

ABSTRACT

The Wise Man among the Corinthians: Rethinking Their Wisdom in the Light of Ancient Stoicism and Studies on Ancient Economy

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Against recent trends, this dissertation argues that the divisive “wisdom” addressed in 1 Corinthians can be characterized most nearly as a Christian development of Stoic philosophy, espoused mainly by a few individuals among the church’s wealthier and more educated members. Though Stoic connections with the Corinthians’ wisdom have long been noted, in considering the possibility of philosophical training in the church no study to date has had recourse to the refined socio-economic data that has emerged over the last ten years. Still less has anyone attempted to cull the full breadth of evidence for the Stoic thesis from across the whole of the letter. The present dissertation attempts to draw all of this data together for the first time.

The dissertation unfolds in six chapters. The first chapter offers a general introduction and a history of Corinthians scholarship on “wisdom.” Chapter 2 argues that the regnant, rhetorical thesis (to which the Stoic thesis is offered as an alternative) owes more to its account of the eminence of rhetoric in Corinth’s broader social milieu and to the methodological trends in current Corinthians scholarship than it does to careful

analysis of exegetical, lexicographical, and historical details. Chapter 3 addresses the question of methodology. It is argued that reconstruction should begin, not with a mirror-reading of Paul's denials (e.g., 1:17; 2:1, 4, 13), but rather with the full gamut of Corinthian language quoted and of Corinthian problems narrated throughout the letter. Chapter 4 attempts to construct a profile of the church's social world, paying especial attention to the socio-economic status of church members and the question whether any may have received some formal philosophical training. Chapter 5 brings the study to its culmination. Treating the full spectrum of Corinthian language and problems seen in the letter, it is argued that an essentially Stoic perspective provides a unifying explanation for all the letter's dominating topics, and is the only single perspective that can satisfactorily do so. Chapter 6 provides a concluding summary and reflections on why the Stoic thesis has not yet been widely accepted.

The Wise Man among the Corinthians:
Rethinking Their Wisdom in the Light of Ancient Stoicism
and Studies on Ancient Economy

by

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A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Religion

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Accepted by the Graduate School
May 2012

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

D. L. Diogenes Laertius

LS Long, A. A. and D. N. Sedley, eds. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. 2 vols.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

All other abbreviations follow the Society of Biblical Literature Handbook of Style.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It would be impossible to estimate how deeply indebted this dissertation is to the astute minds of teachers, colleagues, scholars, and friends who have engaged with me over the many years of its completion. Immense thanks are due professors Bruce Longenecker and Mikeal Parsons, who have read or heard presented, in several stages of their production, each and every chapter of the dissertation. Throughout my time at Baylor they have been, along with Charles Talbert, Lidija Novakovic, and the rest of the Religion faculty, the refining fire of all my academic work. From the Baylor Classics department, Jeffrey Fish was involved from the earliest stages of the project, and proved to be both a ready resource and a profound source of encouragement along the way. I also owe a debt of gratitude to professor David Armstrong from the University of Texas-Austin, who invested an exceedingly generous share of his time musing over earlier drafts of my thesis. Thanks must go to the *Journal of Theological Studies* and *Neotestamentica* for allowing me to incorporate reworked material from my earlier articles. And countless others at Baylor and Houston Baptist University, both friends and colleagues—to one and all, sincere thanks.

DEDICATION

To Mary Mac, who has shown me daily the superiority of love to human wisdom

Omnia vincit amor

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

On this much interpreters have agreed: in 1 Corinthians the divisions plaguing the church had chiefly to do with their understanding of “wisdom.”¹ When it has come to profiling this wisdom, however, the landscape of Corinthians scholarship over the last 200 years has shown a stifflingly uneven topography. Amid the shifting terrain, several peaks have stood out. (1) In 1831, F. C. Baur published his programmatic essay arguing that the church’s four apparent “parties” (1:10-12) could be reduced to two: Paul’s Hellenistic-Jewish faction, which valorized grace, and Peter’s Palestinian Jewish faction, which valorized the Law and human wisdom.² (2) From the early to mid twentieth century, wisdom came to be understood in terms of Greek Gnosticism, whereby a contingent of the church was thought to have demeaned the material realm and to have boasted in the spiritual salvation they had achieved through baptism.³ (3) Beginning in

¹ This has been the common judgment from one generation of scholars to the next: e.g., Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1914), 15; Frederik Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 42; C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971), 275-6; J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (New York: Seabury, 1965), 76, 77; Robert Funk, “Word and Word in 1 Cor 2:6-16,” in *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 277; Gordon Fee, *1 Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 64; Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (SBLDS 134; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 105; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (Pillar; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 120; cf. 20-21.

² F. C. Baur, “Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom,” *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831): 61-206; followed by “The Epistles to the Corinthians,” in *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi* (Stuttgart: Becker & Muller, 1866), 268-320.

³ First, W. Lutgers, *Freiheitspredigt und Schwarmgeister in Korinth* (C. Bertelsman, 1908); followed by a few others, but famously revived by Walter Schmithals, *Die Gnosis in Korinth: Eine*

the final third of the twentieth century scholars began to liken Corinthian wisdom either to “over-realized eschatology” or to the wisdom of Hellenistic Judaism, both of which could be described, if not in terms of Gnosticism, at least in terms of incipient or “proto-gnosticism.”⁴ (4) Also gaining traction during this period—though still continuing as the dominant perspective today—were social-historical theories which connected the Corinthians’ wisdom with elite, and especially rhetorical, education.⁵

Untersuchung zu den Korintherbriefen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969); ET, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

⁴ Over-realized eschatology: Anthony C. Thiselton, “Realized Eschatology at Corinth,” *NTS* 24 (1978): 510-26; reaffirmed but qualified in *ibid.*, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), esp. 40. Hellenistic-Judaism: Richard Horsley “Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos: Distinctions of Spiritual Status among the Corinthians,” *HTR* 69 (1976): 269-88; “Wisdom of Words and Words of Wisdom in Corinth,” *CBQ* 39 (1977): 224-39; “How Can Some of You Say That There Is No Resurrection of the Dead?: Spiritual Elitism in Corinth,” *NovT* 20 (1978): 203-31; “Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians (1 Cor 8-10),” *CBQ* 40 (1978): 574-89; “Gnosis in Corinth: 1 Cor 8:1-6,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 32-51; as well as his commentary, *1 Corinthians*, 33-36; and his collection of essays, *Wisdom and Spiritual Transcendence at Corinth: Studies in First Corinthians* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2008); also B. A. Pearson, “Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Paul,” in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Robert L. Wilken; Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 1975), 43-66; James A. Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit: An Investigation of 1 Cor 1:18-3:20 against the Background of Jewish Sapiential Traditions in the Greco-Roman Period* (University Press of America, 1984). Jerome Murphy-O’Connor demonstrates just how closely the “over-realized eschatology” and Hellenistic-Jewish theses relate in labeling the wise Corinthians “Spirit people”: *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 275ff; and *Paul: His Story* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 163-5.

⁵ Johannes Munck was a harbinger: “Menigheden uden Partier,” *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 15 (1952): 215-33; ET, “The Church without Factions,” in *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959), 135-67; but the thesis was most fully developed beginning with Bruce Winter; *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: A Hellenistic Jewish and a Christian Response* (Ph.D. diss., Macquarie University, 1988); published in *Paul and Philo among the Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); others taking the rhetorical line have included: Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*; Andrew Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (New York: Brill, 1993), 102-7; Duane Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (SNTSMS 79; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); L. L. Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997). Dale Martin (*Corinthian Body* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995]) sees the Corinthians as having a knowledge of “popular philosophy” bordering on elite-level education (pp. 61-68), though he also notes their obsession with the high status associated with rhetoric (pp. 47-66). Studies focusing on social conventions more generally include: Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations with the Corinthians* (WUNT 2/23; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987); and J. K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (JSNTSup 75; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

Of these trends, the first two have been effectively dismantled (though their specters still show themselves from time to time).⁶ Baur's thesis has long been regarded as reductive, if at all accurate. As for Gnosticism, it was shown conclusively in the 1970s that it simply did not exist before the early or mid second century.⁷ But interpretations of the third sort, too, have been blackened by association. In their recent review of Corinthians scholarship, Edward Adams and David Horrell subsume under one heading theses based on "religious and philosophical parallels," which include not only the Gnostic thesis, but also those theses related to Hellenistic Judaism, Greco-Roman philosophy, and popular philosophical thought.⁸ The difficulty they find with such theories reflects a common sentiment at present: "When parallels are found in Gnosticism, Hellenistic Judaism, Stoicism, Cynicism, Epicureanism, and so on, we are bound at least to ask whether the Corinthians can ever be clearly located in relation to one movement or another."⁹ This seemingly reasonable objection has generally led to either one of two courses of action. Bracketing the question of the Corinthians' wisdom, many

⁶ Baur's thesis has been revived and further elaborated in recent years by Michael Goulder in "σοφία in Corinthians," *NTS* 37 (1991): 516-34; and *Paul and the Competing Mission in Corinth* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001). One still finds mention of "Gnosticism" as well: e.g., Moses Taiwo, *Paul's Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 10:29b-30* (Saarbrücken, Müller: 2008), 54; and Gerd Theissen, "Social Conflicts in the Corinthian Correspondence: Further Remarks on J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*," *JSNT* (2003): 389-90; cf. Todd E. Klutz, "Re-Reading 1 Corinthians after *Rethinking 'Gnosticism*,'" *JSNT* 26 (2003): 193-216.

⁷ Credited with the exposé is Edwin M. Yamauchi, in *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (Grand Rapids; London: Eerdmans, 1973); and "Pre-Christian Gnosticism Reconsidered a Decade Later," in *Pre-Christian Gnosticism: A Survey of the Proposed Evidences* (Baker Book House, 1983), 187-249.

⁸ Edward Adams and David Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 16-23. Studies to note here include the following—on Epicurean philosophy: Graham Tomlin, "Christians and Epicureans in 1 Corinthians," *JSNT* 68 (1997): 51-72—on Cynic philosophy: F. Gerald Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches* (London: Routledge, 1998)—on Stoic philosophy, see below.

⁹ Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth*, 22.

have shifted focus from the putative background *behind* the letter to the task of examining Paul's own side of the conversation—what *his* theology of wisdom was, what kind of rhetoric he used in treating the exigencies, and so forth. The second solution has been to address the Corinthians' wisdom, but with the assumption that it cannot be characterized by any single system of thought: it is rather the wisdom acquired from elite education and therefore must pertain to *rhetorical* eloquence, not any definable set of religious or philosophical beliefs. Both of these approaches have reinforced the recent trend of widening investigation to examination of the broader social milieu and consideration of the general secular attitudes that the Corinthians might have imbibed from it.

As for the fact that these trends have marked a significant advance from the ideas of Baur and proponents of the Gnostic thesis: who can deny it? All the same, it would be a mistake to let ourselves be swept away unthinkingly and indefinitely in the current of these present perspectives. Indeed, it must be asked whether the flow of present scholarship is one simply to be *entered into* or whether it too is in need of some redirection. To be sure, social-historical approaches to the text remain indispensable for a full appreciation of what is taking place in 1 Corinthians. But such approaches need not lead us either to the conclusion that the Corinthians' wisdom cannot be characterized primarily in terms of one system of thought (controversial as that may sound), or to the now dominant perspective that the Corinthians' wisdom is best understood in terms of Greco-Roman rhetoric.

In the light of present circumstances, the thesis proposed on the following pages may seem surprising for some. Nonetheless it is a thesis that, at least in inchoate form,

has precedent as old as any, and once an opportunity has been given for the full breadth of evidence to be assessed, should be recognized as the most cogent to be forwarded to date, accounting as it does for the full scope of the internal evidence of 1 Corinthians on the one hand, and *also* the social situation of first-century Corinth and its church community on the other: without denying the role played by social stratification and other secular social forces, it will be argued that the divisive “wisdom” of the Corinthians can be characterized most nearly as a Christian development of Stoic philosophy, and perhaps nothing more.¹⁰ Evident in most of the problems in the letter, this perspective has been adopted among a small but influential minority in the church. While they have not committed to Stoicism slavishly, they have drawn to a considerable extent from both its vocabulary and its ideas for their interpretation of Paul’s message.

The lack of attention this thesis has received owes less to a dearth of evidence than it does to the almost irresistible draft of the collective scholarly agenda, which, though set by a few, sweeps nearly all into its powerful current. For some fifty years prior

¹⁰ Earlier articulations of this thesis have generally been limited to select passages within the letter. Stoic connections in 3:21, 22; 4:8; and 6:12 are noted as far back as J. B. Lightfoot (*Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* [London: Macmillan, 1895], 195, 200) and Johannes Weiss (*Der erste Korintherbrief* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910], 89-91, 157-9); Robert Grant (“The Wisdom of the Corinthians,” in *The Joy of Study* [New York: Macmillan, 1951], 51-55) believed the Corinthians were self-styled Stoic-Cynic wise men; Stanley Stowers (“A ‘Debate’ over Freedom: I Corinthians 6:12-20,” in *Christian Teaching: Studies in Honor of Lemoine G. Lewis* [ed. Everett Ferguson; Abilene, Tx.: Abilene Christian University, 1981], 59-71) says the Corinthian slogans of 6:12, 13, 18 are to be seen against the background of “a popular form of Cynic and Stoic ethics” (p. 67); Maria Pascuzzi (*Ethics, Ecclesiology, and Church Discipline* [Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1997]) argues that the problem in 1 Corinthians 5-6 was influenced by the Stoic view that incest was “indifferent”; Richard Hays (“Conversion of the Imagination,” *NTS* 45 [1999]: 391-412) sees the Corinthian position as a hybrid of Stoicism, Cynicism, and charismatic fervor; A. J. Malherbe (“Determinism and Free Will in Paul: The Argument of 1 Cor 8 and 9,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* [ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; London: T & T Clark, 1995; London: Continuum, 2004], 231-55) understands the Corinthians’ “knowledge” and denigration of the “weak” in Stoic terms; Albert Garcilizo (*The Corinthian Dissenters and the Stoics* [New York: Peter Lang, 2007]) notes a number of texts in which Stoicism rears its head, but focuses on the denial of the resurrection in 15:12-58. Terrence Paige offers the closest thing to a full treatment of the letter, though his analysis is limited to a short article: “Stoicism, *Eleutheria* and Community at Corinth,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT, 1992), 180-93.

to the ascendancy of social-historical approaches, NT scholarship exhibited an all-time low in interest in how Greek philosophy might illuminate the text,¹¹ which meant that Stoicism received little attention in investigations of 1 Corinthians.¹² At the end of that period, when the Gnostic thesis suffered its decoronation and social-historical approaches were presented as a sort of replacement, all theses that might have been supported on the basis of comparative religious or philosophical material were collectively crushed, with scarce regard for their independent merits. This has allowed what little treatment the Stoic thesis has received in recent years to fall through the cracks: the thesis has been passed over *on principle* rather than by any sort of direct rebuttal. With “religious” and “philosophical” theses out of the picture, the rhetorical thesis then seemed the natural road to take. This direction seemed to be confirmed by a simultaneous shift of opinion regarding first-century Corinth, namely that it was “Roman, not Greek” (again serving to shunt aside theories related to Greek religion or philosophy). And with that, the new agenda for Corinthian studies was set: as we hear in the current literature, the divisions of the Corinthians were “social, not theological” in orientation, their wisdom was that of “rhetoric, not philosophy,” and their city was “Roman, not Greek.” Next to such sharp dichotomies, the Stoic thesis has been a non-starter. As it is, one either follows the consensus willingly, or is dragged.

Perhaps the current consensus has also stemmed from our despair at the great diversity of meanings “wisdom” was capable of bearing in the first century. Still, the

¹¹ See Abraham J. Malherbe, “Graeco-Roman Religion and Philosophy and the New Testament,” in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. Eldon J. Epp and George W. McRae; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 3-26; and “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament,” *ANRW* 2.26.1:267-333.

¹² Of those studies noted above, only Robert Grant (“The Wisdom of the Corinthians”) wrote during this period, and he emphasized a *Jewish appropriation* of the Greek philosophical categories.

corollary observation that Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians 1-4 admits of a wide variety of usages for the term,¹³ and wisdom must therefore be non-specific, seems to involve a non sequitur. It confuses the *occasion behind* the letter on the one hand, and Paul's theological *response to it* on the other. Indeed, not everything Paul says constitutes the antithesis of some opposite position held by his "opponents," as if the text were a mirror. Rather, historical occasions act as *springboards* to Paul's theologizing: he begins with a *particular* occasion—and thus in 1 Corinthians (arguably) with a particular kind of wisdom—and then expatiates more broadly on "human wisdom" in all its dangerous forms. But just how this historical occasion can be isolated if not through "mirror-reading" will have to be considered in our present investigation.

My main aim here will be to provide the first sustained treatment for the Stoic thesis, treating 1 Corinthians from beginning to end,¹⁴ with keen methodological consciousness, and *within proper social context*. This will require a conscientious treatment of counter theses, most of all the rhetorical one. As we shall see in chapter 2, the rhetorical thesis has been taken for granted on the word of a few dominating monographs, though a closer (and fuller) look at the evidence reveals that their case is far less compelling than recent literature has reflected. Chapter 3 canvasses the state of the question with regard to methodology and attempts on this basis to distill a set of

¹³ For the varied meanings of σοφία within this discourse, see James D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (Sheffield Academic, 1995; T & T Clark, 2004), 43.

