forms of Christianity with its focus on well-being, it misses the linguistic mark, given that is has been shown convincingly that εἰρήνη refers much less to an inner sense of tranquility and much more to a harmonious social order, which, in turn, can of course contribute to mental well-being (a topic that cannot be pursued further here), even to a form of the same that goes widely beyond that what can be achieved by any human νοῦς, although such inner peacefulness is a dimension of an overarching divine order of divine peace, which is, finally, in agreement with God's character as a God of peace.[24] This need not surprise, given that this is exactly the referent of the Hebrew שָׁלוֹם that echoes through Paul's use of εἰρήνη, while it also agrees fully with common Greek uses of the term.[25] The gist of that understanding has also been formulated convincingly by Kreinecker, when she argued that εἰρήνη like pax was understood primarily as 'a complex political programme' rather than as a state of mindfulness.[26] What the Philippians are to experience is, therefore, not so much a particular mental state as a particular quality of life in communion that is a key aspect of the order of God's world to come, which is both a future and an already present reality. Living into an existence in Christ mediates God's peace, in this sense of the word, to the Philippians already.[27] This agrees with the immediate context of the remarks about peace, as they are prefaced by Paul's statement ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς (4:5), which places the entire section in an eschatological context.[28] The same is true for the qualification of the peace as (ἡ) ὑπερέχουσα πάντα νοῦν, which also points to a reality that is beyond the present one, in other words: forms of foreshadowing, or prefiguration seem to be occurring.

This dimension of prefiguration can be developed further with reference to the contemporary political philosophical discourse on prefigurative politics, which, although it has roots in the Christian tradition with its own origins in Judaism, often pays little attention to religious discourses, while, vice versa, those studying theological sources do not frequently utilize this discourse in their research either.[29]

6. Prefigurative Politics: Some Contours

Prefigurative politics, 'an experimental political practice in which the ends of one's actions are mirrored in the means applied in their realisation'[30] is a relatively recent model which is used in the analysis of contemporary movements such as 'Occupy' or earlier movements, such as the Paris Commune of 1871 (religious movements are not typically analyzed from this vantage point). Leach describes the functioning of such movement as follows:

> Rather than looking to a revolutionary vanguard to seize existing power structures and implement revolutionary change on behalf of the masses or to trade unions or political parties to leverage reforms within the existing system, a prefigurative approach seeks to create the new society "in the shell of the old" by developing counterhegemonic institutions and modes of interaction that embody the desired transformation.[31]

First developed in the 1970s,[32] the concept facilitates overcoming dichotomies such as that between means and end (the end is present in the means) and between a future ideal and the present: the future is already there in the present through its prefigurative performance in communal practices.[33] Thus, prefigurative practices manipulate time to the extent that the dichotomy between present and future becomes blurred. However, this is not the only kind of dichotomy that is called into question in prefigurative practices. Beyond the dichotomy between future and present, others include the following:

- The dichotomy between means and end because the end is already present in the means.
- The dichotomy between presence and absence because what is (yet) absent is also (already) there.
- The dichotomy between ideal and reality, as the ideal is present in a reality that does not agree with the ideal; with this, also a strict dichotomy between body and mind

becomes blurred as the (noetically) imagined future is imagined through physical practices and experiments.
- The dichotomy between center and margin, as (marginal) prefigurative practices both establish themselves as center and continue as marginal.

Inherent in the analysis of a religious movement,[34] such as the early Jesus movement, as a form of social experimentation and in terms of prefigurative politics is, of course, also the collapse of the dichotomy between religion (a problematic term for any first century CE phenomenon to begin with) and politics (this would also invite the analysis of not explicitly religious forms of social experimentation from a theological point of view, of course, as forms of 'secular liturgy,' as it were).

As it seems that the blurring or even collapsing of these various dichotomies is what characterizes prefigurative practices, or is at least one of their outstanding characteristics, they will be used in what follows as an organizing principle for the analysis of aspects of peace in the Letter to the Philippians.