¹⁴ In spite of those few earlier studies that challenged the unity of 1 Corinthians (Johannes Weiss, *The History of Primitive Christianity* [New York: K. W. Wilson-Enckson, 1937], 356-7; Jean Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* [London: Epworth, 1962], xiii-xv; and Walter Schmithals, "Die Korintherbrief als Briefsammlung," *ZNW* 64 [1973]: 87-113), the consensus since Margaret Mitchell's *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993) has been overwhelmingly in favor of the letter's full integrity.

methodological principles for the present study. In chapter 4, I undertake an investigation of the Corinthian social world, addressing especially questions related to the socio-economic configuration of the Corinthian church, the religio-cultural character of their city, and potential philosophical influences within the community. Finally, chapter 5 sets forth our Stoic thesis, aiming to treat the full breadth of 1 Corinthians' internal evidence—not merely chapters 1-4, but the whole pattern of issues involved in the letter—in making the case. Many observations will have been noted in previous studies,¹⁵ but we shall also find some ponderable stones left unturned. In the end, the composite evidence should tell a story rather different from that told in recent years: the “wise man” among the Corinthians is less the “sophist” than he is the “Stoic.”

¹⁵ In such cases, I cite the relevant literature.

CHAPTER TWO

Rhetoric versus Philosophy in 1 Corinthians

Long before the first scholars showed us 1 Corinthians' parallels with Philo's brand of Hellenistic-Judaism, and still even before anyone sought to convince us of Gnosticism in Corinth, many interpreters were pointing to a different form of wisdom as the source of the Corinthians' troubles—the Greco-Roman rhetorical-philosophical tradition.¹ Now nearly a century later, we are said to have come full circle. The Gnostic and Hellenistic-Jewish theses have been found either impossible or inadequate, and we have arrived back at rhetoric.

Since the new rhetorical thesis hit the presses in force in the early 1990s, scarcely an exegete has found need to doubt its conclusions. In the first place, it was immediately heralded as a retrieval of the old and widely accepted “rhetorical” thesis that had circulated among scholars prior to the middle of the twentieth century, when it was temporarily, and wrongfully, eclipsed by the Gnostic and Hellenistic-Jewish arguments. Moreover, the wisdom of rhetoric—closely associated with high social status in Greco-Roman antiquity—has seemed to connect naturally with the fine insights made in the 70s and 80s (though still considered basically valid) by Gerd Theissen, Wayne Meeks, and others regarding social stratification in the Corinthian church. Add to this the recent rediscovery of ancient rhetorical theory and its happy appropriation in the form of

¹ Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 170; Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 23; Ulrich Wilckens “Σοφία, σοφός, σοφίζω,” *TDNT* 7:522, recalling the consensus of older scholarship.

rhetorical criticism of the NT, and the rhetorical thesis appears a perfect fit for the times. Indeed, current conditions tell us that the rhetorical thesis is here to stay.²

Despite this apparent security, the rhetorical thesis has some weaknesses which have yet to be given close attention. First, while exponents have been quick to remind us that their thesis is an old one, they have been suspiciously reticent as to the fact that, in the older treatments, philosophy had been given an important place alongside, or even prominence over, rhetoric. Duane Litfin for instance tells us that “until recent times exegetes *consistently* interpreted the phrase σοφία λόγου (1.17) with *primary reference* to Greco-Roman rhetoric”³ (my italics). Here he footnotes, among other sources, Ulrich Wilckens’ article from *TDNT*, whom he quotes as saying that “most exegetes” have held the rhetorical explanation to be the “customary interpretation.” Turning to Wilckens’ article, however, we find that Litfin’s statement has been somewhat misleading:

Most exegetes in expounding the whole discussion in 1 C.1:18-2:5 concentrate on the phrases σοφία λόγου in 1:17, ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας in 2:1, and ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις in 2:4. It thus seems that in this section the Chr. preacher is opposing *any philosophical or rhetorical presentation* of the Gospel acc. to the standards of *Gk. philosophy*.⁴ (my italics)

Wilckens of course classically goes on to demur from “most exegetes,” suggesting that Paul’s opponents are “Gnostics”—that is, as he says, “Gnostics, not *Gk. Philosophers*” (my italics). Thus, far from supporting Litfin’s suggestion that exegetes have for a long

² Though we have seen occasional dissenters: e.g., R. Dean Anderson, *Rhetorical Theory and Paul* (CBET 18; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 245-76.

³ Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 3.

⁴ Wilckens, *TDNT* 7:522. See also Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 170; Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 23, 158-9.

time “consistently” interpreted 1:17 with “*primary* reference” to Greco-Roman rhetoric,⁵ Wilckens instead seems to place the emphasis of “most exegetes” on the other side, that of philosophy.

Related to the disappearance of philosophy from the old thesis is the question of Paul’s dominating emphasis in the discourse. That the Corinthians’ divisive wisdom was merely “*human*” is stated plainly in the text (2:5, 13; cf. “wisdom of the world,” 3:19), but whether it was more *formally*, or more *substantively*, problematic, is left uncertain. In antiquity, the conflict between the “form” and “content” of wisdom was often framed in terms of a clash between rhetoric and philosophy—rhetoric was about the form of expression, or mere *words* (*verba*/λόγος), philosophy was about content, or real things (*res*/πράξεις). Which of these two sciences—rhetoric or philosophy—could rightly lay claim to wisdom, was a matter of heated, and perennial, debate.

In light of this ancient dispute, NT scholars have greatly exerted themselves in trying to discern whether Paul is concerned more with the *form*, or more with the *content*, of the Corinthians’ σοφία—that is, with “rhetorical” wisdom, or with “philosophy.” In this regard, three main text units come to the fore—1:17-31, 2:1-5, and 2:6-16. Within these units, four phrases have become the center of attention:

1:17 – οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου – “not with eloquent wisdom” (NRSV); “not in cleverness of speech” (NAS)

2:1 – οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας – “not with lofty words or wisdom” (NRSV); “not with superiority of speech or of wisdom” (NAS)

⁵ L. L. Welborn (*Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles* [Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997]) manipulates the data in exactly the same way as Litfin, saying, “The σοφία that Paul fears will undermine the community is *nothing other than rhetoric*. This interpretation was the view of an older generation of scholars more familiar with Greek and Latin authors” (p. 30; my italics).

2:4 – οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖ[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις] – “not with plausible words of wisdom” (NRSV); “not with persuasive words of wisdom” (NAS)
2:13 – οὐκ ἐν διδακτοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοις – “words not taught by human wisdom” (NRSV)

So is Paul’s primary concern in the discourse the *form* of the Corinthians’ wisdom (“rhetoric”), or is its *content* (“philosophy”)? In certain respects, conclusions have remained widely diverse. Most studies consider 1:17 to be concerned entirely with the form of wisdom;⁶ though almost as many detect a dual concern for form and content, with alternating emphases.⁷ A few have concluded that the full emphasis is on content.⁸

⁶ Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 15-16; E.-B. Allo, *Première épître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: Gabalda, 1934), 12; Funk, “Word and Word in 1 Cor 2:6-16,” 281; C. Senft, *La Première Epître de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens* (CNT; 2d ed.; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1990), 36; Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 82, 85; Richard Hays, *1 Corinthians* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox Press, 1997), 24; Raymond Collins, *1 Corinthians* (SP; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 85, citing Pogoloff; Andreas Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (HNT; Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 43; Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGTC; Eerdmans, 2000), 143; Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, Ga.: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 17; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (BECNT; Baker Academic, 2003), 56, following Litfin and Pogoloff; Joseph Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 148; Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 86. Lightfoot (*Notes on Epistles of St. Paul*, 157) sees form as the concern, though he says it could be either rhetorical or dialectical. Some say that Paul is taking the side of wisdom’s content over against that of form, with which the Corinthians are infatuated: e.g., Edgar Krentz, “Logos or Sophia: The Pauline Use of the Ancient Dispute between Rhetoric and Philosophy,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. John T. Fitzgerald, Thomas H. Olbricht, and L. Michael White; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 280.

⁷ Form and content: Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 46; Friedrich Lang, *Die Briefe an die Korinther* (NTD; 2d ed; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 22; Christian Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1996), 33; rhetoric and philosophy: Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 46-47; emphasis on content: J. Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), 14-16; Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth*, 142-3; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 65, 66, 68; emphasis on form: Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 23; Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 49; Wolfgang Schrage, *Der Erstebrief an die Korinther* (EKK 7; Zürich; Düsseldorf: Benziger Verlag, 1991), 1:158. Emphasis on rhetoric, though without excluding philosophy: Craig Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 28, 36. Witherington (*Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 87, 96, 103, 104, 142) and Hays (*1 Corinthians*, 27) note that 1:18-25 is also about both form and content.

⁸ Content: Anderson, *Rhetorical Theory and Paul*, 276; philosophy: Grosheide, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 40-41; Heinrich Schlier, “Kerygma und Sophia: zur neutestamentlichen Grundlegung des Dogmas,” in *Die Zeit der Kirche: Exegetische Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Freiburg: Herder, 1956), 206-32; D. Hans Lietzmann, *An Die Korinther I, II* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1969), 9. Cf. on 1:18-25, Michael Bullmore, *St.*

Likewise, most interpreters take 2:1, 4 in connection with form or rhetoric,⁹ though many believe it could refer to either form or content,¹⁰ or even to content alone.¹¹ Finally, almost all agree that 2:6-16 refers again to wisdom's content, though 2:13 alone could refer to either content or form.¹²

Thus most, though not all, interpreters have seen form or rhetoric as the greater emphasis in these select phrases. But scholars show less agreement regarding Paul's overall emphasis from one unit of thought to the next. Indeed, also according to the opinions of interpreters, Paul's movement seems to shift, after 1:17, from content (1:18-25), to form (2:1-5), and finally back to content (2:6-16).

Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 in the Light of First-Century Rhetorical Criticism (San Francisco: International Scholars Publications, 1995), 221.

⁹ Form: Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 63; rhetorical ability: Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 32; Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 22-23; Allo, *Première épître aux Corinthiens*, 25-26; Funk, "Word and Word in 1 Cor 2:6-16," 282; Schrage, *Der Erstebrief an die Korinther*, 224-35; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 121-3; Wolff, *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, 49; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 35; Jacob Kremer, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1997), 52; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 116-20; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 53; Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 208; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 35; Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 169-73; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 112-19; social status connected with rhetorical ability: Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 82; cf. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 39.

¹⁰ Form and content: Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 54; Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 56; form and content, emphasis on form, though either philosophical or rhetorical: Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of St. Paul*, 170; Senft, *La Première épître de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, 45-47; Lang, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, 35-37; rhetoric and philosophy: Allo, *Première épître aux Corinthiens*, 23; Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 14; rhetoric and philosophy, though primarily rhetoric: Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 121-3. Fee (*1 Corinthians*, 89-90) takes 2:1-2 in relation to content and 2:3-4 in relation to form, but the whole of 2:1-5 primarily in relation to form. Bullmore (*St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 209, 221) takes 2:2 to indicate form and 2:4 to indicate content, but he sees the main emphasis in 2:1-5 to be content.

¹¹ Grosheide, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 61.

¹² 2:6-16 in relation to wisdom's content: Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 25; Horsley, "Wisdom of Words and Words of Wisdom in Corinth," 224; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 101; Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 213; Krentz, "Logos or Sophia," 281. Still, Fee (*1 Corinthians*, 114), for instance, notes that v. 13 refers to both form and content.

Despite this confusion, the four phrases listed above—1:17, 2:1, 4, and 13—have enticed a (slim) majority of interpreters over the decades to identify form or rhetoric as Paul’s leading concern, at least in 1:17-2:5, if not in the entire discourse. Whether these phrases have been interpreted rightly—and more importantly, *with due emphasis*—will be a matter for consideration in what follows.

At the outset, it should be said that the rhetorical thesis in many ways deserves the following it has commanded. As we shall see, much about it is plausible, and advocates are to be commended both for their diligent attention to Greco-Roman urban culture, and for their creativity in sorting out certain pieces of evidence afforded by the letter. Nonetheless, in those texts which have been invested with critical importance, our survey so far, and the considerable disagreement it has revealed among commentators, has indicated that Paul is hardly explicit in identifying the Corinthians’ wisdom with rhetoric *per se*. Moreover, even an emphasis on the “form” of σοφία in certain verses need not point to Greco-Roman rhetoric *in particular*, nor to rhetoric as the main issue at stake in the church. Without these verses (1:17; 2:1, 4, 13) as one’s foundation, we shall see that the evidence actually begins to stack up quite differently.

Demonstration of these observations will be the task of the present chapter. In short, it will be argued that the divisive wisdom of the Corinthians can be seen exclusively or (if not exclusively) even primarily in relation to Greco-Roman rhetoric only with difficulty, only with selective attention to the full facts of the letter, and only by discounting the alternative explanation that is readily available in that other ancient champion of wisdom, philosophy. To this end, we turn next to an assessment of the

current dominant argument, with especial attention to the three flagship studies for the thesis—those of Stephen Pogoloff, Duane Litfin, and Bruce Winter.

1 Corinthians 1-4 in Recent Scholarship

The first monograph to forward the new rhetorical thesis in detail was Stephen Pogoloff's *Logos and Sophia* (1992). Pogoloff cleared the way by noting that past scholarship had mistakenly understood ancient rhetoric as nothing more than “mere form.” In correction, he noted that “the leading theorists of rhetoric treated their subject as concerned with far more than the ornaments of style. . . . The unity of form and content they espoused was, in large measure, lived out in the wider rhetorical culture.”¹³ Thus, far from being rattlers of empty speech, rhetors in Paul's day were experts in both the techniques of formal adaption *and* the content of a wide variety of liberal arts subjects. In short, a rhetor was “one who could speak well on any subject.”

Pogoloff's recognition of the synthesis of form and content in rhetorical education should not, however, be taken as an indication that he finds any substantial overlap between the wisdom of rhetoric and that of philosophy. Rather, Pogoloff contends that rhetoric and philosophy “conflicted and competed social and verbally . . . [N]ever did philosopher become rhetor or vice-versa, for their approaches were radically different.”¹⁴ He continues, “Just as the philosophers did not become rhetors, the rhetors did not become philosophers.”¹⁵ And again, rhetoric and philosophy “remained distinct and

¹³ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 48.

¹⁴ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 57.

¹⁵ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 58.

competitive cultures.”¹⁶ For all these reasons, he says, “we must be especially cautious about any close linkage between rhetoric and philosophy in Paul’s Corinth.”¹⁷ In sum, we “have no evidence that in Paul’s Corinth one whose speech was considered wise would *necessarily* have been expected to speak philosophically.”¹⁸ Therefore, thinks Pogoloff, if rhetorical education included a heavy dosage of “content,” still that content was scarcely philosophical in nature, and we can conclude that, when Paul spoke of σοφία λόγου (1:17), he was referring to the wisdom of a cultured rhetor who could speak on *any* subject—just not philosophy.

It is within this context that Pogoloff understands the divisions in Corinth. The “wise” person was not the philosopher but the rhetor, the person who spoke in such a way as reflected a typical upper class education. The culpable Corinthians were among the *nouveau riche*, those struggling with status dissonance because they possessed money but lacked other status symbols. These Corinthians perceived Paul and Apollos as high status rhetors, and rallied around the leader of their choosing, hoping to boost their own status through association. To counter the Corinthians’ claims, Paul attributed to himself the rhetoric of *weakness* (e.g., 1:25-27; 2:3; 4:10; 8:7-12; 9:22; 12:22). In sum, Pogoloff’s reconstruction integrates earlier sociological treatments of 1 Corinthians with his new insights concerning the relevance of Greco-Roman rhetoric: what the Corinthians value, specifically, is the high status of the rhetor, and it is this in turn which Paul repudiates.

¹⁶ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 62.

¹⁷ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 64.

¹⁸ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 65.

Duane Litfin provides a similar assessment of the situation in his book *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation* (1994). Litfin begins with a lengthy summary of the rhetorical tradition, tracing its history from Athens in the fifth century B.C. down to Rome in the first century A.D. Throughout this period, he maintains, the essential aim of rhetorical theory remained the same: to adapt one's speech so as to achieve the desired results. The sophists, Isocrates, Aristotle, Plato, Cicero, Quintilian—while they disagreed with each other as to epistemology, they were all alike in their understanding of rhetoric as *persuasion*. As Litfin puts it: “it was as if the orator worked with a grand equation in which everything was fixed except his own contribution. . . . Only the orator's own efforts were completely under his control.”¹⁹ Thus, whereas Pogoloff focuses on rhetorical wisdom in relation to *social status*, Litfin underscores Paul's opposition to rhetoric *as a means of persuasion*. Litfin takes 1:17-25 as Paul's “theology of proclamation,” his declaration that faith comes not by the clever manipulation of human rhetoric, but by the power of the Spirit. This passage, then, is Paul's apology to those Corinthians who have faulted him for substandard display of rhetoric. Over against Paul is Apollos, whose rhetorical abilities the Corinthians perceive to be consummate. Between these two men the church is divided, in accordance as each leader has been judged for his rhetorical aptitude.

Litfin, however, differs from Pogoloff in conceiving of the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy as one not of opposition, but of synthesis. For Litfin, rhetoric always united form and content, eloquence (λόγος) and wisdom (σοφία), so that, to the public eye, the distinction between the rhetorician and the philosopher would have been

¹⁹ Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 133.

difficult to discern. Even in the first century, when the Greek world sat at the cusp of the Second Sophistic and the scales of oratory tipped toward the side of empty form, the untrained masses would have been incapable of differentiating the two: “to the vast majority of people in antiquity wisdom and eloquence together must have appeared to be what philosophy was about.”²⁰

The third major monograph to argue the rhetorical thesis was Bruce Winter’s *Philo and Paul among the Sophists* (1997), now in its second edition (2002).²¹ Winter builds on the old proposal of Johannes Munck²²—for decades overshadowed by the Gnostic thesis—that in 1 Corinthians 1-4 Paul articulates an anti-sophistic *modus operandi*. But whereas Munck had relied almost exclusively upon evidence from Philostratus (from the late second century A.D.), Winter has been able to locate several sources that point to a sophistic presence in Corinth nearer the time of Paul. Spanning the period between about A.D. 90 and the mid second century, these sources include two speeches of Dio Chrysostom (A.D. 89-96); a diatribe of Epictetus (A.D. 92-93); the Corinthian oration of Favorinus (reign of Hadrian); Plutarch’s *Questiones Conviviales* (A.D. 99-116); and an inscription commemorating Herodes Atticus (b. A.D. 101, d. A.D. 177). These sources, along with Paul’s Corinthian correspondence (i.e., 1 Corinthians 1-4; 9; 2 Corinthians 10-13), are used to prove Winter’s larger thesis that the Second Sophistic, traditionally thought to have emerged in the second century, was already in full swing in Corinth in the second half of the first.

²⁰ Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 123.

²¹ Though this was based on his earlier doctoral dissertation: *Philo and Paul among the Sophists: A Hellenistic Jewish and a Christian Response* (Ph.D. diss., Macquarie University, 1988).

²² Johannes Munck, “Menigheden uden Partier,” *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 15 (1952): 215-33; ET, “The Church without Factions,” *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959), 135-67.

After presenting in detail the extrabiblical evidence for the sophistic movement in first-century Corinth, Winter undertakes to prove that this is the background against which the divisions in the Corinthian church are to be understood. As such, Winter surmises that the Corinthians have seen Christianity as a kind of wisdom, the church's leaders as sophists, and themselves as students (ζηλωται/μαθηται) of these teachers and therefore as wise men. The Corinthians are "behav[ing] in secular fashion" by "measure[ing] their instructors by the same canon as do the secular Corinthians."²³ It is such secular attitudes—which are, specifically, *sophistical* in nature—that Paul repudiates in 1 Corinthians 1-4, 9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13.

Such are the views of Pogoloff, Litfin, and Winter. As a triple-braided cord, these three scholars have ably hoisted the mainsail of the rhetorical ship that has sailed the waters of NT scholarship proudly and smoothly for the last twenty years. Based largely on their work, it is now taken for granted that the wisdom with which the Corinthians are enamored, and which Paul in turn eschews, is primarily that of rhetoric. Select almost any recent article, monograph, or commentary in which the Corinthians' wisdom is addressed, and that is the basic perspective likely to be espoused.²⁴

²³ Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 175.

²⁴ In addition to those studies named in notes 5, 6, 9, 10 above, we may identify the following—Corin Mihaila, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship and Paul's Stance toward Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Library of New Testament Studies 402; New York: T & T Clark, 2009), who names Pogoloff, Winter, and Litfin as the foundations of his study (pp. 2-3); Clarke (*Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 102-7), citing Litfin and Winter (i.e., Winter's 1988 dissertation); Hays ("Conversion of the Imagination," esp. 402), expressly relying on Pogoloff; Sigurd Grindheim ("Wisdom for the Perfect: Paul's Challenge for the Corinthian Church [2:6-16]," *JBL* 121 [2002]: 689-709), drawing from Winter, Litfin, Pogoloff, and others; V. H. T. Nguyen (*Christian Identity in Corinth: A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians, Epictetus, and Valerius Maximus* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 125-29), citing both Pogoloff and Winter; Collins (*1 Corinthians*, 85), citing Pogoloff; Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 56), following Litfin and Pogoloff; Ciampa and Rosner (*First Letter to the Corinthians*, 104-12), citing Winter. Witherington (*Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 74n9) says Pogoloff's understanding of the issue in 1 Corinthians "is essentially the same as mine" (cf. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 237ff). Martin (*Corinthian Body*, 47-66) says that Paul rejects the rhetorical values attached to high social status; Oh-Young Kwon, "A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship

In this regard, I may mention here one further permutation of the argument, set forth in an article by Edgar Krentz.²⁵ Krentz situates Paul's interplay between form and content within the context of the classical controversy between "words" and "things," as embodied in the debate between rhetoricians and philosophers. Stemming from Platonic thought, the two dimensions distinguish the unreal from the true—"words" or rhetoric reflect the former, "things" or philosophy the latter. In this connection, Krentz proposes that 1:17 and 2:4 present Paul's rejection of the Corinthians' love of "persuasive rhetoric," while 2:6-16 offers his own understanding of wisdom in terms of content. Thus, Paul opposes "words," or *form*, and prefers "things," or *content*, as if advocating a form of "philosophy" over rhetoric. As such, 1 Cor 2:6-16 focuses on the true *content* of wisdom and stands "antithetical to the wisdom that comes via good speaking or persuasive rhetoric alone," that is, wisdom via *form*.²⁶

Each of these studies stands as a specimen of fine scholarship. They show a great deal of creativity in working with the internal evidence, and, unlike the Gnostic studies of the mid twentieth century, have been especially sensitive to the sociological matrix of first-century Corinth, in which context the ability to speak well was admittedly the coveted pursuit of every educated person, and the enjoyment of hearing it the fondest obsession of almost everyone else.

on the Pauline Opposition and the Nature of its Wisdom (σοφία) in 1 Corinthians 1-4," *Currents in Biblical Research* 8 (2010): 386-427, says that the Corinthians' obsession with rhetoric is one aspect of their problematic, secular perspective; Bullmore (*St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style*, 220-1, passim) says that rhetoric is a significant problem, but does not rule out philosophy.

²⁵ Edgar Krentz, "Logos or Sophia: The Pauline Use of the Ancient Dispute between Rhetoric and Philosophy," in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (eds. Fitzgerald, John T., Thomas H. Olbricht, and L. Michael White; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 277-90.

²⁶ Krentz, "Logos or Sophia," 282. Keener (*1-2 Corinthians*, 9) follows the same formulation.

In spite of it all, evidence for the rhetorical thesis is actually weaker than has been imagined. Thus, true as it is that a triple-braided cord is not easily broken, we shall undertake it here to test the rule.

Assessment of Recent Scholarship

*Rhetoric and Philosophy in the First Century*²⁷

In three of the four studies surveyed above, a putative separation between rhetoric and philosophy has played a vital role. Pogoloff is explicit that rhetoric and philosophy “remained distinct and competitive cultures,”²⁸ and that we must therefore “be especially cautious about any close linkage between rhetoric and philosophy in Paul’s Corinth.”²⁹ Hence, he says, though rhetors could speak well on any subject, we have no reason to believe that they ever spoke on philosophical issues.³⁰

Winter avoids making such overt claims, but one suspects that this dynamic is consequential in his analysis as well. Indeed, in his discussion of sophism in Alexandria, he spends close to thirty pages sketching the split between rhetoric and philosophy, the withdrawal of the philosophers from the public sphere, and the dominance of the rhetoricians.³¹ Moreover, it seems to be on these grounds that he omits any discussion of

²⁷ With the permission of *Neotestamentica*, this section has incorporated modified material from my earlier article Timothy Brookins, “Rhetoric and Philosophy in the First Century: Their Relation with Respect to 1 Corinthians 1-4,” *NeoT* 44 (2010): 233-52. Where changes have been made, the present argument should be preferred.

²⁸ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 62.

²⁹ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 64.

³⁰ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 65.

³¹ Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 16-25, 44-58.

philosophical wisdom and the possibility that this could explain the language of “wisdom,” the “wise man,” and the values associated with him in 1 Corinthians (e.g., “powerful” and “well-born” in 1:26, “rich” and “kings” in 4:8). Indeed, it is striking that Winter writes not so much as a word to rule out philosophy as an explanation. We may perhaps presume that he means for the first-century dominance of rhetoric, and its (ostensibly) complete separation from philosophy, to be explanation enough.

We have seen a similar dynamic in Krentz’s essay. For Krentz, Paul’s apparent shifting between discussion of wisdom’s form in 1:17-2:5 and its content in 2:6-16 is resolved in the thesis that Paul opposes the former in favor of the latter, in the manner of the philosopher taking the side of true content over the mere form of the rhetorician. In that regard, the historic philosophy-rhetoric dispute again supplies the framework for sorting out the data.

Although Litfin avoids separating rhetoric and philosophy, his understanding of their relationship nonetheless leaves rhetoric entirely dominant. He fills nearly a hundred pages making the point that there had been a tradition of synthesis between the two, only to reveal at last that, in first-century rhetoric, “the scales tipped to form over content.”³² At that time, he points out, the role of the rhetorician became merely that of persuader, whose chief aim was not truth, but the fulfillment of audience expectations for delight. What Litfin’s formulation really amounts to, then, is the absorption of philosophy into rhetoric—to the point of philosophy’s essential annihilation. Thus Litfin’s proposed “synthesis” between rhetoric and philosophy seems to be practically equivalent to what others have meant by rhetoric: call “wisdom” a matter of mere form, or call it the well-

³² Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 89, 114, 119.

expressed knowledge of the liberally educated speaker, but it is not really a matter of philosophical truth or “content.”

It should be clear here that the issue is not simply which direction the internal evidence of the letter has naturally taken interpreters—toward rhetoric or toward philosophy—nor simply a matter of how the social milieu has helped illuminate the text. In all of this it is evident that conceived *relationship* between rhetoric and philosophy in the first century—or the external evidence, formulated in terms of a rigid *model*—has been laid over top of the internal evidence of 1 Corinthians, in some formulations determining, almost *a priori*, in which direction the evidence can be taken. But either formulation—whether the absolute separation model followed by Pogoloff, or the “synthesis” model of Litfin—relies on a theoretical construct that hardly holds true in first-century reality. Hence, in an embodied historical situation such as that behind 1 Corinthians, such rigid hermeneutical frameworks will be of very limited value. What is needed is a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, one which pays attention to the theoretical strictures provided by the sources, but which is flexible enough to account for actual first-century phenomena.

Thus while the rhetoric-philosophy relationship has already been sketched in detail elsewhere (and most fully by Litfin), it will profit us to canvass it again here. In the subsequent section, we shall trace this relationship at both the theoretical and practical levels, focusing on but not limiting attention to the first century A.D. Even our brief survey should be sufficient to show that the categories of “rhetoric-rhetorician/sophist” and “philosophy-philosopher” are relatively flexible labels, understood in different ways

by different ancient authors (and sometimes in different ways even within single sources), though on the whole resisting conflation.

Separation in theory? Though the controversy itself was much older, our first sources to recount the ancient debate in detail come from the hand of Plato. Two of his dialogues are of note.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates dialogues with the eponymous figure, the renowned Sicilian sophist who for years dazzled Athens with his brilliant speeches. Socrates tells us that rhetoric must aim at a higher end than mere persuasion: it must aim at knowledge of virtue. Moreover, only the good and noble orator could benefit the public with his oratory (e.g., by exonerating the good or punishing the wicked). Thus the telos of rhetoric was knowledge of the true and good, and not, as the sophist would have it, mere persuasion.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato presents a theory of rhetoric as it ought to be if it is to be considered a true “art” (τέχνη). As Plato informs us, Socrates and the sophists agree that rhetoric aims at persuasiveness, but they disagree as to whether it requires actual knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). The sophists maintain that in order to be successful one needs only the appearance of probability, not real knowledge of the truth. Socrates, on the other hand, contends that only the man who knows the truth can know what will seem probable. Truth, therefore, must be the end of rhetoric.

Thus ran the dispute between rhetoricians and philosophers according to Plato. From his perspective, the one aimed at empty “words,” the other at actual “things” (*Rep.* 2.362A), the one at “seeming,” the other at “being” or “doing” (*Rep.* 521D, 527B, 601B).

From Plato throughout antiquity, the conflict persisted.³³ By the Roman era, Plato's dichotomies continued, and philosophers and rhetoricians remained as far from rapprochement as ever. From the side of the philosophers, Plato's basic views continued to be promoted. The Stoic Seneca (A.D. 1-65), for instance, maintained that audiences should be "roused to the content (*rem*), and not to the words (*verba*)" of a discourse (*Ep.* 52.14 [Gummere, LCL]; cf. 45.5-6; 52.14; 75.7). Like Plato, he contrasts "saying" and "doing" (*dicere* and *facere*; *Ep.* 20.2; 108.39); "speaking" and "living" (*loqui* and *vivere*; *Ep.* 88.42); "seeing" and "hearing" (*videre* and *audire*; *Ep.* 75.4). Rhetoric, he believed, was concerned with mere words—words full of tricks and craftiness—and aimed only at popular approval (*Ep.* 20.2; 45.8; 48.5; 75.4; 108.12). Philosophy, on the other hand—with its concern for real content—aimed to transform lives (*Ep.* 108.35-37; 95.13; 88.4).

Others agreed. While philosophers sought to foster love of virtuous living, rhetoricians were wont to entrap their listeners with clever and deceitful words (Dio, *Or.* 12.13; 33.14) and maintained no regard for the truth (Dio, *Or.* 22.4-5). As such, the rhetorician was concerned with words, but the philosopher with deeds (Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 5.26-37; 6.7-10), and especially that one's words and deeds should be in agreement (Dio, *Or.* 18.17; Philo, *Jos.* 230; *Mos.* 1.29, 283; 2.48, 66, 130, 140, 150).

But recriminations were made from the other side—rhetoricians against philosophers. In Cicero we hear that by the time of the late Roman Republic "philosophers looked down on eloquence (*eloquentiam*) and the orators on wisdom (*sapientiam*), and never touched anything from the side of the other study except what this group borrowed from that one, or that one from this" (*De or.* 3.72 [Rackham, LCL]).

³³ For a basic summary, see Samuel Ijsseling, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict: An Historical Survey* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1976), 1-40.

Philosophers, moreover, had acquired a reputation for uselessness; they had immured themselves in their studies to pursue interests far removed from the concerns of the state (Cicero, *De or.* 3.5-58; Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.2.6; Dio, 34.52). Not only were the philosophers useless, but the standards they exacted on others they themselves failed to meet. Quintilian lamented, “Very great vices have been concealed under this name [philosopher] in many persons,” for they neglect “by virtue or learning to be regarded as philosophers; instead, they put on a gloomy face and an eccentric form of dress as a cover for their immorality” (*Inst.* 1.pr.14-15).³⁴ Accordingly, he said, “[P]hilosophy can be counterfeited,” but “eloquence cannot” (*Inst.* 12.3.12). The philosophers, moreover, had become “disdainful of the precepts of rhetoric” and attempted to establish their own authority over against that of the rhetoricians (*Inst.* 12.3.12). Where philosophers were of practical value, they were often considered nothing more than moral pedants (Horace, *Sat.* 1.14.103-29; Quintilian, *Inst.* 11.1.33). The gravamen of these charges was that the philosophers were of little profit to the state, while the eloquence of the rhetorician served it well.

The theoretical separation between rhetoric and philosophy is also apparent in alleged “conversions” to philosophy, which we hear of during this era. These sometimes implied a clean break from the pursuits of sophism. A well-known case is Dio Chrysostom, who allegedly converted from sophism to philosophy during his years in exile under Domitian. Even in the second century, when rhetoric and philosophy had

³⁴ All translations of Quintilian are from Russell, LCL.

become less distinguishable, Lucian of Samosata claimed to have undergone a similar conversion (*Bis acc.* 32).³⁵

It is apparent, then, that the opposition between rhetoric and philosophy seen in Plato persisted in some form through the first century. This is evident from the polemical language waged from both sides of the dispute, as well as from attestations of “conversion” from one science to the other. Nonetheless, we should question how far the separation can be pressed, even in theory. Blinded amid the fury of the ancient fracas, we seem to have missed the fact that there was, in reality, no united view as to how the two ought to relate; there were rather many competing perspectives. Cicero’s dialogue *De Oratore* reveals this to have been the case in his day (mid first century B.C.), and in the generation before him, when the dialogue is set. In that work, Crassus presents the ideal (and Cicero’s position)—that rhetoric and philosophy be wedded. Anthony presents the counter argument—that the orator need not study philosophy. Both claim to present positions that find support in their day. The very existence of this dialogue signifies that rhetoricians, at any rate, had reached no full agreement as to the value of philosophy.

Union in theory and in practice. As just suggested, Plato’s jaundiced perspective was not the only one that found acceptance. Indeed, amid the tumult of rhetoric and philosophy’s longstanding battle stood a substantial tradition of concord. Plato’s coeval Isocrates had insisted on the synthesis of wisdom and eloquence (*Antid.* 89; 170-214). And within the tradition of Isocrates fell the later rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilian.

³⁵ Others had similar experiences of conversion to philosophy. C. Cassius Longinus converted to Epicureanism in the first century B.C. (Cicero, *Fam.* 15.16.3; 17.3); the Epicurean system was usually considered to be hostile to “display” rhetoric (see Clive Chandler, *Philodemus on Rhetoric: Translation and Exegetical Essays* [Routledge, 2006]). For further examples of such “conversions,” see Henri Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York: The New American Library, 1956), 206.

Cicero noted that, from the time of Socrates, there had occurred a “reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain”—that is, between eloquence and wisdom (*De or.* 3.49). In Cicero’s view, “wisdom without eloquence (*sapientiam sine eloquentia*) does too little for the good of states, but . . . eloquence without wisdom (*eloquentiam sine sapientia*) is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful” (*Inv.* 1.1; cf. 1.2; 1.5. 2.178 [Hubbell, LCL]). Quintilian expressed a similar sentiment, calling oratory “the best gift of the gods to man” (*Inst.* 12.11.30), since, *in combination with “Reason,”* one may use it to “defend friends, guide the senate, and lead a people or an army” (12.16.14-15). He lamented that the moral concerns of philosophy should never have been wrenched from the orators: oratory ought always to have been concerned with both eloquence *and* wisdom, in fact with all the parts of philosophy—rational, natural, and moral. Indeed, to be a good orator one needed also to be a good man (*Inst.* 1.pr.9-20; 12.2.1-23). In short, Cicero and Quintilian, among others,³⁶ affirmed that wisdom and eloquence—or as it were, philosophy and rhetoric—often did not, but nonetheless *ought*, to have gone together.