7. Peace in Prefigurative Perspective

The first dimension to consider is the relationship between present and future. As it was argued above already, these two overlap in the sense that the peace, in the sense of social order, of God's future world becomes present in the community in the present. This matters much, as the construction of time is always also deeply political in nature.[35] As soon as a community not only orients itself towards an alternative political order, in this case alternative to the order of the Greco-Roman world, including its imperial dimensions, but also crafts its own understanding of time, it positions itself independently. If important dimensions of the calculation (and, with that, construction) of time are geared towards the political structures that dominate this world—and with a calculation of time *ab urbe condita* or in terms of the years of rule of emperors and the like, this was certainly the case—[36] and one introduces an understanding of time, in which the present is no longer primarily determined by what one may call imperial time but rather by the future of the God of peace, the inauguration of which is very much connected to the glorification of his son, who was crucified on behalf of the empire, then the prefigurative presence of God's peace in the Philippian community is deeply political in nature and contributes to shaping its social profile, both in this world while not being of it. This also means that new light can be shed on the Lord's nearness as it is mentioned in v. 5, from a prefigurative perspective, as both interpretations emphasize its eschatological orientation and exegeses underlining the Lord's proximity in the here and now can be seen as two dimensions of the same phenomenon: the coming Lord is already near.

A further dichotomy to consider is that between means and end; this dichotomy is, logically, relativized in prefigurative approaches, as the end is always already present in the means used to achieve it (or this should be the case at least). For the understanding of peace in Philippians, this is of relevance as the behavior of the Philippians that mediates God's peace, as it was argued above to be the case, is not merely a technique to achieve something that is distinct from the procedure itself; rather God's peace, the eschatological "end", of the community, is already present in the "means", i.e., the community's practice and way of life employed to journey towards this end. Another way of putting it would be that the mediation of God's peace and, with that, the presence of the God of peace takes place because the community's being drawn into a fuller life in Christ takes place through an ongoing (and explorative) practice of life in Christ already (with a formulation that somewhat circumvents the lurking question as to the initiative and the agency involved in all of this in relation to Paul's general views on divine and human agency).[37]

Closely connected to the question of future and present is that of presence and absence, given that God's peace and with that the presence of the God of peace is on the one hand a reality in the life of the Philippian community, or, at least, it can be a reality, while on the other it is also something that is not (yet) there, or not fully. Also, if, as it will be addressed below, it makes sense to view the peace that Paul refers to as distinct from

other kinds of peace, then the absence of this kind of peace in the world at large and its presence in the ἐκκλησία overlap and the imagery that Paul uses in Phil. 2:15 may well be applicable here as well (. . .ἵνα γένησθε ἄμεμπτοι καὶ ἀκέραιοι, τέκνα θεοῦ ἄμωμα μέσον γενεᾶς σκολιᾶς καὶ διεστραμμένης, ἐν οἷς φαίνεσθε ὡς φωστῆρες ἐν κόσμῳ). Although God's new world is largely absent, it is at the same time very much present, at least in the experience of the Philippian Christ devotees.

Also, the distinction between ideal and reality and with that mind and body is of relevance, given that the "idea" of God's peace is presented as being there in and through the praxis of the Philippian ἐκκλησία; whatever images or concepts of peace the congregation may have, it is through its developing embodiment of life in Christ (through the practice of particular virtues and other forms of behavior) that it becomes clear what these are, not primarily through conceptual refinement. The social experiment or laboratory that the community is leads to a discovery as to which means agree with the imagined end through the experience of God's peace (in the sense of a social order in the community of a particular quality) in the ἐκκλησία. This is of importance, as it provides another reason for moving beyond "peace" as an inner feeling of being at peace, or the like.