If in theory rhetoricians did not reject philosophy outright, neither did philosophers entirely reject rhetoric. Epictetus said explicitly that he did not disparage the study of rhetoric (*Diatr.* 2.23.46-7), and called it the gift of God and a benefit to others (2.23; 2.24.1-3). Seneca spoke to the same effect: “Even philosophy does not renounce the company of cleverness . . . If . . . you can attain eloquence (*eloquentia*) without

³⁶ Theon’s *progymnasmata* also follows in the tradition of Cicero and Quintilian, as is evident in his discussion of theses (*Prog.* 120). Further references to the role of philosophy in rhetorical education include: Cicero, *De or.* 3.65-66; *Fin.* 3.3; 4.4; *Rhet. Her.* 1.1.1; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.pr.13-15; 2.15.24-31; 4.44.57; 12.2.29; 12.10.52.

painstaking, and if you either are naturally gifted or can gain eloquence at slight cost, make the most of it and apply it to the noblest uses” (*Ep.* 75.3-5; cf. 79.9-10).

This fusion of rhetoric and philosophy in theory is noteworthy. Perhaps more significant, however, was how things worked out in practice. Indeed, we find both rhetoricians interloping onto the territory claimed for the philosophers, and philosophers encroaching upon the ground claimed for the rhetoricians. In Philo we find those labeled “sophists” engaging in “philosophical” activity, such as discussing the “facts of nature” (*Her.* 246-7), naming the elements (*Contempl.* 4), and delivering “philosophical discourses” (*Det.* 74). Conversely, Epictetus chastises philosophers for sharing in all the vices of the orators: over-valuing eloquence, and coveting praise, money, and large crowds (*Diatr.* 3.23, especially §10, 19, 24). The younger Seneca finds similar fault with student-philosophers of his day, charging that a great number of them have “sat for many years at the feet of a philosopher and yet have not acquired the slightest tinge of wisdom,” as they were more concerned with enjoying and parroting their teachers’ rhetoric than with any moral profit (*Ep.* 108.5-6). He goes on to say that such pupils of philosophy “come to their teachers to develop, not their souls, but their wits” (108.23). Instead, he would have them become “practical” philosophers, and not “just to entertain [their] listeners with a *clever display of language*” (*Ep.* 104.22; my italics).³⁷ Elsewhere he expresses dissatisfaction regarding “how much superfluous and unpractical matter the philosophers contain,” who “*know more about careful speaking than about careful living*” (*Ep.* 88.42-43; my italics).

³⁷ Quoted from Robin Campbell, *Seneca: Letters from a Stoic* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 190.

It therefore seems that many philosophers had picked up some of the rhetoricians' (ostensibly) disreputable habits. At any rate, their avowal of rhetoric, in practice, was inescapable.³⁸ Even Plato, who so derided the art of the sophists, is said to have displayed great eloquence in the very process of refuting them (Cicero, *De or.* 1.47; cf. 1.137-145; 2.75-76; 3.59-61; 3.70-73), a charge to which Seneca was no less liable (e.g., Suetonius, *Cal.* 53.2).

Thus many who were called philosophers were deemed guilty of the worst alleged vices of the rhetorician. Consequently, it became necessary to distinguish carefully between the “real” philosopher and his mere counterfeit. Just as we find Plato speaking of the “spurious” versus the “true” philosopher (*Rep.* 485D), so we find later philosophers denying the label to those they considered unworthy of it. Musonius Rufus advised students to consort “with men who were philosophers not in name only but in truth (οὐκ ὀνόματι μόνον ἀλλ’ ἀληθῶς φιλοσόφοις)” (*Diatr.* 17.14-16 [Lutz]). Dio Chrysostom on one occasion said that the “philosophers” with whom his audience had grievance were not *really* philosophers, for “no one is a philosopher who belongs among the unjust and wicked” (*Or.* 31.3; cf. 34.3). In several places he refers to this class of people as “those who are called philosophers” (τῶν καλοῦμενων φιλοσόφων) (*Or.* 13.11; 31.8; 34.3; cf. 31.8-12, esp. 10). He notes that unfitting habits had led to a certain ambiguity of identity: “The disease is already affecting, not only public speakers, but some philosophers as well—though it would be more correct to say that public speakers are no longer easy to recognize” (*Or.* 32.68 [Cohoon, LCL]). Epictetus, like Dio, simply narrows the

³⁸ On the use of rhetoric in philosophical prose of the Hellenistic period: Dirk Schenkeveld, “Philosophical Prose,” in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 195-264.

qualifications: to be a “genuine philosopher” (οἱ γνησίως φιλοσοφοῦντες) one should live like Socrates, Diogenes, or Cleanthes (*Diatr.* 3.26.23). Despite these protestations, however, we must realize that there was a vast difference between the ideal philosopher and the reality. Indeed, the circle *could* have been tightened in until the only individuals that fit within it were the purest specimens, but this obviously would have done no justice to the way the designation was actually being applied.

Clearly, classifying the rhetorician and philosopher could be thorny business. G. R. Stanton observes, “Educated Greeks with literary and philosophical interests who lived and traveled in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire have proved difficult to classify, particularly in terms of the contrast between sophists and philosophers.”³⁹ Stanton considers, for example, Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, and Aelius Aristides, who have been placed in either camp, in ancient and modern literature alike. How, then, does one decide what is the appropriate designation for the would-be “rhetorician” or “philosopher”? In Stanton’s assessment of Plutarch, Dio, Aristides, and Marcus Aurelius, he finds that there was a tendency “to want to be regarded as philosophers and not as sophists.”⁴⁰ That is, in their own minds, philosopher and sophist were two different species, not one. It should further be said, however, that each of these authors was active several decades after the time of the Corinthian correspondence, and squarely within the period we know as the Second Sophistic, by which time the boundaries between rhetorician and philosopher had indeed worn thin.⁴¹ In this regard, though I cannot accept

³⁹ G. R. Stanton, “Sophists and Philosophers: Problems of Classification,” *AJP* 94 (1973): 350.

⁴⁰ Stanton, “Sophists and Philosophers,” 364.

⁴¹ Nowhere is this thinning more evident than in Lucian. His satires are replete with ostentatious and morally-bankrupt philosophers; see esp. *Icar.* 29; 30; *Par.* 31-37; 43; 56; *Men.* 4-5; *Fug.* 13; 16-20;

Pogoloff's full conclusion on this point, I must agree with his basic contention that the more ambiguous philosopher-rhetorician dynamic that characterized the Second Sophistic cannot be appropriately retrojected into Paul's day. For, as he observes:⁴²

- (1) One finds only a few examples of "philosophical sophists" between the fourth century B.C.E. and the late second century C.E.
- (2) The Second Sophistic, in full bloom, postdated Paul's Corinth by a century.⁴³
- (3) The philosopher and the sophist, though often overlapping in character, were distinguishable even in the Second Sophistic.

We can summarize our discussion so far by saying that, not only did many rhetoricians in Paul's day recognize the necessity of philosophy, but all of the major philosophical schools, in general, conceded to the value and usefulness of rhetoric, even if their polemical contexts usually compelled them to denigrate it. In that regard, our sources present a certain tension on the subject. On the one hand, rhetoricians and philosophers tended to disassociate from the other, each claiming that their own science was preeminent and that the others' was degenerate. Yet, we have seen that the separation was far from absolute. Neither could easily deny the value of the other. This point they grudged in theory, and proved in practice.

Moreover, all this confusion reveals a certain range of flexibility for the relevant categories. The given categories, which are not entirely empty but which are nonetheless

Eunuch. 7; as well as the works *Philosophies for Sale; The Dead Come to Life, or The Fisherman; The Lover of Lies;* and *Nigrinus*. Frequently philosophers are even called "sophists"; e.g., *Iupp. conf.* 19, 27, 30, 32; *Par.* 43; *Fug.* 10-11; *Eunuch.* 13. Even if meant only in a pejorative sense, the association with sophism illustrates the heightened similarity. On the pejorative use of σοφίστης, see Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: Histoire des mots* (Klincksieck, 2000), 1031. On the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy in the Second Sophistic, see also Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 206-12.

⁴² Summarized from Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 66.

⁴³ In relation to this point, see discussion of Winter's (*Philo and Paul among the Sophists*) counter thesis below.

somewhat flexible, are “rhetoric-rhetorician/sophist” and “philosophy-philosopher.” Opposition between the two was intense enough to invalidate any claim that there was no real difference between the two. All the same, however, enough ambiguous characters apparently occupied the streets and lecture halls of antiquity to cast doubt upon the notion that the philosopher *never* played the rhetor, or the rhetor the philosopher. We therefore ought to employ the given distinctions, but with the realization that they are artificial, *theoretical* constructs reinforced in a polemical situation by the most stalwart proponents of each science. Thus, we should grant each one the designation he professes, mindful that, in practice, a professing rhetorician may at times have played the philosopher, or a philosopher the rhetorician.

Rhetoric and Philosophy in Recent Scholarship

In this light, we now return to Pogoloff. First of all, it has become apparent that his assumption that “philosophers did not become rhetors,” and vice versa, and his argument on these grounds that rhetors were not speaking on philosophical topics, cannot be sustained. Worse, though, are the implications this assumption has had for exegesis. To my mind, his assumed wedge between rhetoric and philosophy has made it so that rhetoric, which seems plausibly to explain some elements of Paul’s discourse, has been stretched to explain elements in which rhetoric is really the less convincing option. We shall return to this point later in the chapter, and again more fully in chapter 5. But for now we can suffice it to say that Pogoloff is surely without justification in using a theoretical rhetoric-philosophy divorce as a way of removing philosophical wisdom from consideration—as he has expressly done.

To a lesser extent, this is an apt criticism of Winter as well. It has already been observed that, although Winter avoids *explicitly* ruling out philosophy on the basis of its relative estrangement from rhetoric, he does give us reason to believe that the split-dynamic has played an important role in directing him to his conclusions. For not only does he fill nearly thirty pages discussing the split, but, thereafter, the possibility that some sort of philosophical wisdom could be the focus of Paul's attention in chapters 1-4 is not so much as mentioned. Are we not to believe that he considers the separation of rhetoric and philosophy, and the hegemony of the former in society, to be reason enough for the omission?

To Litfin, we may ask whether the available evidence really supports his claim that "the vast majority of people" couldn't distinguish a philosopher from a rhetorician. If cultivation of rhetorical skill was indeed the beginning and end of the entire school curriculum (as in many ways it was), then surely parents knew the difference between sending their children to philosophers, and sending them to rhetoricians or sophists. Add to this that we are not talking about the "vast majority of people" but about a real historical situation dealing with a very specific, and by Litfin's own admission, status-conscious group of people in the Corinthian church, who were apparently exceptionally interested in this sort of wisdom.⁴⁴ Would these not have known the difference? Moreover, we are missing the whole nub of the first-century philosophical-rhetorical debate over σοφία if we think that wisdom was a thing so amicably shared: as we shall see below, it was scarcely considered common property.

⁴⁴ True, Litfin (*St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 166) notes that "the average member" of the congregation could not claim to have been a finished orator, but he also notes that some may have been such, and that there were others "on the fringe" of circles of status, influence and sophistication in Corinth.

Finally, it should be said regarding Krentz's theory—that Paul presents the gospel's wisdom of content over against the Corinthians' wisdom of form, as if preferring philosophy over rhetoric—that we are missing any of the dichotomies that would ordinarily have attended this debate. Paul conjures up no antitheses between “words” and “things,” “speaking” and “doing,” or “seeming” and “being.” Nor does he associate the Corinthians' wisdom with “empty” words, “clever tricks,” or the courting of applause. Not that this in itself renders Krentz's thesis invalid, but it does immensely decrease its likelihood, especially since, as our survey of the commentaries has shown, it is already less than clear that σοφία λόγου must refer to rhetoric.⁴⁵ Moreover, it may be just as likely that Paul is pitting *his own type of content* against *other content*. We can only conclude that the form-versus-content framework that Krentz's employs is more imposed on the text than it is drawn from it.

Needless to say, none of what has been said so far renders the rhetorical thesis impossible. But I hope to have shown that the extraneous rhetoric-versus-philosophy dynamic constructed by certain scholars has been used *misleadingly* as a sort of hermeneutical matrix for deciphering the meaning of 1 Corinthians 1-4. In many cases, and most unequivocally in Pogoloff, wisdom has been conceived as an either-or deal, so that, once certain features in the text seem to be identified in relation to rhetoric, the counter wisdom of philosophy must be sidelined from consideration—a conclusion far different from the philosophical-rhetorical thesis we see subscribed to early in the twentieth century. Of course, a matter for later consideration will be whether wisdom in the first century is really as appropriately identified with rhetoric as it is with philosophy

⁴⁵ Despite Krentz's assertion (“Logos or Sophia,” 280) that 1:17 constitutes an “explicit” rejection of wisdom conveyed by rhetoric.

(i.e., wisdom may in fact be an either-or issue as regards the *particular historical occasion*). For the time being, however, I should simply like to emphasize that the imposition, *ab extra*, of a theoretical “separation” *model* to discount philosophy is in itself a less than satisfactory use of the external evidence. But our main concern is over how such an external scheme may have skewed our examination of the text itself. It is to these matters that we now turn.

Λόγος and Σοφία

As an internal foundation for the rhetorical thesis, advocates have turned to the four disputed phrases mentioned earlier: (1) 1:17 – οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου – “not with eloquent wisdom” (NRSV); (2) 2:1 – οὐ καθ’ ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας – “not with lofty words or wisdom” (NRSV); (3) 2:4 – οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖ[ς] σοφίας [λόγοις] – “not with plausible words of wisdom” (NRSV); and, to a lesser extent, (4) 2:13 – οὐκ ἐν διδακτοῖς ἀνθρωπίνης σοφίας λόγοις – “words not taught by human wisdom” (NRSV). On account of σοφία’s conjunction with λόγος in these verses, such scholars have concluded that the expressions must refer specifically to rhetoric. Hence, Winter takes liberty in rendering οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις (2:4) “persuasive rhetoric.”⁴⁶ Wolff translates the same expression “Weisheitsrhetoric.”⁴⁷ Pogoloff is able to say of 1:17, 2:1, 4 that “*any Hellenistic reader would have taken [Paul’s] disclaimers to refer to rhetorical practice*”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Bruce Winter, “Rhetoric,” in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin; Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), 821.

⁴⁷ Wolff, *Die erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, 49.

⁴⁸ *Logos and Sophia*, 7.

(my italics), and of 2:13 that the rhetorical meaning is “unmistakeable.”⁴⁹ Mihaila is equally confident, concluding that “the evidence adduced by Litfin and Winter is *overwhelmingly* in favor of understanding σοφία when used in juxtaposition with λόγος as rhetoric (i.e., cleverness in speaking), not the least because when the two are used together they appear in the context of preaching (cf. 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:1, 4, 13)” (my italics).⁵⁰ Oh-Young Kwon follows in the train of Pogoloff, though with a less critical eye, claiming that the reference of 1:10-4:21 to Greco-Roman rhetoric is “*isclearly evident* in Paul’s frequent use of rhetorical terminology such as σοφία and its equivalents (which appear 26 times in chs. 1-4) and λόγος (nine times)” (my italics).⁵¹

Unfortunately, an excess of confidence does not provide sufficient compensation for slapdash treatment of the evidence. Indeed, either the rhetorical interpretation of these texts is truly “unmistakeable” and so “clearly evident” that no examination of counter explanations is necessary—a conclusion which our survey of the commentary literature has belied—or we should expect some painstaking lexicographical analysis and an extensive demonstration that the rhetorical meaning is in fact superior among the options. Kwon’s statement seems to convey that the mere appearance of σοφία and λόγος ends the discussion. Pogoloff is more conscientious, though hardly more accurate. He speaks repeatedly of the “ordinary” or “common” usages of σοφία and λόγος.⁵² Putting the two

⁴⁹ *Logos and Sophia*, 140.

⁵⁰ *The Paul-Apollos Relationship*, 92.

⁵¹ Kwon, “A Critical Review of Recent Scholarship on the Pauline Opposition and the Nature of its Wisdom (σοφία) in 1 Corinthians 1-4,” 420. Cf. Krentz, “Logos or Sophia,” 280, where he calls 1:17 an “explicit” rejection of wisdom conveyed by rhetoric.

⁵² Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 109, 112 (twice). Cf. also his claim that συζήτητης (1:20) refers “most naturally” to the rhetorician (160).

together, he then concludes that the “most common and least specialized or esoteric meaning” is “sophisticated speech.”⁵³ But, upon closer examination, on neither count is the meaning Pogoloff is actually demanding the “ordinary” one. Let us trace his argument.

First, he solicits LSJ on σοφία, interweaving its entries with his own comments:

The original meaning of σοφία, ‘*cleverness or skill in handicraft and art,*’ continued throughout antiquity. It could also mean ‘*skill in matters of common life, sound judgement, intelligence, practical wisdom, etc., . . . cunning shrewdness, . . . learning.*’ Less frequently, it meant ‘*speculative wisdom,*’ including knowledge of divine matters, or ‘*natural philosophy.*’⁵⁴

Presumably on the basis of the entries, he then concludes that the ordinary usage of σοφία “suggested nothing of philosophical or religious speculation,” but was rather “a matter of learning applied to *practical* accomplishment.”⁵⁵ To undergird this claim, he selects a portion of *TDNT*’s entry on σοφία referring to the “seven competent wise men” of the Classical period and their activities as statesmen, judges, legislators, and so forth. Significantly, however, Pogoloff inserts a footnote here faulting the author of the entry for going on to affirm that the term came, later in antiquity, to refer (as Pogoloff paraphrases) “only to philosophical ideas and qualities.” But there is in fact much truth in what he denies. Whether or not the term “less frequently” denoted *speculative* wisdom, a broader philosophical meaning did become far and away the dominant one. In the first place, the “seven wise men” whom Pogoloff brings to bear themselves came to be understood in philosophical terms. By the time the canon of seven was forming in the

⁵³ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 109.

⁵⁴ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 109.