Next, and agreeing with what was said about the relationship between presence and absence, the dichotomy between center and margin is of importance. What plays a role here is the fairly marginal social position of the Philippian community as it seems to be under duress (cf., for instance. Phil. 1:27–30 and also ch. 3, internal strife is discussed in ch. 4),[38] while Paul himself writes out of prison.[39] From one perspective, then, the Philippian ἐκκλησία is marginal, yet given the presence in it of the social reality of God's world to come, it is at the same time at the center of things, a state of affairs that may well contribute to a sense of self-esteem and the development of resilience in a community such as the one that Paul addresses. In any case, also here, two kinds of reality coexist, the "empirical" reality of the marginal situation of the Philippian congregation and the "theological" reality of its prefigurative embodiment of God's world to come, which is real at an even deeper level than that of sociology.

Finally, leaving the series of dichotomies that have served as a way of structuring the past few paragraphs, two other observations can be made. They both have to do with the exploratory nature of prefigurative strategies. First, as groups engaging in prefigurative politics are commonly seen as social experiments and as early Christianity can certainly be seen as such,[40] viewing peace from the vantage point of prefigurative strategies underlines its experimental dimension. Engaging in forms of social life that agree with God's peace (or the God of peace) is more than executing a particular plan or living according to a certain blueprint, but rather it means experimentally exploring which forms of life together indeed align with this peace (and this God). Second, and related to this, is the dimension of the unknown,[41] which is inherent in experimenting, given that all experimentation is aimed at discovering what is unknown. This also means that the precise kind of behavior that the Philippians are to engage in as part of their being in Christ and hence being ordered according to God's peace is also something that needs to be discovered through trial, error and evaluation—this, in fact, fits Paul's terminology in Phil. 4, as it is rather open and leaves it to the Philippians to discern what is really true, honorable, good, etc. (v. 8). Beyond this, it also fits the general ad hoc and discursive nature of the Pauline correspondence, in which theory and practice befitting the life in Christ is developed through working through and reflecting on concrete cases and questions.[42]

8. Peace and Politics

A recurring discussion about the topic of peace in the New Testament is as to its relationship to peace in the Greco-Roman world at large, especially in relation to the so-called *Pax Romana*,[43] i.e., the imperial peace, which is evaluated in rather different ways by different authors, with some emphasizing its colonial and repressive nature, while others stress the stability and space for development that it created. Such ambivalence is also associated with Roman monuments dedicated to peace, such as the *Ara Pacis* in Rome

and the *Templum Pacis* in the same city—with the first being constructed on the occasion of Augustus' return from successful campaigns of conquest and repression in Hispania and Gallia and the second being built following the success of Vespasian and Titus in the Jewish War (the spoils of which contributed to financing the edifice). An accompanying question is as to whether the New Testament authors intentionally took a stance vis-à-vis such views of peace and were thus deliberately anti-imperial in their modus operandi or whether this is not the case and they sought, rather, either to live in peace and quietness or in an overarching apocalyptic worldview that was not aimed at the Roman empire per se. The following observations can be made based on the above considerations.

First, as peace is seen as a form of social order, the question naturally arises as to its origins and profile, which has, when it comes to the relationship with broader views of peace and the like, at least the following aspects. To begin with, the various forms of behavior that are mentioned in Phil. 4:5–6.8–9 are not particularly controversial, in fact, certainly in vv. 8–9, Paul seems to be appealing to commonly held values (ὅσα ἐστὶν ἀληθῆ, ὅσα σεμνά, ὅσα δίκαια, ὅσα ἁγνά, ὅσα προσφιλῆ, ὅσα εὔφημα, εἴ τις ἀρετὴ καὶ εἴ τις ἔπαινος, ταῦτα λογίζεσθε). Second, however, the origin of the peace is of interest, given that it is God's peace and, although the expression ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 7) or ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης (v. 9) does not have an especially outspoken profile, tying the first to Christ (…ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, v. 7) and the second to Paul's example (ἃ καὶ ἐμάθετε καὶ παρελάβετε καὶ ἠκούσατε καὶ εἴδετε ἐν ἐμοί, ταῦτα πράσσετε, v. 9) changes matters, given that these are two figures that lived (and, in the first case, died) in marked tension with those in charge of maintaining the peace and upholding the desired social order in the Roman empire. Christ was crucified and Paul was, at the time of writing of his letter, imprisoned. At the very least, this suggests that participating in God's peace can be at odds with the peace of the Roman empire. This does not amount to an outright challenge or an actively anti-imperial stance, but it is clear that if the values and forms of behavior mentioned in vv. 5–6.8–9 are to be understood from the vantage point of Paul and Christ, some controversy and tension is to be expected. In addition, and in order to return to a detail of the text, i.e., the use of the military term φρουρήσει, stating that the preservation of hearts and minds comes from (this) God's peace, this at least relativizes other forms of protection, such as the one offered by the structures and institutions of the Roman empire.[44]