⁵⁵ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 109.

fourth century B.C., already they are referred to as “philosophers” (φιλοσοφεῖν; Plato, *Prot.* 343a); though, it is perhaps true that both rhetoricians and philosophers later claimed them for their own (cf. Cicero, *De or.* 3.56). More importantly, however, Pogoloff provides no lexicographical, and particularly *diachronic*, evidence to show, against *TDNT*, that σοφία is best—or as he would have it, more “commonly”—understood in terms of rhetoric. In fact, R. Dean Anderson observes that Pogoloff “really only cites one concrete use of this word [σοφία] in a definite rhetorical context, namely, Isoc. 15.199-200.”⁵⁶ More could be found, no doubt. But even if they were provided (and they are not), mere examples of rhetorical σοφία, found at some point in Classical antiquity, hardly demonstrate that the rhetorical meaning was the “*common*” or “*ordinary*” meaning in the *first century*.

It is when we begin to undertake a lexicographical analysis of this terminology that the rhetorical interpretation begins to topple. To be sure, σοφία could indeed mean “cleverness,” “skill,” or “practical wisdom,” as cited in the first two entries of LSJ. Viewing the term diachronically, however, we observe that, beginning from the late Classical period, the σοφ- word group gradually moved away from this range of meaning and indeed eventually came to designate, predominantly, the pursuits of philosophy. So Chantraine’s entry on σοφία:

Mis à part les emplois particuliers que σοφίστης a connus en attique et plus tard pour l’enseignement de la rhétorique, emplois souvent péjoratifs, les débuts de l’histoire des mots σοφός, σοφία, etc., montrent comment les Grecs sont passés d’une connaissance pratique à une connaissance philosophique, les mêmes termes convenant pour ces deux démarches.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Anderson, *Rhetorical Theory and Paul*, 270.

⁵⁷ Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 1031. We should also note here that LSJ’s entries tend to be ordered chronologically. The first two entries, “cleverness”/“skill” and “practical wisdom,” thus name meanings that prevailed in earlier times, whereas the third meaning,

This movement can be demonstrated in one way from the pitting of σοφός and δείνος *against* each other in late Classical and Hellenistic usage, where the one referred to *philosophical wisdom*, the other to *practical cleverness*. For instance: “Our proof will be unconvincing to merely clever men (δείνοις) but convincing to wise men (σοφοίς)” (Plato, *Phaed.* 245C [Fowler, LCL]; cf. *Thaet.* 164D). Or again: “And in no other way will the wise man (σοφόν) approve himself acute, nimble-witted, and generally skilful (δεινόν) in argument” (D. L. 7.48 [Hicks, LCL]). The same conceptual distinction can be found in Latin literature around the first century.⁵⁸ On the other hand, when these two words are paired in more or less a synonymous sense, the association comes to be predominantly negative, not positive.⁵⁹ For example, in Dio Chrysostom, σοφούς τε καὶ δεινοὺς refers to “pettifogging lawyers, who pledge their services to all alike for a fee, even to the greatest scoundrels,” etc. (*Or.* 7.123 [Cohon, LCL]). Incidentally, Pogoloff claims that in the first century σοφία, in conjunction with δείνος (“clever or skillful”), often refers to the rhetorician (but in a *positive* sense?), though he provides only one example, and that missing any reference to σοφία!⁶⁰ Regardless, σοφία is *not* used in conjunction with δείνος in 1 Corinthians.

“wisdom”/“learning,” including philosophical speculation, came to prevail during the Classical and Hellenistic periods.

⁵⁸ Seneca often contrasts the wisdom of the philosopher with the cunning of the sophist (e.g., *Ep.* 111, esp. §3). Cicero speaks of cunning dissembling for wisdom (e.g., *Off.* 3.72; 3.96). Cf. Dio Chrysostom below (n59).

⁵⁹ In context, other examples of this pairing are arguably negative as well; cf. Dio, *Or.* 32.2; 72.15.

⁶⁰ *Logos and Sophia*, 112-13. In the context we do find σοφιστείαν. But whether “sophistry” is commonly, and favorably, designated as “wisdom” (σοφία) in the first century is precisely what is under debate. Pogoloff (*Logos and Sophia*, 114) does cite one more passage where σοφία and δεινότης are in fact conjoined (Plutarch, *Mor.* 148D). However, they are conjoined in reference not to a rhetorician but to a little girl. Moreover, the pairing in the context seems to indicate that σοφία’s *negative* sense of “cleverness” was best clarified by association with δεινότης.

Furthermore, we have positively compelling lexicographical evidence that by the first century the wider public had indeed yielded the rights of wisdom—at least in name—to the sole proprietorship of philosophy.

First, it should be said that Paul’s affirmation that “Greeks desire wisdom” (1:22; Ἕλληνες σοφίαν ζητοῦσιν) in no place to my knowledge finds parallel with reference to rhetorical wisdom. We do, however, find parallel statements frequently regarding philosophy or the philosopher *specifically*, and these issuing not only from the mouths of philosophers, but also from rhetoricians. Seneca defines philosophy as the “love and pursuit of wisdom” (*sapientiae amor est et adfectatio*; *Ep.* 89.4); philosophy is “that which seeks,” wisdom “that which is sought” (*quod adfectatur*; *Ep.* 89.6). Strikingly, however, we find similar statements in Quintilian. He regrets that philosophers now hold exclusive claim to the title *studiosi sapientiae*, or “seekers of wisdom” (*Inst.* 1.pr.14). He later uses an analogous phrase with reference to philosophy itself—*studia sapientiae*, or “the pursuit of wisdom” (*Inst.* 12.2.8). Cicero confirms that Quintilian’s usage is a known technical designation for philosophy, for he states: “Those who seek wisdom are called philosophers, and philosophy is no other thing—if I may be allowed to translate it into our own idiom—than the *pursuit of wisdom (studium sapientiae)*” (*Off.* 2.5). In another place, Cicero speaks of “the pursuit of wisdom (*studio sapientiae*), which is also called philosophy” (*Tusc. Disp.* 1.1).

Over and over we find this expression as a circumlocution for philosophy.⁶¹ But might this expression also refer to the art of rhetoric? The evidence suggests otherwise. As often as we find certain authors advocating a conjunction between the two, the

⁶¹ For additional examples, see: Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4.3 ; 5.8 ; Seneca, *Vit.* 24.4; Tacitus, *Agr.* 4 ; cf. Lucretius, *De Rer. Nat.* 5.7-12, 18-21; 1.635-644.

“pursuit of wisdom” seems to have been one thing, and “eloquence” another. To this even the rhetoricians bear witness. We have already seen how Cicero, in speaking of the regretful severance that certain individuals had perpetrated between the “tongue and the brain,” or as it were, eloquence and wisdom, had stated that, when those at the helm of the state possessed eloquence (*eloquentia*) but had neglected the pursuit of wisdom (*sapientia*), disaster had ensued (*Inv.* 1.1-3). Quintilian too, as much as he desired synthesis between the two, also bore witness to their separation in common usage. He customarily refers to “rhetoric” and “philosophy” using the respective labels *eloquentia* and *sapientia*, or “eloquence” and “wisdom” (*Inst.* 12.6.7; cf. Tacitus, *Agr.* 4). We find analogous usage when it comes to the practitioners themselves: there are “the eloquent” (*eloquentes*) and there are the “philosophers” or “wise men” (*sapientes*) (*Inst.* 1.pr.3).

This last observation brings us to a crucial point which we have yet to discuss, and that is the usual referent of the term σοφός or *sapiens* (“wise man”) in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. There has been relative neglect of the significance of this *substantive* (as distinguished from the attributive) designation in 1 Corinthians. In the first four chapters it appears four times as a definite substantive (1:19, 27; 3:19, 20) and at least once as an indefinite substantive (1:20).⁶² It also appears as a substantive in 6:5 (“Is there no wise man to judge among you?”), a text which, alongside 3:18, provides the most probative evidence that the title was one some of the Corinthians were using of themselves. Twice Paul inserts the title into OT quotations, where no known text type actually includes it (3:19/Job 5:13; 3:20/Ps 93:11). Should we assume, as Winter and others do, that this is the sophist or rhetorician?

⁶² The NRSV obscures the technical nature of this designation by rendering it “the one who is wise” (e.g., 1:20).

Like σοφία, σοφός underwent a considerable semantic shift between the Archaic period and Hellenistic and Roman times. Though the term continued to carry some of its earlier meanings, by the first century philosophical associations had in fact become the most dominant. The “wise man” as a technical class had first been elaborated in Plato’s *Republic*, and was further developed in each of the major philosophical schools thereafter. By the first century, we see that, even when the term did not refer specifically to the philosopher, its meaning was generally colored by philosophical usage, as it was in Hellenistic Judaism, and in its more generalized usage as the person with good moral judgment.⁶³ Scarcely, however, was it used in connection with the rhetorician.

All of what has been said so far is compellingly born out by a deeper examination of first-century usage of “wisdom” language in rhetorical and philosophical writings. In my own comprehensive examination of four authors—Seneca, Quintilian, and Theon from the first century A.D., and the author of the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* from the century before—not only is wisdom language exceedingly more prevalent in the philosopher (Seneca), but even when it is used by the *rhetoricians*, still it refers to philosophy more often than it does to rhetoric, and apparently in a standard technical

⁶³ On earlier, Classical usage of the σοφ- word group, see A. W. H. Adkins’ “Review of Burkhard Gladigow’s *Sophia und Kosmos: Untersuchungen zur Frühgeschichte von σοφός und σοφία*,” *The Classical Review*, New Series 21 (1971): 391-93; also, Walter Burkert, “Platon oder Pythagoras? Zum Ursprung des Wortes ‘Philosophie,’” *Hermes* 88 (1960): 159-77. For the dominance of the philosophical meaning after Plato, see G. B. Kerferd, “The Sage in Hellenistic Philosophical Literature,” in *The Sage in Israel and Ancient Near East* (eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns), 320: “One might say in general that the concept of the wise man must be interpreted from Plato and Aristotle onward in terms of the various systems of philosophy within which the concept is positioned.” On its usage in Hellenistic Judaism, see Michael Kolarcik, S. J., “The Sage behind the Wisdom of Solomon,” in *Scribes, Sages, and Seers: The Sage in the Eastern Mediterranean World* (Leo Perdue, ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 245-57. For a generalized moral usage indebted to the philosophical tradition, see Cicero’s *De Officiis* (e.g., 1.159; 3.29, 38, 89-93), which was based on the writings of the Stoic Panaetius (2.60; 3.7).

sense.⁶⁴ By my count, the total appearances of the σοφ-/*sapient*- root⁶⁵ in these authors are as follows:

Table 1. Occurrences of the σοφ-/*sapient*- root in contemporary literature

Author	Occurrences
Seneca	550+
Quintilian	60
<i>Ad herennium</i>	17
Theon	12

That there are far fewer occurrences of this language in *Ad Herennium* and Theon is as expected, given their brevity in comparison with the other authors. But one is struck by the paucity of wisdom language in Quintilian when set next to the works of Seneca, which are of comparable length.⁶⁶ It should go without saying that Seneca almost exclusively uses the terms “wisdom” (*sapientia*) of philosophy (e.g., *Ep.* 89.4-6), and “wise man” (*sapiens*) of the philosopher (e.g., *Ep.* 9; 41; 109; *Vit. Beat.* 16.3), and specifically of the Stoic; I have yet to find an example where he uses the “wise man” of the rhetorician specifically.

What is noteworthy, however, is not just that the three rhetorical works exhibit markedly fewer uses of wisdom language than do the works of Seneca, but that even in these rhetorical works such language, when it does appear, occurs still as technical language for philosophy/philosophers, though not for rhetoric/rhetoricians (cf. table 2). It

⁶⁴ From Seneca, I considered the moral epistles and moral essays; from Quintilian, the *Institutio Oratoria*; and from Theon, the *Progymnasmata*.

⁶⁵ Including the noun σοφία/*sapientia*; the adjective σοφός/*sapiens*, whether attributive, predicative, or substantival; and, though rare, the adverb σοφῶς/*sapienter*.

⁶⁶ I may add that this terminology appears more than twice as often in Cicero’s philosophical work *De Finibus* as it does in his rather longer, rhetorical work *De Oratore*—some 150 times in comparison with some 60.

should be noted that *not one* occurrence of *sapiens*/σοφός (“wise man”) in either *Ad Herennium* or Theon refers to the rhetorician, whereas in Theon at least one, and perhaps as many as 7, refer to the philosopher specifically (*Prog.* 126.16; cf. 123.7, 9, 14, 20, 24; 124.9).⁶⁷ Quintilian is even more telling. At least 12 times *sapiens* refers clearly to the philosopher, without qualification, while in only two cases does it refer to the rhetorician, and in both occurrences *with* qualification.⁶⁸ That is, like Seneca, Quintilian uses *sapiens* as a default term for the philosopher. He uses a separate term for the rhetorician—*eloquentes*. For instance, he notes that in earlier times “philosophers and orators (*sapientes atque eloquentes*) were taken to be the same” (1.pr.13). Not so in his own day, however. We have already pointed out that the same goes for his use of *sapientia*: this is the accepted name for philosophy, as opposed to rhetoric, which goes by the name of *eloquentia* (12.6.7; cf. 2.15.33). In the two instances where *sapiens* does refer to the rhetorician, Quintilian betrays that he is not following common acceptance. In the first of these texts, he mentions “the orator, who *ought to be* a wise man (*qui debet esse sapiens*)” (1.10.6). Apparently it does not go without saying that he will actually be thought one. The second text is even more revealing. In the context, Quintilian is lamenting the withdrawal of philosophers from public life and voicing the urgency of having that vacancy filled (12.2.7):

Hence this exhortation of mine does not mean that I want the orator to be a philosopher, for no other way of life is more remote from the duties of a citizen and the task of an orator generally. . . . What philosopher has ever been active in the government of the state, the very subject on which so many of them give so

⁶⁷ Line numbers follow L. Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1854; repr. 1966), 2:59-130.

⁶⁸ Of the philosopher: 1.pr.13; 1.1.4; 1.10.15; 2.17.27, 28; 6.3.109; 10.1.68; 11.1.10; 12.1.4; 12.1.18; 12.1.39; 12.7.9; cf. 1.10.5; ideally, of the rhetorician: 1.10.6; 12.2.7.

much advice? All the same, I should like the orator I am training to be a sort of Roman Wise Man (*Romanum quondam velim esse sapientem*), able to play the part of the real statesman not in private seminars but in the experience and activity of real life.

Quintilian’s remarks reflect the old debate about whether the philosopher should engage in politics. Most had declined the path recommended by Aristotle, and had preferred withdrawal. Accordingly Quintilian is again suggesting that the “wise man” in generally accepted usage was in fact the philosopher, the one who had withdrawn from the public sphere. This sort of wise man, whom he finds wanting, he hopes to replace with another—“a sort of Roman Wise Man” (*Romanum quondam velim esse sapientem*)—the orator trained for statesmanship. Thus, true as it may have been that in pre-Socratic times wise men received their name from their eloquent speech (cf. Cicero, *De or.* 3.56), by Quintilian’s day, the wise man as *philosopher* was the one people knew; the old, wise man as *orator* was one Quintilian could only hope to recreate.

Table 2. Occurrences of σοφός/*sapiens* as a substantive in contemporary literature

Source	Philosopher	Rhetorician
Quintilian	12	[2]
<i>Ad Herennium</i>	0	0
Theon	1 [7]	0

The upshot of this examination is the conclusion that the “wise man” was without dispute a standard designation specifically for the philosopher, as seen in both philosophical and rhetorical works, and must have referred to the rhetorician exceedingly infrequently, and then (apparently) only with explicit qualification. Therefore, true as it was that Quintilian wished to create a “wise man” in his orator, his actual usage reveals

that he presented an ideal that did not reflect the common opinion, or even reality (cf. 1.pr.17), of the orator in his own day.⁶⁹

So far, then, we have seen that a more assiduous examination of wisdom language around the first century—in the works of both philosophers and rhetoricians—reveals that both the term “wisdom” (σοφία/*sapientia*) and the substantive designation “wise man” (σοφός/*sapiens*) were used more—one may now say—“commonly” in connection with philosophy or the philosopher than with rhetoric or the rhetorician. If Pogoloff’s judgment that a rhetorical meaning was the “common” or “ordinary” one cannot be sustained in light of either contemporary philosophical or rhetorical literature, and in spite of the judgment of more than one etymological dictionary (*TDNT* and Chantaine), then we must ask on what precisely it is based, or whether it is simply being declared.

What then of λόγος? Should it be taken for granted that “rhetoric” is the ordinary meaning? In a suspiciously shifty paragraph, Pogoloff tells us that it is:

The third [intersection of λόγος and σοφία] includes one of the most common, everyday meanings of λόγος as ‘speech.’ From the papyri we can gather that λόγος developed from its ordinary sense of ‘word’ or ‘saying’ to its developed meanings as ‘speech in progress.’ Thus, in both koine and literary texts, λόγος was commonly understood to mean speech. In particular, it was used to mean a ‘speech delivered in court, assembly, etc.’; in other words, it meant the product of *rhetoric*.⁷⁰

By sleight of hand, the “common, everyday meaning” of λόγος has slipped from the rather generalized “speech,” to “speech in progress,” to “speech delivered in court,” to

⁶⁹ Based on my observations, a thorough examination of Cicero’s philosophical and rhetorical treatises would only confirm this. “Wisdom” and the “wise man” are to philosophy and the philosopher, as “eloquence” and “the eloquent” are to rhetoric and the rhetorician.

⁷⁰ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 110.

none other than “rhetoric.” Pogoloff can now self-assuredly conclude that “σοφία λόγου would mean clever or skilled or educated or rhetorically sophisticated speech.”⁷¹

In all this—from σοφία to λόγος—the astute reader will not miss what Pogoloff has done. Without a fair show of the evidence, he has made us believe that the “least specialized” meaning of σοφία λόγου is “rhetorically sophisticated speech,” when his renderings of λόγος and σοφία λόγου are in fact both specialized! On the contrary, the *least* specialized usages would be something like “wisdom/learning” and “word/speech,” which when combined would give us a general expression like “wisdom of word.” The rest is a matter of interpretation—and in this matter contemporary usage of σοφία cannot be ignored.