Second, the focus of the use of peace in Phil. 4:7.9 is primarily on it being God's peace and with that a mode of presence of the God of peace, mediated through the life in Christ of the community. In other words, it has a positive not a negative orientation. Naturally, because it has its own profile (as stressed in the previous point), tension with other ideals concerning peace and order emerges, yet it would seem that this is only as a corollary of the positive orientation chosen. Therefore, tensions arise because of what the Christ devotees in Philippi strive for and whose examples they follow, not because they agitate against something or someone. Such tensions could arise, for instance, when worshiping someone who had been executed as an insurrectionist (or bandit—or both) as one's lord and god and also, given the vindication of the humble and humiliated involved in the resurrection of this person, rejecting commonly held values (as Paul does extensively in Phil. 3), or when taking one's cue from an imprisoned leader, who proclaims a message that there is a power far superior to that of the empire, i.e., of the God and father of Jesus Christ, who rose him from the dead.

Of course, many other aspects of Philippians could also be considered here, such as the reference to alternative citizenship in Phil. 3:20,[45] yet for the present purposes these considerations need to suffice. On their basis, it can be proposed that as Philippians is dealing with a social order (i.e., that of life in Christ) that is distinct from the dominant social order of the Roman empire or that of the colony of Philippi, political implications are at the very least a corollary of what Paul is writing to his beloved Christ devotees in this city.[46]

9. Concluding Observations

The conclusions to this study can be relatively brief. The main points that have been argued are that, when understanding Paul's references to peace as a reference to a social order, this is best understood as a key dimension (or even pars pro toto) for God's upcoming new world that is already present "in Christ." As the Philippian community is called upon to stand firm in Christ (Phil. 4:1, ἐν κυρίῳ)—which is, due to devotional and ethical practices (vv. 5–6.8–9), to result in the experience of God's peace or the God of peace (the former likely being a metonymy for the latter)—which must be understood as both a present and a future reality, the Philippian community can be seen as prefiguring God's future world, characterized by peace as concretum pro abstracto or pars pro toto of the "good life", both according to Greco-Roman and Jewish understandings of the term, by inhabiting this world now already in their communal life.

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Notes

1 In what follows, I will not occupy myself with proposals to view Philippians as a composite letter, with one reason being that I am not convinced by them (see Smit 2013, pp. 39–52) and another that the segment Phil. 4:4–9 will, by and large, be discussed on its own merits, and in the broader context of the undisputed Pauline letters, arguments based on the structure of the canonical Epistle to the Philippians will, in other words, play a very limited role. For this question, see also (Popkes 2004, pp. 246–47). One aspect that concerns the present pericope is whether v. 8 is a remnant of the conclusion of a letter that has been incorporated into canonical Philippians; this may be, but, besides being a rather inelegant way of editing, it can also indicate a continuation of the line of thought (cf. 1 Cor. 7:29; Heb. 10:16), while the references to peace also give the text a kind of coherence that speaks against separating vv. 8–9a from what precedes it redaction-critically, as (Standhartinger 2021, p. 268), suggests (see 14–23 for the full redaction-critical proposal). Of the recent literature, Castillo Elizondo (2022) could not be consulted.