But as Pogoloff himself points out, other interpretive options present themselves. He notes for instance the possibility that λόγος could indicate “reason” or “philosophical dialogue,” so that, when combined with σοφία, the expression could refer to the process of dialectical reasoning. He even notes that “This has been a popular alternative throughout the history of exegesis, and it fits well theologically with much of what Paul says in the rest of the chapter.” The reader who expects a rebuttal of this option will be disappointed. None is forthcoming. We are merely told that the third option, which he prefers, “is so compelling that few commentators can avoid taking it into account.”⁷² Unfortunately, as we have seen, a mere declaration that a particular interpretation is “compelling” or that its rendering of the text represents the most “common” meaning in

⁷¹ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 110.

⁷² Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 110.

the first century, hardly makes it so. We can no longer avoid attending to actual first century usage.

In fact nothing about the context of 1:17-2:16 deters us from taking λόγος and σοφία and the relevant phrases in terms of the process of *rational argumentation generally* rather than rhetoric specifically. In the first place, it should be said that rational argumentation, rather than mere speech, is often the better rendering of λόγος, even when the term appears alone. According to the Stoics, the “logical” (λόγικα) part of philosophy, which embraced both “dialectic” and “rhetoric,” was concerned with all forms of λόγος, or rational discourse. Isocrates attested that λόγος—or reasoned argumentation—was what separated rational humans from the irrational beasts (*Nic.* 5-9; cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 259e-261a). Aristotle used the term similarly, noting in addition that it was “designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong” (*Pol.* 1253a14 [LCL, Rackham]). In earlier days, Parmenides had spoken of rational discourse, such as the philosophers employed, using the expression πιστὸν λόγον, or “probable speech” (*Nature* fr. 8.50). In the same way, Plato spoke of the philosopher’s πειθοῖ διὰ λόγων, “persuasion by speech” (*Rep.* 411D), and πίθανος λόγος, “persuasive argument” (*Phaedo* 88D; *Leg.* 839B). And in the first century Dio Chrysostom, in his famous Alexandrian discourse, lauded the one who assuaged the souls of the people through “persuasion and *reason* (λόγου)” (*Or.* 32.18). What all this means is that a similar field of terminology—including words like σοφία, λόγος, πείθος, πίθανος, and πίστις, for instance—surrounded rational argumentation generally as surrounded “rhetoric” (in the sense of eloquence) specifically.

Many of the same criticisms apply to Litfin and Winter. Like Pogoloff, Litfin takes no pains to demonstrate that the σοφ- word group, and especially the substantive σοφός, is best understood in relation to rhetoric. The sparse examples he provides derive almost exclusively from Dio (in the late first or early second century), and not one of them speaks of the rhetorician or sophist with the substantive designation “wise man.”⁷³ Furthermore, we must ask how Litfin can justify repudiating the idea that σοφία λόγου in 1:17 refers to wisdom’s content, indeed calling such an interpretation “tendentious,” when he himself says that matters of content “will arise soon enough in Paul’s argument”—that is, by his own admission, as early as v. 18!⁷⁴

Neither does Winter provide any diachronic analysis to prove that wisdom language is *best* understood in connection with rhetoric. Moreover, he neglects important evidence from one of his chief sources, Philo of Alexandria. Indeed, Philo’s works bear witness that wisdom is to be associated, not with the sophist (as Winter would have it), but with the *philosopher*. In this regard, Philo frequently pits wisdom and the sophist *against each other*, preferring to associate wisdom with the “wise man” or philosopher. Philo for instance states that the sophists had “given the name of wisdom [σοφία, the root seen in the name σοφίστης] to their rascality, conferring on a sorry work a divine title” (*Post.* 101 [Colson and Whitaker, LCL]). From this, and other examples,⁷⁵ it is evident that, as far as Philo was concerned, wisdom was the property of the philosopher and *not the sophist*. Of course, it *could* be that Philo’s statements to this effect indicated that the

⁷³ Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 121-3.

⁷⁴ Cf. Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 188, 205.

⁷⁵ On the philosopher as wise man over against the sophist, see also Philo, *Cher.* 1.10; *Sobr.* 1:9; *Q.G.* 3.33; Dio, *Or.* 10.32; *Or.* 4.32.2; Plutarch, *Mor.* 999E.

title “wise man” was at times claimed for the sophist, which fact Philo then felt he had to combat; but Winter cites no positive evidence of such an application. What we have instead is further explicit evidence of this (substantive) title’s attachment to the philosopher. Further examples support this point. For instance, Winter observes that Philo speaks favorably of Moses as the “the wise man par excellence” (πάνσοφος).⁷⁶ Yet, in contradiction, Winter’s work has set out to argue that “the wise man” was the *sophist*, whom Philo *opposed*, and whom Paul had set his face against in his letters to the Corinthians. Winter again supports this point in calling Dio Chrysostom, when he played the role of the *philosopher* in his thirty-second discourse (*Or.* 32.11.8), “the prototypical wise man” (47). Is Winter not inadvertently demonstrating that the wise man as philosopher was more standard usage than the wise man as sophist?

All of this simply confirms what we have seen from Quintilian and others about first-century usage of wisdom terminology. Without denying that the first-century rhetorician could be called “wise,” it has been shown that, at that time, wisdom language was associated in a technical way with philosophy in a way that it apparently was not with rhetoric. Accordingly, it is found predominantly in connection with the former. Those who have told us otherwise have been satisfied merely to drop in a few examples, with no regard for diachronic considerations, and without dealing with (or being unaware of) the exceedingly greater prevalence of the terminology in relation to philosophy. Thus they show no recognition that σοφία/*sapientia* was a technical designation for philosophy, and the substantive σοφός/*sapiens* a technical designation for the

⁷⁶ Additionally, Philo frequently uses the uncompounded form σοφός in reference to Moses and other “philosophers”: in reference to Moses, *Gig.* 1.48; *Ebr.* 1.37, 1.100; *Migr.* 1.201; in reference to others, *Dec.* 1.1.

philosopher, in the parlance of philosophers and rhetoricians alike. That λόγος is occasionally added in Paul's references to σοφία need hardly compel us to take them in connection with rhetorical eloquence, for as we have seen, this term often denotes rational discourse more generally.

Therefore, no longer can the rhetorical meaning of 1:17 and 2:1, 4 be presumed the "obvious" one, or indeed so "overwhelmingly" plain that other explanations, such as those related to philosophy or rational argumentation more generally, can either be dismissed without reason (Pogoloff) or passed over entirely (Winter). Quite the contrary, evidence regarding σοφία/σοφός points compellingly in the direction of philosophy. Of course, the context of the letter must have the final say in helping us interpret this language in 1 Corinthians. But surely we can see that, if we are to take the Corinthians' understanding of wisdom in a way that defies prevailing usage in first-century Greco-Roman culture, then we must have extraordinarily good evidence for doing so. Moreover, we have seen that there is more to 1 Corinthians 1-4 and what Paul divulges about the Corinthians' wisdom therein than the language of 1:17; 2:1, 4, 13. I have drawn attention so far not only to Paul's frequent references to the "wise man" (1:19, 27; 3:19, 20; 1:20; cf. 6:5), but also to his repeated references to wisdom generally and his specific remark that Greeks "seek" it (1:22). Nonetheless, those advocating the rhetorical thesis do have other evidence to show forth, evidence that must be considered before we can weigh the whole. We look next at another major piece, that found in a cluster of terminology appearing along with λόγος and σοφία in 2:1-5.

Supporting Internal Evidence

(1) Admittedly, several other terms in 2:1-5 appear to conjure up associations with ancient rhetoric. These include: ὑπεροχή (v. 1), ἀπόδειξις (v. 4), δύναμις (vv. 4, 5), πείθος (v. 4), and πίστις (v. 5).⁷⁷ If a case can be made for a rhetorical background of the Corinthians' wisdom, it is most strongly made on the basis of the dense cluster of language in these few verses, much of which, along with λόγος and σοφία, can be found in other literature in connection with rhetorical eloquence.

Here one must confess that Paul, in repudiating the use of persuasive human argumentation of that kind which precludes reliance on the power of the Spirit (2:4-5), is surely repudiating certain uses of rhetoric. However, that need not mean that Paul is disavowing the wisdom of the rhetorician *exclusively* or *specifically*. To begin, there is next to nothing inherent in ὑπεροχή to denote rhetoric per se. The term carried a range of very generalized meanings, from “projection, prominence” or “pre-eminence, superiority,” to “excess,” “supremacy, authority, dignity,” or “prolixity” (LSJ). Ἀπόδειξις, to be sure, could be used of a rhetorical “demonstration,” but it was equally used of “demonstrations” in *philosophical* persuasion (e.g., D. L. 7.44, 52, 79; Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrr.* 2.135-43; Strabo 2.3.5; Lucian, *Eunuch.* 13). Regarding δύναμις, it is hardly to be denied that the term was an important one in rhetorical theory. But once again, we have mitigating factors. Never mind that this term too had wide application, and could refer to any natural capacity or faculty, not just that of speech or rhetorical eloquence: what's more, even *Socrates* of all people—the ultimate enemy of rhetoric—was said to have possessed the “power of speech” (τοῦ στόματος δυνάμει; Plato, *Symp.*

⁷⁷ Winter (*Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 149-50) lists all of these.

215C; cf. 216C). Finally, I have already pointed out how πιστός and πείθος/πίθανος could be used of persuasion in philosophical or more generalized contexts (πιστόν λόγον, “probable speech” – Parmenides, *Nature* fr. 8.50; πειθοῖ διὰ λόγων, “persuasion by speech” – Plato, *Rep.* 411D; πίθανος λόγος, “persuasive argument” – Plato, *Phaed.* 88D; *Leg.* 839B; πειθοῦς καὶ λόγου, “persuasion and reason,” – Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 32.18; cf. πίστις, “firm conviction” – D. L. 10.85).

I hope to be fair. With the forgoing, I do not say that rhetoric was *excluded* from the embrace of Paul’s disavowal of wisdom in 2:1-5; but I do suggest that Paul does not here repudiate rhetorical wisdom *exclusively*. Rather, he is denying reliance on any natural human argumentation as the sole instrument of persuasive success. This could include wisdom associated with rhetorical eloquence, or that associated with philosophical or rational argumentation generally.

Yet, we have still further reason to balk at the weight that has been given to 2:1-5 by advocates of the rhetorical thesis. Indeed, a rather striking parallel to this text appears *outside* 1 Corinthians, in Paul’s First letter to the Thessalonians:

Our message of the gospel *came* to you *not* in *word* only, *but also* in *power* and in the Holy *Spirit* and with full *conviction*. (1 Thess 1:5, NRSV; cf. 2:1-12; Gal 1:10)

And I *came* to you with weakness and fear and much trembling, and my *speech* and my proclamation were *not* with plausible *words* of wisdom, *but* with a demonstration of the *Spirit* and of *power*,⁵ so that your *faith* might rest not on human wisdom but on the *power* of God. (1 Cor 2:3-5)

Paul’s coming (ἐγενόμην/ἐγενήθην), the “Spirit” (Πνεῦμα), the “word” (λόγος), “power” (δύναμις), faith/conviction (πληροφορία/πίστις), the “not . . . but” construction (οὐ . . . ἀλλά) —it is all there in 1 Thessalonians 1:5, just as in 1 Cor 2:5. We lack only σοφία. Why then have we been so confident that 1 Cor 2:1-5 must address directly the

views of the Corinthians? Do these similarities not rather suggest only a general concern for Paul's personal reputation, a concern which transcends specific occasions and localities?

(2) Of course, there is also some relevant material outside 2:1-5. Some have found significance in the appearance of κρίνω ("judge") in 4:5. It has been propounded that Paul has been "judged" on the basis of the criteria used to evaluate eloquence and the high status associated with it.⁷⁸ In particular, the Corinthians are said to have judged Apollos superior, and Paul inferior. While this interpretation is not *impossible*, however, it must be admitted that it is at best based on a speculative "mirror-reading" of the situation, though we might more accurately call it an *a priori* assumption. Indeed, we are given not a hint of the actual charges (nor necessarily any indication that specific charges had been made). Besides, other, equally plausible explanations for this single reference are likely to be at hand. For the present we must postpone any conclusions.

(3) Winter makes a great deal out of sophistic parallels related to the Corinthians' "quarrels" (ἔριδες, 1 Cor 1:11) and "factionalism" (ζῆλος, 1 Cor 3:3).⁷⁹ He observes that the students of sophists could be called μαθηταί, or, if they were zealous for the reputation of their teachers, ζηλωταί. Among especially zealous students, rivalries, or ἔριδες, could develop on behalf of competing teachers. This, Winter proposes, is precisely what is happening in the Corinthian church. Some of the converts have begun to perceive themselves as μαθηταί/ζηλωταί of their Christian teachers—some of Paul, and others of Apollos—and have formed factions around them. They are now judging their

⁷⁸ Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 229-33; Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 137.

⁷⁹ Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 172-8.

teachers in accordance with the “secular attitudes” of the sophists; they are acting like mere worldlings (cf. σάρκινος, νήπιος, σαρκικός, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον; 3:1-3). Winter’s theory looks fairly plausible, until we realize that the same language can be found with reference to students of philosophers—which he fails to mention. The students of philosophers too could be called, not only μαθηταί (Dio, *Or.* 55.1-6), but also ζηλωταί. Diogenes Laertius speaks of the emulators of the Skeptic Pyrrho as ζηλωταί (9.63), and of Theophrastus as a ζηλωτής of Parmenides (8.55). Epictetus encouraged his students to become ζηλωταί of Socrates (*Diatr.* 3.7.34). Josephus recalls how he submitted himself to the way of life of each of the three major Jews “sects” of his day—each of which he likens to one of the three major Greco-Roman philosophies—noting that he became a ζηλωτής of his Essene teacher (*Vit.* 1.10-12).⁸⁰ The term could also be used in the sense of a philosophical rivalry (Lucian, *Peregr.* 15.17). And we can find instances where ἔρις arises over philosophy (Lucian, *Symp.* 1).

(4) Paul’s discussion of Apollos in 1 Corinthians 3-4 has also played an important role, though the argument here really depends on what can be gleaned from material outside 1 Corinthians. Since Acts calls Apollos λόγιος (“learned,” “eloquent”; 18:24), it is surmised that some Corinthians saw him as a rhetor superior to Paul, who according to 2 Corinthians was “contemptible in speech” (ὁ λόγος ἐξουθημένος; 10:10). Interestingly, Litfin enlists both Acts and 2 Corinthians 10 for his cause, despite the fact that he patently refrains from treating 1 Corinthians material outside 1:17-2:5, *and* claims to be upholding Dahl’s methodological observation that “information from other Pauline epistles, Acts, and other early Christian, Jewish, Greek, or Gnostic documents should not

⁸⁰ Other references to ζηλωταί of philosophers include: Lucian, *Herm.* 14.7; *Dem.* 48.6.

be brought in until the epistolary situation has been clarified as far as possible on the basis of internal evidence.”⁸¹ As we shall see in our fifth chapter, however, Paul gives no indication in 1 Corinthians that Apollos necessarily played a role in the divisions. Why we have made Apollos the whipping boy if 1 Corinthians is silent (or at best ambiguous) on the matter is a question that must be further addressed. In any case, were Apollos in fact involved, could it not have been as a conduit of certain *philosophical* knowledge,⁸² for which also his native city (Alexandria) was renowned?

(5) Other supporting arguments include the appearance of συνζητήτης in 1:20—whom some have identified as a rhetorician—⁸³ and the possible association of the “high-status” terms of 1:26 (σοφοί, δύνατοι, εὐγενεῖς) and 4:8-10 (ἐβασιλεύσατε, ἐπλουτήσατε, φρόνιμοι, ἰσχυροί, ἔνδοξοι) with “sophistic values.”⁸⁴ Again, in each case the interpretation is debatable to say the least. Some have plausibly argued that the (rare) term συνζητήτης is more likely the philosopher,⁸⁵ if not simply generalizing. And the “sophistic values” of 1:26 and 4:8-10 can all be found in other contexts in relation to spiritual or intellectual values, not least in philosophical literature,⁸⁶ where they may in fact more properly belong. In the end, the linchpin for the rhetorical argument has

⁸¹ He says (*St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*) that he is not obliged to say how his thesis relates to material outside 1:17-2:5 (pp. 148-50), and then later quotes Dahl (p. 236).

⁸² As indeed has been argued in the past: Robert M. Grant, “The Wisdom of the Corinthians,” in *The Joy of Study* (ed. S. E. Johnson; New York: Macmillan, 1951), 51-55.

⁸³ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 160.

⁸⁴ Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 192, 198-9.

⁸⁵ Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 71. We may add that the verb form, συζητέω, occurs in Epicurus, *Vatican Sayings* 74.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 31-32, 51-52, 69.

remained the language of 1:17 and 2:1-5 and the underlying inference that, in employing this language, Paul is denying the very thing that lies at the heart of the Corinthians' problems—their high estimation of eloquent speech. But as we have seen, any and all of the evidence adduced in chapters 1-4 for the rhetorical thesis is subject to multiple interpretations, and our survey of philosophers and rhetoricians has shown that Paul's wisdom language is almost certainly better taken in another direction. What can be gathered from the remaining twelve chapters of the letter will be paramount in adjudicating in which direction we should go.

The Popularity of Rhetoric

Pogoloff, Litfin, and Winter all, rightly, emphasize the dominance of rhetoric in first-century Greco-Roman education and in popular culture more broadly. But we must be wary of allowing this dominance to prejudice the way in which we sift the internal evidence. Winter is keenly aware of this: “even when the extrabiblical evidence of the sophistic movement has been assembled, it cannot be assumed *ipso facto* that this provides the actual background to the problems in the church discussed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-4, 9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13.”⁸⁷ This conclusion, he says, must be assembled from the text itself.