2 A primarily temporal interpretation is preferred here and in what follows, as it has been recently proposed by, for instance, (Szerlip 2020, pp. 225–45), who offers a wealth of linguistic and conceptual support (kind reference of Dr Isaac Blois). See for considerations about a more spatial interpretation, e.g., (Popkes 2004, pp. 251–52), and (Guthrie 2023, p. 282). One reason for emphasizing the temporal is the likely proximity of the expression used here to Μαρανα θα (1 Cor. 16:22) that is predominantly eschatological, see, e.g., (Walter 1998, pp. 93, 100–1), and (Standhartinger 2021, p. 274). Yet, as it will be explored further below, what is at stake in Phil. 4 is also the coming Lord who is now already near (through the peace that Paul mentions). In other words, in the end one is dealing with a false dichotomy between interpretations that emphasize the future at the expense of the present and vice versa.

3 One reason for thinking this is that it is precisely the thinking of Paul that has served as an inspiration for philosophers such as (Agamben 2005). See, for instance, Suzan Sierksma-Agteres (2024).

4 In doing so, this paper further develops ideas that were put forward in relation to other aspects of (early) Christian tradition in extant publications, elements of which will recur in what follows. See, for instance, Smit (2022, 2023a, 2023b, 2024).

5 The connection between the injunction to rejoice and the exhortations that follow has been constructed variously and cannot be the topic of extensive discussion here, though little of what follows depends on that; although, the connection between εἰρήνη and χαρὰ in Romans 14:17 would invite exploring a connection. For a brief survey of views on the relationship between Phil. 4:4 and 4:5ff., see: (Snyman 2007, pp. 233–34).

6 But not to the extent that the assumption of a combination of letters becomes necessary, also in a continuing text a new emphasis can be indicated through such literary means. See, e.g., Bockmuehl (1997, p. 249).

7 See, e.g., (Morgan 2020, p. 163), (Standhartinger 2021, p. 269). Cf. also Bockmuehl (1997, p. 238), who also stresses that what follows in vv. 4–9 with its focus on good relationships contrasts with the strife addressed in vv. 2–3 (Bockmuehl 1997, p. 243).

8 For criticism of this possibility, see (Morgan 2020, p. 28); εἰρήνη, which could, as (Breytenbach 2010, pp. 228–31), has argued, just as well be a variation on a (common) salutation formula referring to peace and mercy (as it also occurs in Jude 2: ἔλεος ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη).

9 With many, e.g., (Walter 1998, p. 94), (Standhartinger 2021, p. 276).

10 As it has been noted variously, see, e.g., (Popkes 2004, p. 253), and (Morgan 2020, p. 172) (literature).

11 On which see (Breytenbach 2011).

12 See, for a discussion of the eschatological and inaugurated nature, also (Gorman 2013) and also (Roberts Gaventa 2013, pp. 71–72), notes the tension between the already and the not yet.

13 Standhartinger (2021, p. 276), points to the fact that the peace of God is personified here (and only here), which would be one reason to view it as a circumlocution for God's presence (metonymy). As Paul does wish the presence of the God of peace with his correspondents towards the end of some of his letters (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:24), while usually wishing them peace in his salutations, the two may well be regarded as somewhat interchangeable: peace implies the presence of the God of peace and vice versa.

14 Hawthorne and Martin (2004, pp. 246–54), also Standhartinger (2021, p. 275), and Bockmuehl (1997, p. 247). This can lead to some theological anxiety, cf. e.g., (Reumann 2008, pp. 640–41).

15 Vgl. (Popkes 2004, p. 253), 'Das Verb in V. 7b steht im Futur, nicht im Konjunktiv. Mehr als ein frommer Wunsch, nämlich eine Zusage und Verheißung wird den Philippern zuteil.' Cf. also (Standhartinger 2021, p. 275).

16 For a discussion of the eschatological nature of peace, see also, e.g., (De Villiers 2009, pp. 15–17), esp. p. 17, offering a characteristic of such peace: '. . .peace is not merely an inner experience of individuals, but a state under God's rule that comprises creation and humanity as a whole and inspires people in a new time and dispensation to live righteously, peacefully and joyfully.'