Nonetheless, the dominance of rhetoric has been used as a supporting argument. Winter, for instance, bringing to bear Theon's statement that students of his day were “far from the knowledge of philosophy,” remarks, “presumably they were not interested or had not been trained in it.”⁸⁸ Elsewhere he says that the people had “voted with their feet

⁸⁷ Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 13; cf. 140, 159.

⁸⁸ *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 21.

and were only too anxious to enroll their sons in the sophists' schools. Alas, for the philosophers of his day, they no longer held centre stage in the public's estimation."⁸⁹

Litfin notes that rhetoric was "ubiquitous in the Greco-Roman culture," even "endemic, an inherent part of life."⁹⁰ Pogoloff is more explicit, reminding us that Greco-Roman education was "almost exclusively education in rhetoric,"⁹¹ but that philosophers tended to be only "marginal" members of society.⁹²

But Winter's caveat must hang constantly before us: that rhetoric was immensely popular in the first century is no guarantee that it lay at the heart of the problems in Paul's Corinthian community. And indeed, just as rhetoric was by no means the only "wisdom" of the first century, neither was it the only option for those seeking higher education. One could procure a philosophical education in any number of ways—at the gymnasium, by private tutors (at home or abroad), or even by attending popular lectures.⁹³ Philosophy was even considered by its practitioners to be the true capstone of education, that for which the liberal arts and sciences were only preparation (e.g., Philo, *Congr.* 1.79). In that regard, the claim that a rhetorical education was a high status indicator could be

⁸⁹ *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 219.

⁹⁰ *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 125.

⁹¹ *Logos and Sophia*, 49.

⁹² *Logos and Sophia*, 62-63.

⁹³ Private tutors, at home or abroad: see Mark Joyal, Iain McDougall, and J. C. Yardley, eds., *Greek and Roman Education: A Sourcebook* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2009), 193, 207-8, 224-5—the gymnasium: see Robert Dutch, *The Educated Elite in 1 Corinthians: Education and Community Conflict in Graeco-Roman Context* (JSNTSup 271; London: T & T Clark, 2005). See also John T. Townsend, "Ancient Education in the Time of the Early Roman Empire," in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum* (eds. J. Benko and S. O'Rourke; Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1971), 314-15, as well as Teresa Morgan's comments on secondary literature's oversight of philosophy in the ancient school curriculum, in *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (CCS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193.

made equally of a philosophical education, for a tertiary education almost always indicated a person of means. Is it conceivable that there were some in the Corinthian church who had a fair acquaintance with philosophy? This question will be revisited in chapter 4.

But here we should also note a defect in Winter's argumentation. *Paul and Philo among the Sophists* is, of course, about Paul and Philo and how they furnish evidence for the sophistic movements in first-century Corinth and Alexandria respectively—or is it? The Corinthian sources Winter relies on include Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 6 and 8 (A.D. 89-96); a diatribe of Epictetus (A.D. 92-93); the Corinthian oration of Favorinus (reign of Hadrian); Plutarch's *Questiones Convivales* (A.D. 99-116); an inscription commemorating Herodes Atticus (b. A.D. 101, d. A.D. 177); and, along with these, Paul's Corinthian letters. Here arises what seems to me a vexing question: are these other Corinthian sources, which were written between A.D. 90 and the late second century, being used to bolster Winter's thesis about the sophistic problem behind the Corinthian correspondence, which occurred some forty to one-hundred (plus) years earlier? or is the sophistic background of the Corinthian correspondence being argued on its own terms and then used in support of his argument about the larger sophistic movement in Corinth? Inasmuch as Winter is doing the latter—as the volume's primary thesis suggests—he leads us to believe that he is *also* doing the former (hence, a noticeable circularity). Indeed, he states (several times) that he has relied on the extrabiblical sources as evidence that the sophistic movement was alive and well in mid first-century Corinth, and that he

will then, from that starting point, flesh out his argument about the Corinthian correspondence using internal evidence.⁹⁴

But if that is the case (to leave aside the problem of circularity for the moment), we cannot pass over the book Winter produced between the first (1997) and second (2002) editions of the present one—*After Paul Left Corinth* (2001). This work uses Epictetus and Favorinus (among others)—two of those authors he uses in his 1997/2002 book to argue for the emergence of the Second Sophistic as early as the middle of the first century, and indeed, as early as the Corinthian correspondence—as evidence for a “cultural watershed” in Corinth, whereby the city, formerly entrenched in Roman customs and ideals, became transformed into a city zealous to revive the glories of its Classical Greek past.⁹⁵ But this combination of arguments could not be more puzzling. First, it means that the same evidence that is used in 1997/2002 to support a sophistic background behind 1 Corinthians is *also*, in 2001, being used to demonstrate a cultural *shift* which Winter insists happened decades *after* 1-2 Corinthians, and which somehow changes how we are to interpret the letters. Or perhaps we are to believe that Epictetus and Favorinus simultaneously instantiate *and* cut across this cultural watershed? Second, if with time Corinthian culture did shift from Roman to Greek orientation, according to Winter’s (2001) argumentation this would mean that the other sources attesting to sophism in Corinth (Dio, Epictetus, Favorinus, and so forth) which he uses in the

⁹⁴ Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 13; cf. 140, 159. That being the case, one wonders why he has arranged the book as he has. We may conclude that the book is not *really* about how Paul contributes to our understanding of the sophistic movement in the first century (as the title and inclusion of Philo seem to betoken), but about how the presumed sophistic movement of the first century contributes to our understanding of the Corinthian correspondence. But to say it is both is surely circular.

⁹⁵ Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 18-19.

1997/2002 book have been undermined and are no longer very helpful to his thesis regarding the background to the Corinthian correspondence—for they occur after the supposed watershed. Thus, Winter’s contradictory manipulation of the evidence ends in a zero-sum game, and we must conclude that his argument in *Philo and Paul among the Sophists* is not much aided by the (late) external sources he names. Having pulled the rug out from under himself, his case must be made from the letter itself.

Methodological Approach

We come now to the crucial issue of methodology. Though we shall explore this issue in more detail in the subsequent chapter, it will be apposite here to address the question briefly in relation to the rhetorical thesis. Indeed, the rhetorical thesis has relied largely on a method of interpretation that has long since fallen into disrepute, at least in name, if not in fact. It has been over twenty years since John Barclay, in a now-classic essay, warned us of the dangers of “mirror-reading,”⁹⁶ that technique whereby the interpreter reads every attack made by the author of an epistle as a token that the repudiated behavior or belief somehow characterized or was shared by the original audience. Frequently, this involves the οὐ . . . ἀλλά construction (“not . . . but”). As it happens, this is precisely the construction we find in those verses that scholars have pinpointed as the foundation for the rhetorical thesis: “not with lofty words or wisdom” (2:1), “. . . not with persuasive words of wisdom . . . but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (2:4); “words not taught by human wisdom . . . but taught by the Spirit” (2:13; cf. “not with eloquent wisdom,” 1:17). This methodological point has important implications. Suppose it can be established that the wisdom referred to in these

⁹⁶ “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73-93.

verses is specifically that of rhetoric: even so, we have then only ascertained that the rhetorical wisdom involved was something that Paul *himself* repudiated, *not* necessarily that what he repudiated was specifically at the root of the *Corinthian* understanding of wisdom. Indeed, Paul seems everywhere to want to distance himself from the sort of argumentation alluded to in these texts, which is why we find almost identical statements elsewhere. I have already drawn attention to the almost identical statement which appears in 1 Thess 1:5:

“Our message of the gospel *came* to you *not* in *word* only, *but also* in *power* and in the Holy *Spirit* and with full *conviction*” (NRSV; cf. 2:1-12; Gal 1:10).

At times interpreters are aware of what they are doing. For instance, Litfin states: “Because we cannot fully appreciate what Paul is affirming unless we *reconstruct the opposite member of the contrast*, we have taken pains to describe the relevant aspects of the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition” (my italics).⁹⁷ Ciampa and Rosner are even more explicit: “A mirror-reading [of 1:17] would imply that Paul has been criticized, or unfavorably compared with leaders like Apollos.”⁹⁸ At other times mirror-reading seems to be employed unwittingly, as when Litfin says, “[Paul] perceived these Corinthians as wanting him to preach ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου, that is, in eloquent words . . .”⁹⁹ Mihaila provides a more subtle example. He argues that we can take the expression “not with σοφία λόγου” as a clear renunciation of rhetoric on the basis that it appears “in the context of preaching.”¹⁰⁰ As such, Mihaila implies that what Paul says about his own preaching can

⁹⁷ St. Paul's *Theology of Proclamation*, 245.

⁹⁸ Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 87.

⁹⁹ Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 193.

¹⁰⁰ Mihaila, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship*, 92.

be set in direct antithesis to the Corinthian's own views about speaking, or as it were, rhetorical wisdom.¹⁰¹ This technique crops up also in interpretations of that (small quantity of) material that has been considered outside 1 Corinthians 1-4, as for example, when Winter surmises that Paul uses the rhetoric of weakness in 9:15-23 and 11:17-34 in order to counter the *sophistic* values of the Corinthians.¹⁰²

Of course, this is not to say that mirror-reading paves us an infallible road to error—actually it can be both necessary and helpful, when practiced responsibly. It is simply to recognize that there is potential difference between what Paul says about *his own* beliefs and behavior on the one hand, and what was the reality behind those of the Corinthians on the other. In this regard, Dale Martin is more judicious:

There is no evidence that Paul is being directly attacked by anyone in Corinth at the time he wrote 1 Corinthians. He does sound apologetic sometimes, as when he defends his decision to accept no money from the Corinthian Christians Elsewhere in 1 Corinthians Paul sometimes sounds as if he is defending himself, as when he says repeatedly that he is *not* using skillful rhetoric. But mock apologies and demurrals, . . . were not unusual in Greco-Roman speeches; they served to disarm potential critics and predispose the audience to be more favorably inclined toward the speaker.¹⁰³

Abraham Malherbe confirms this observation in his earlier study “Gentle as a Nurse,” where he demonstrates that negative and antithetic formulations were often employed by Cynic philosophers to distinguish themselves from charlatans, even when no specific charges had been made against them.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ But Mihaila's remark implies another fallacious assumption as well: that speaking is not involved when, say, a *philosopher* presents an argument.

¹⁰² *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 214ff, 252ff.

¹⁰³ Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 52. For a similar argument, see Anderson, *Rhetorical Theory and Paul*, 274-5.

¹⁰⁴ Abraham J. Malherbe, “‘Gentle as a Nurse’: The Cynic Background to 1 Thess II,” *NovT* 12 (1970): 204-5, 214-15, 217.

But in pointing out the precariousness of the mirror-reading method, I also do not mean to imply that we are now forced to restrict attention to the text and what we can make of Paul's own views *within* it, and to abandon the quest for the reconstructed situation and the opposing perspectives that stood *behind* it. I simply propose that we must base our reconstructions on more responsible anchors than on some conjectural contrariety between Paul's own views and the historical realia embodied in the Corinthian church. More specifically, the approach I am proposing would differentiate between the Corinthian perspective and problems on the one hand, and Paul's theological or kerygmatic *response* on the other. Once we have regarded this difference, we can see that not everything Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1-4 can be taken to mirror the specific wisdom that he finds so problematic. Rather, it becomes evident that he may begin by confronting the problem at hand—a problem which presumably involved wisdom of a more *particular sort*—and may from there take the opportunity to widen his assault so as to demolish human wisdom *in all its forms*. But we begin with the historical anchors; we end with Paul's theology. This approach will be developed more fully in chapter 3.

The Scope of the Rhetorical Thesis

In this chapter we have focused largely on the fact that the internal data of 1 Corinthians 1-4 admits of, and in some respects speaks loudly in favor of, interpretations other than the rhetorical one. Before putting forth a new thesis, however, it will be important to turn attention to another aspect of the rhetorical argument—just how much of the letter does it claim to explain?

With 1 Corinthians 1-4, exponents of the rhetorical thesis have taken a reasonable point of departure. Indeed, there can be no grounds for locating the central factor in the

church's divisions in some problem other than wisdom (of whatever kind we decide it was). That the divisions were most closely associated with this has been the consistent conclusion of interpreters from decade to decade of biblical scholarship.¹⁰⁵

Beyond this, whether all the issues in the letter are related to a common cause may be debatable. Most interpreters, however, have sought out a common thread before taking recourse to the conclusion that we have a mere miscellany of disconnected topics, or worse, a pastiche of several Pauline letters. Anthony Thiselton has emphasized this point repeatedly:

I stand by my conclusion of 1978 that the topics addressed in 1 Corinthians do not represent an almost random set of pastoral and ethical problems in relation to which Paul adopts a merely reactive stance, but that a 'systematic and coherent' dimension characterizes *both* theological themes in Corinth *and* Paul's reproclamation of grace, the cross, and resurrection instantiated and actualized in terms of these contingent problems.¹⁰⁶ (my italics)

Others have concurred. Some certain thing, or pattern of things, binds the otherwise disparate limbs of the letter together.¹⁰⁷

Advocates of the rhetorical thesis share this basic impulse for unity, though each has configured the data a little differently. Pogoloff notes that after 1:10-12 "the issues of the cross, proclamation, wisdom, boasting, and division remain major themes for the rest

¹⁰⁵ Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 15; Grosheide, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 42; Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthian*, 275-6; Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians*, 76, 77; Funk, "Word and Word in 1 Cor 2:6-16," 277; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 64; Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 105; Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 120; cf. 20-21.

¹⁰⁶ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 40.

¹⁰⁷ Grosheide (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 16) names as unifying themes lasciviousness, spiritual pride, and abuse of Christian liberty; Fee (*1 Corinthians*, 6, 10) locates the connecting thread in what the Corinthians think it means to be "spiritual"; William Baird ("'One against the Other': Intra-Church Conflict in 1 Corinthians," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* [eds. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990], 131) suggests that "the most common feature" is "pride"; Ciampa and Rosner (*First Letter to the Corinthians*, 120) note that a lack of true wisdom leads to the ethical problems of chs. 5-6, 7, 8-10, and 11-14; so also Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit*, 145.

of chapters 1-4. The reader is constrained to relate all these factors when constructing a narrative of the rhetorical situation.”¹⁰⁸ Elsewhere he says that the *ethos* of σοφία λόγου is “intimately tied to issues of social status, boasting, and rivalries.”¹⁰⁹ For Winter, the main problems Paul deals with are “status/inferiority,” “imitation,” and “boasting.”¹¹⁰ Litfin, however, deliberately limits attention to 1:17-2:5, announcing that he is in the “happy position of not having to decide” how chapters 1-4 relate to the rest of the Corinthian correspondence, since he is concerned only with a single aspect of Paul’s thought (i.e., his theology of proclamation). For Litfin, then, the relationship of chapters 1-4 to the rest of the epistle can “remain an open question.”¹¹¹

Many arguments, however, are “provable” if we are selective enough with the data. Indeed, the very thing that makes Litfin “happy” turns out to be a crippling weakness for the rhetorical thesis, for it matters a great deal how chapters 1-4—or rather 1:17-2:5—relate to the rest of the letter: exegetical gerrymandering rarely leads to sound conclusions. While Winter and Pogoloff seem aware that their argument is more convincing with a greater quantity of the text within its embrace, it must be confessed that little outside chapters 1-4 is actually taken in hand. Pogoloff admits as much, noting in his conclusion that “the issue of rhetoric does not explicitly reappear in the rest of the letter.”¹¹² It is for this reason that he (no less than Winter) is compelled to slip over from wisdom to social status after the first four chapters, as if the latter actually predominated.

¹⁰⁸ *Logos and Sophia*, 105.

¹⁰⁹ *Logos and Sophia*, 54.

¹¹⁰ *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, ch. 9.

¹¹¹ *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 148-50.

¹¹² *Logos and Sophia*, 271.

When that is done, he is able to add the dispute in 11:17-34, where status-related tensions seem to be spoiling church dinners, and then a few verses where Paul characterizes himself with the rhetoric of weakness (8:7-12; 9:15-23; 12:22), presumably because his “opponents” valued the opposite.¹¹³ Of course, we can no longer deny that social stratification was a problem in the Corinthian church, and a considerable one at that. But at least two observations come to bear here. First, it is not social status, under which fall wisdom and other problems, that *Paul* indicates is the keynote issue behind the divisions, but rather *wisdom*, to which are (apparently) related problems of social status and so on. Pogoloff knows in theory that this is true (after all, he tells us it is the high status associated, specifically, with *rhetoric*, that is the problem), but would have us reverse the order in effect. With the tail wagging the dog, he has social status taking primacy, and the problem of rhetorical wisdom—which associates one with a high status—hanging from it (though clearly by a hair, since rhetoric later disappears from the discussion). Hence, as Pogoloff has it, in repudiating earthly *wisdom* Paul would be fighting, tooth and nail, against the mere *epiphenomon* of what is the Corinthians’ real problem (zeal for *status*), rather than directly taking on the problem itself—a strangely circuitous route. Second, even when Pogoloff reverses the hierarchy, placing social status above wisdom rather than vice versa, we are still left with an explanation that compasses little material outside 1 Corinthians 1-4. Again, it may be that the problems behind the divisions are so miscellaneous and disconnected that no comprehensive explanation can be admitted. But other solutions should be sought before settling with a minimalist conclusion. Boasting, divisions, and social status are only a few of the many problems touched upon in the

¹¹³ See Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 147-55, 196, 214ff, 252ff; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 141.

letter. We need also reckon with the potential connection of wisdom with the issues of sexual immorality (5:1-13; 6:12-20), litigation (6:1-11), abstinence (7:1-40), eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-13; 10:1-11:1), freedom (9:1-27), spiritual gifts and the order of worship (11:2-16; 12:1-14:14), practices surrounding the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and denial of a general resurrection (15:1-58), *and* the question of what other unifying threads these might share. But more on this in chapter 5.