17 Of course, when operating on the basis of a chronology of Paul's letters that place Philippians after Romans as Paul's final letter, this caution can be waived. For a discussion as to where Phil. was written, see (Smit 2013, pp. 52–55).

18 See (Wengst 1986, p. 222): 'Der Friede, der menschlichen Verstand übersteigt, der alles übertrifft, «was der menschliche Verstand leiten kann» (*Gnilka*, Phil 171) und—erst recht—was Menschen bewerkstelligen können, ist gewiß nur von Gott her zu erwarten; aber wenn dieser Frieden das Denken und Wollen der Glaubenden geradezu in seinen Gewahrsam nimmt, dann bestimmt er auch ihr handeln, gibt ihnen Richtung und Perspektive.'

19 The more general exhortations in v. 8 are interpreted through the lens of Paul's own example, cf. Wojtkowiak (2012, pp. 255–56), Hawthorne and Martin (2004, p. 253), Heil (2010, pp. 156–57), helpfully using the concept of embodiment. On Paul's use of himself as an example in Philippians in general, see also (Smit 2014).

20 What cannot be pursued here is the question of physical mediation, given that the behavior that the Philippians are called upon to engage in is social and, as it necessarily involves bodies, also physical or material in nature. It would be inviting to consider this both from the vantage point of the perspective of the paradigm of material religion, which, as formulated by Meyer, views religion as 'a medium of absence that posits and sets out to bridge a gap between the here and now and something "beyond"' (Meyer 2015, p. 336), as well as from the perspective of sacramental theology—the two perspectives can cohere, or this is at least proposed with regard to another early Christian body, that of Ignatius of Antioch by Smit (2020b). For a consideration of the ancient and contemporary liturgical ritual of the peace, which can also be said to have a sacramental character, see (Smit 2020a).

21 Such a rather sacramental perspective on the agency of the Philippians is also supported by Guthrie (2023, p. 285): 'God uses *right thinking* and *right doing*, learned from the example of mentors as agents of God's peace, to buttress believers against life's anxieties.'

22 See (Schapdick 2010, p. 257).

23 One example would be (Hawthorne and Martin 2004, p. 246): 'Paul seems here to be referring to the tranquillity of God's own eternal being. . ., the peace that God himself has. . .., the calm serenity that characterizes God's very natures and that grateful, trusting Christians are welcome to share. . .' See more recently also (Holloway 2017, p. 183) (with reference to the motif of the *tranquilitas animi*, but no further discussion), as well as (Guthrie 2023, p. 284) (both without really considering alternative interpretations).

24 See, along these lines, the condensed argument of (Focant 2010).

25 See the convincing collation of evidence offered by Dormandy (2021). Dormandy also offers a survey of pertinent opinion on more theological and psychological interpretations of peace both in general (Dormandy 2021, pp. 220–23) and with regard to Phil. 4:6–9 (Dormandy 2021, pp. 238–39), which will not be repeated here; as the survey of εἰρήνη in Paul's (undisputed) letters below will show, virtually only its use in Rom. 5:1 has a direct connection with reconciliation with God, even if peace is just as consistently associated with God as its origin.

26 See (Kreinecker 2010, pp. 105–6), equally working on the basis of papyri. Such views are also supported by research on peace in the Bible at large, see for surveys, e.g., (Smelik 2005) and (Kunz-Lübcke and Mayordomo 2021).

27 This diverges from the view put forward by (Dormandy 2021, p. 239): 'Paul is in fact saying that God, by his εἰρήνη, will cause the world to work in a way such that the hearts and minds of his readers are kept in Christ.' The peace is not the source of the behavior of the Philippians but its result, even though it is the case that this peace will have an effect on the hearts and minds of the Philippians. See for the position advanced here, e.g., (O'Brien 1991, p. 496), 'the peace that he bestows or gives. . .is thus equivalent to the eschatological salvation that has been effected in Christ Jesus.'

28 As it is variously recognized, see, e.g., (Hawthorne and Martin 2004, pp. 244–45), also underlining the simultaneity of the presence and the absence of the lord.

[29] See for earlier explorations of this interface Smit (2022, 2023a, 2023b); the outline of the theory presented here is indebted to the last-mentioned essay.

[30] van de Sande (2017, 2019).

[31] (Leach 2013, p. 1004).

[32] Usually, reference is made to (Boggs 1977).

[33] See, for instance, the elaboration of this theme by (Swain 2019).

[34] 'Religious' is used in a very general sense here; the term is, at least to the extent that it suggests a distinction between the sacred and the secular and the private and the public spheres, of course, not really applicable to first-century CE social movements or cultic groups.

[35] See, for instance, (Stern 2017). An insightful study (as of yet not published as a monograph) is (Wan 2016).

[36] See on this, e.g., the essays in (Gildenhard et al. 2019), as well as in (Dijkstra et al. 2017).

[37] See also the careful formulations of (Guthrie 2023, p. 285), emphasizing God's use of people as agents of peace.

[38] Wojtkowiak (2012, p. 255), rightly points out that also the emphasis on prayer and the need for protection mentioned in Phil. 4:6–9 point to a situation of distress.

[39] Hawthorne and Martin (2004, p. 245), stress that the call μηδ ἐν μεριμνᾶτε is anything but vacuous, given this situation.

[40] As I have argued before, see (Smit 2023a, 2023b).

[41] This topic was explored fruitfully in a workshop in the context of the joint colloquium of the Amsterdam Centre for New Testament Studies (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) and the Centre of Contextual Biblical Interpretation (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam/Protestant Theological University) on 1 December 2023; I am grateful to the input provided by Dr Suzan Sierksma-Agteres, Dr Mathijs van de Sande through their responses to my contribution and Dr Klazina Staat and Prof. Dr Evert van der Zweerde in the discussion.

[42] On the significance of error in this respect, see, with regard to ritual, also (Smit 2021).

[43] Both on a macro and on a micro level, the Roman context is of importance, as Philippi was part and parcel of the Roman empire as such and it was a Roman colony with, as it is often stressed, strong ties with Roman culture and ideology. Cf. with regard to peace, for instance (Dormandy 2021, p. 238): "[T]he Roman background is particularly important for understanding Philippians. Philippi was a Roman colony and the Philippians could hardly have failed to see how Paul's εἰρήνη contrasted with the pax Romana." See similarly, (Wojtkowiak 2023, p. 68), 'Die Adressatengemeinde lebt in der Colonia Iulia Augusta Philippensis, welche unter den römischen Kolonien in singulärer Weise von römischer Kultur geprägt ist.' See also Pilhofer (1995, pp. 115–23); Wengst (1986), remains a benchmark study.

[44] See, e.g., (Hawthorne and Martin 2004, p. 247), cf. (Standhartinger 2021, p. 275; Reumann 2008, p. 637; Szerlip 2020, p. 239), also notes that στήκετε in 4:1 is a military term.

[45] For a review of some research, see (Wojtkowiak 2023, pp. 69–70); the idea that an orientation towards heaven is merely ethical and not political does seem to miss the point, as such an orientation involves a strong relativization of the earthly state of affairs—see for this proposal (Wischmeyer 2013, pp. 307–10), and also Standhartinger's argument (Standhartinger 2021, pp. 277–78) that Paul's considerations match Stoic ideas does not need to the conclusion that social criticism is not involved; even if Paul wants to suggest, along Stoic lines, that a heavenly citizenship (or 'commonwealth') is to be the model for the earthly state of affairs, then a critical tension is created between the two (which was precisely the point of this Stoic notion). Ebel's earlier considerations remain (more) convincing, see (Ebel 2015).

[46] In agreement with, for instance, (Wojtkowiak 2023, p. 71), 'In keinem der für die Diskussion um eine anti-römische Ausrichtung des Philipperbriefs zentralen Punkte dürfte Paulus das explizite Ziel verfolgen, sich gegen das Imperium Romanum zu wenden. Alle Punkte besitzen jedoch kritische Implikationen.'

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