The Said Alternatives

When the new rhetorical thesis sprang to life in the early 1990s, it was presented to us as the replacement for moribund alternatives. Winter was aware that the Gnostic thesis was already in its death throes when he penned his dissertation in 1988, and thus presented his thesis as the new solution.¹¹⁴ Similarly, Litfin contrasted the rhetorical thesis with contemporary treatments that “depend heavily upon the concepts of wisdom as found in the Greek mystery religions and Gnosticism, or the syncretistic Jewish-Hellenistic philosophy exemplified by Philo.”¹¹⁵ He allows that these other wisdom traditions may have played a part in the Corinthian exigencies, but concludes that the Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition “was eminently closer to hand and forms a sounder, more complete, and less fanciful key for unlocking the Apostle’s meaning in this important passage [1:17-2:5] than these other popular options.”¹¹⁶

Left with the choice between the rhetorical thesis and the older Gnostic one, we should have little difficulty judging the former superior. Nonetheless, it remains curious

¹¹⁴ See Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), cf. xiv, 245-6.

¹¹⁵ *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 172.

¹¹⁶ *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation*, 173.

that those who have advocated the rhetorical argument have neglected—and in some cases explicitly repudiated—philosophical wisdom as a live alternative. As we have noted, in earlier treatments of 1 Corinthians, most of those emphasizing Paul’s condemnation of rhetorical wisdom either mentioned philosophy in the same breath, or deemed it the leading concern. Moreover, articles and books proposing certain Hellenistic philosophical systems as the dominating “wisdom” of the Corinthians have continued to appear in the last two decades, even if they have received less attention.¹¹⁷ Here, it has been shown that, in keeping with a larger diachronic trend, the semantic scope of “wisdom” and, especially, the “wise man” in the first century corresponded more properly with philosophy and the philosopher than it did with rhetoric and the rhetorician. All said, one can only surmise that the ancient rhetoric-philosophy dynamic, as it has been framed in our rhetorical studies, has played a major role in sidelining the latter element: as the argument goes, rhetoric and philosophy were “separate,” and rhetoric was dominant, so (in effect) the issue was the former and not the latter.

Litfin is right to allow a place for “other wisdom traditions” alongside rhetoric in the background of 1 Corinthians (though he does not mention philosophy).¹¹⁸ I should

¹¹⁷ Epicurean philosophy: Graham Tomlin, “Christians and Epicureans in 1 Corinthians,” *JSNT* 68 (1997): 51-72—Cynic philosophy: F. Gerald Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches* (London: Routledge, 1998)—“Stoic-Cynic” philosophy: Richard Hays, “Conversion of the Imagination,” *NTS* 45 (1999): 391-412, esp. 395-6—Stoic philosophy: R. M. Grant, “The Wisdom of the Corinthians,” in *The Joy of Study* (ed. S. E. Johnson; New York: Macmillan, 1951), 51-55; D. Doughty, “The Presence and Future of Salvation in Corinth,” *ZNW* 66 (1975): 61-90, esp. 63; Terrence Paige, “Stoicism, *Eleutheria*, and Community at Corinth,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church* (eds. M. J. Wilkins and T. Paige; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992), 180-93; Troels Engberg-Pedersen and M. D’Agostino, “Un Paolo stoico o un Epitteto paolino? Ripensare gli slogan in 1 Cor 6,12-20,” *RivB* 54 (2004): 41-75; J. E. Smith (“The Roots of a ‘Libertine’ Slogan in 1 Corinthians 6:18,” *JTS* 59 [2008]: 63-95, esp. 69-77), speaking of “popular philosophy,” including but not limited to Stoicism; also Stowers, “A ‘Debate’ over Freedom: I Corinthians 6:12-20”; Pascuzzi, *Ethics, Ecclesiology, and Church Discipline*; Malherbe, “Determinism and Free Will in Paul”; and Garcilazo, *The Corinthian Dissenters and the Stoics*.

¹¹⁸ Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 173.

like to reverse his emphasis, however: Paul may indeed have taken rhetoric to task in his sweeping condemnation of human wisdom, but I have begun making the case that rhetoric was probably *not* the primary “wisdom” that proved so problematic in the Corinthian church. Again, even if in certain verses Paul does single out rhetoric over against other forms of argumentative discourse (and that may now be doubted), we still have a responsibility to determine whether that condemnation addresses the chief problem at hand, or whether it constitutes only an *extension* within Paul’s larger *theological response* to it.

Therefore, if twenty years ago Litfin could say that “ignoring or slighting the rhetorical dimensions” of Paul’s argument will “no longer do,”¹¹⁹ surely we can now say as much for philosophy. The possibility that at the heart of the Corinthians’ divisions lurks some form of Greco-Roman philosophy is a thesis which has yet to be responsibly reckoned with.

Conclusion

For all their subtle differences, Pogoloff, Litfin, and Winter have stood together in affirming that the problematic wisdom behind the divisions in 1 Corinthians was related primarily to Greco-Roman rhetoric. With these three figures in the vanguard, the rhetorical thesis has now become the dominant one in NT scholarship. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this chapter has begun to cut at the foundations. A triple-braided cord is not easily broken; but it seems this one is now wearing thin.

How scholars have transformed the *philosophical*-rhetorical thesis of the early twentieth century into the rhetoric-but-not-*philosophy* thesis of today, and that under the

¹¹⁹ Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 253.

guise of a “return” to the thesis that exegetes had “consistently” posited, remains a mystery. But I have shown that this amounts to a distortion of the facts. Moreover, despite declarations that the “wise man” was the rhetorician, and “wisdom” was “unmistakeably,” “clearly,” or “overwhelmingly” a reference to rhetoric, I have shown by a less superficial examination of first-century sources not only that these terms were standard technical designations for the philosopher and philosophy respectively—in the usage of both philosophers and rhetoricians alike—but also that they apply to the latter very rarely, and then only with explicit qualification. Indeed, neither Pogoloff *nor* Litfin *nor* Winter provides even one example from the first century (B.C. or A.D.) in which the rhetorician was called by the name “wise man” (substantive) without qualification, and together provide only a *single* example in which the title was so used even *with* qualification (Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.2.7). From the present analysis, it has become apparent that, if the rhetoricians could claim victory in the public sphere, it had come at a cost. In exchange for hegemony, they had only to relinquish their claim on wisdom. As much as Quintilian and others deplored—even actively resisted—this, they bore witness that in first century acceptance, the right to the title “wise man” had been won by the philosophers. All said, we would need exceptional internal evidence—nay, the complete inadequacy of a philosophical explanation—to construe wisdom in Paul’s Corinth against this prevailing usage.

Equally critical, however, is the fact that the “rhetorical” thesis embraces so little, if properly any, 1 Corinthians material outside chapters 1-4. Somehow Acts 18 and 2 Corinthians 10 have come to be of more consequence than chapters 5-16 of the letter actually under consideration. Moreover, exponents of the thesis have remained

desperately dependent on their interpretations (!) of the terminology of 1:17 and 2:1-5. Like diggers assembling the scattered remains of a skeleton, they have built up around these core pieces the finer details of the rhetorical situation—evidence of “worldly” values here (1:26; 4:8), a reference to Apollos’ “eloquence” there (Acts 18:24)—until they could envision a complete specimen of Paul’s opponent—flesh, sinew, and all—none other than the rhetorician or sophist.

But if wisdom was in fact the leading stimulant which caused divisions to fester in the church, we should expect further connections in the letter, and if such can be afforded in some first-century wisdom tradition other than rhetoric, Gnosticism, the mystery religions, or Hellenistic Judaism, then we are on our way to a better alternative. It will be my contention that such an alternative—alive and quite popular in first-century Corinth, and unrefuted as an option in modern scholarship—is indeed at hand in Stoicism. At any rate, we have seen that the rhetorical thesis has relied on an extraneous (and questionable) framework regarding the ancient relationship between rhetoric and philosophy as a way of sidelining philosophical wisdom from the discussion. But neither the affirmation that rhetoric and philosophy were “separate,” nor the assertion that rhetoric was dominant in the first century, provide acceptable grounds for precluding philosophical wisdom as the leading problem. Our conclusions must be based as much on a responsible, and complete, treatment of the *internal* evidence as it has been on broader sociological investigation.

At this juncture it may be apposite to reiterate what seems a telling coincidence in recent scholarly trends. As Pogoloff observes in his introduction, the rhetorical thesis owes its return in large part to the rediscovery and renewal of interest in ancient

rhetoric.¹²⁰ One of the forms this renewal has taken is that of rhetorical criticism of the NT. It is interesting that, only shortly after George Kennedy's seminal book *New Testament through Rhetorical Criticism* (1984) came forth, articles and essays advocating the rhetorical thesis for 1 Corinthians began to fill the presses¹²¹ and monographs elaborating the thesis in detail were published in spate.¹²² For my part, I believe that turning our gaze to rhetorical criticism has proved immensely helpful for illuminating the meaning of the NT documents, not least the epistles of Paul. However, I think we should reflect upon whether we have not been so dazzled by this new light of rhetoric that we are no longer seeing clearly. Burnt into our vision, rhetoric has begun to appear everywhere we turn—even where it is not. In this regard, while rhetoric, or the wisdom of “form,” may be *included in Paul's critique* of human wisdom, I maintain that far too much has been made of it in reconstructing the occasion behind 1 Corinthians, and that, as a consequence, we have turned our eyes from what seems to be the more burning issue.

In closing, I should reiterate that Pogoloff, Litfin, and Winter have put together well-written, and clearly (on the consensus of the guild), compellingly argued theses in favor of a rhetorical background behind 1 Corinthians. But it should now be clear that the rhetorical argument is far more impressive in the support it has garnered among

¹²⁰ *Logos and Sophia*, 1.

¹²¹ E.g., Hans Dieter Betz, “The Problem of Rhetoric and Theology according to the Apostle Paul,” in *L'Apotre Paul in Personalité, Style et Conception du Ministère* (ed. A. Vanhoye; BETL 73; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 16-48; Timothy H. Lim, “Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom, but in the Demonstration of the Spirit and Power (1 Cor 2:4),” *NovT* 29 (1987): 137-49; John R. Levison, “Did the Spirit Inspire Rhetoric?,” in *Persuasive Artistry* (ed. Duane F. Watson; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 25-40.

¹²² Besides Pogoloff (1992), Litfin (1994), and Winter (1988/1997/2002), I may mention Bullmore, *St. Paul's Theology of Rhetorical Style* (1995); and Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistle* (1997).

contemporary scholars than it is in the support it can find from the ancient evidence. It is high time the rhetorical ship dropped its mainsail, and came to a lull.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

In the previous chapter we discussed the popular opinion among recent scholars that the “wisdom” of the Corinthians is best understood in connection with Greco-Roman rhetoric. It was shown, first, that the thesis is not, as some have claimed, a “return” to the “consistent” opinion of scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century, but that it rather constitutes a departure from an equal, or even dominating, emphasis on *philosophical* wisdom found in earlier studies. Moreover, advocates of the rhetorical thesis have relied on a questionable construction of the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy in the first century as a way of sidelining the latter from discussion; have overlooked the predominance of “wisdom” and “wise man” language in connection with philosophy, and its striking paucity in connection with rhetoric; have engaged little of the actual material of the letter, instead depending heavily on select verses (1:17; 2:1-5), on “rhetorical” descriptions of Paul and Apollos outside 1 Corinthians (2 Cor 10; Acts 18), and on general social trends; and in all of this have practically made “mirror-reading” their methodological starting point (again, 1:17; 2:1, 4, 13).

We now turn to the issue of methodology at greater length. Is mirror-reading an acceptable *starting point* when dealing with Paul’s letters? If not, how does one go about reconstructing the occasion behind 1 Corinthians, when our interpretation is almost entirely at the mercy of Paul’s own, limited, depiction of the exigencies? From Gnosticism to Jewish-Hellenism to over-realized eschatology, and more, reconstructions over the years have apparently remained too disparate to reconcile with one another.

Therefore, in more recent decades, scholars have grown increasingly skeptical about the possibility of precise historical reconstruction. Years ago Conzelmann had recognized the difficulty, when he proposed that “The position in Corinth cannot be reconstructed on the basis of the possibilities of the general history of religion.”¹ This sentiment is shared by scholars now more than ever, for we have seen that many at present are more apt to see the Corinthians’ divisions in terms of general secular or social values, especially rhetorical aptitude, than in terms of any specific religious or philosophical system.² The fact is that we see “through a glass darkly”—³we can make out only outlines of what hides on the other side of the murk, and even that is subject to interpretation.

Owing to the difficulties involved in such endeavors, some have condemned interpretations which “read between the lines” (even while doing it).⁴ Most, however, remain aware that this is unavoidable. Ben Witherington, among others, has been explicit on this point:

Since we have access to Paul’s letters but not to their social contexts, it is natural to give primary attention to the texts themselves. Sociological analysis of Paul’s communities *requires reading between or behind the lines* of the letters to reconstruct their social contexts. Despite the conjectural nature of such reconstructions, they are both necessary and extremely valuable, especially for understanding texts like 1 and 2 Corinthians.⁵ (my italics)

¹ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 15.

² Raymond Collins (*1 Corinthians*, 97) is representative in suggesting that it was “the wisdom as it was taught in the rhetorical schools and exploited by popular rhetoricians.” As he continues, “At best one can speak of a popular philosophical trend . . . in which knowledge was highly valued and matter was demeaned”; but there were “a variety of philosophical influences.”

³ As many have reminded us—e.g., Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter,” 79; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 2.

⁴ Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 167, 186.

⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, xii. For like remarks, see Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter,” 73-74; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 11; and Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 13.

That is, unless we are content to confine attention to Paul's own thought (rather than what his thought was developed in response *to*) or to focus solely on what the text "means to us," we must look as much to what seems to stand *behind* the text, as to what appears *in* and *in front of* it. In the process, however, we must lay a firmer methodological foundation than that of mirror-reading. To that end, this chapter will seek out a set of methodological principles for dealing with 1 Corinthians. In the first part of the chapter, I make an overview of recent studies in epistolary reconstruction, looking at issues related to the use of literary parallels, the practice of mirror-reading, reconstruction of Paul's "opponents," identification of Corinthian language, and the use of social history. In the remaining sections, I will then offer a synthesis, which will be used to distill a set of dominating topics in the letter, from which we shall begin (in chapter 5) a new reconstruction.

Studies in Epistolary Reconstruction

Context and Function

The practice of using parallels from extra-biblical literature to help illuminate the NT stretches back several hundred years. Beginning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, scholars began noting parallels in terminology and phraseology between the NT writers and rough contemporaries such as Polybius, Josephus, and Philo, operating with an underlying assumption which only years later would be widely recognized as problematic—that parallel language *necessarily* indicated parallel meaning. It was this "philological" approach that brought us Wettstein's monumental collection in the

eighteenth century and the history of religions productions of the late nineteenth and early twentieth.

By the mid twentieth century, this approach had fallen under severe criticism. In his classic presidential address at the 1961 SBL meeting, Samuel Sandmel described this approach as “parallelomania,” or “that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction.”⁶ This, however, was not to say that Sandmel denied the existence, or even the usefulness, of genuine parallels. What he eschewed was “*extravagance*” in claims of similarity and literary dependency.

The latter half of the twentieth century contributed greater methodological clarity to these issues. In terms of *literary dependency*, at least two conclusions have come to be accepted: first, that in a world in which ideas flowed freely between systems, communities, and sub-cultures and underwent unique adaptation in each, *whether* literary dependence was involved in a given case is exceedingly difficult to establish; and second, that even where some direct literary relationship may seem likely, it is scarcely possible to determine *in which direction* dependence ought to be construed. As part of a larger movement that began in the 1960s, the solution followed by Abraham Malherbe and his students was to remove attention from literary dependency between authors and to focus instead on *topoi* or “commonplaces” shared in the thought world of Hellenistic authors more broadly.⁷ In that regard, rather than asking whether the NT writers “borrowed”

⁶ Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 1-13.

⁷ E.g., Abraham Malherbe, “Hellenistic Moralists and the New Testament,” and “Graeco-Roman Religion and Philosophy and the New Testament,” in *The New Testament and Its Interpreters* (eds. E. J.

specific expressions from particular ancient authors, scholars have begun to speak more clearly in terms of how writers may have shared and adapted ideas current in the broader Greco-Roman milieu in which they were situated.

In terms of *formal similarity*, it is now generally recognized that parallel usage does not necessarily amount to equivalent meaning. It *may*, of course, but that must be established on the basis of a diligent comparison of social and linguistic context. For Paul and reconstructions of his letters, that means that a “parallel” can only be established as such on the basis of a similar conceptual framework and plausible sociological connections.⁸

Mirror-Reading

If the 1960s was the decade to question the use of philological parallels for understanding the NT, the 1980s was the decade to question the technique now known as “mirror-reading.” In 1985, George Lyons mounted a fierce attack on this practice in Pauline studies.⁹ As he explained, the practice consists in the assumption that Paul’s autobiographical remarks respond apologetically to specific accusations or allegations made against himself, his office, or his message. Put differently, it assumes that “what

Epp, and G. W. MacRae; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 3-26. We find similar approaches in earlier Johannine scholarship: C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); and in Hebrews scholarship: F. F. Bruce, “‘To the Hebrews’ or ‘To the Essenes,’” *NTS* 9 (1963): 217-52; J. Coppens, “Les analogies qumrâniennes de l’Épître aux Hébreux,” *NRT* 84 (1961): 128-41.

⁸ For such observations, see L. Michael White and John T. Fitzgerald, “*Quod est comparandum*: The Problem of Parallels,” in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture* (eds. J. T. Fitzgerald, T. H. Olbricht, and L. M. White; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 13-39; and Jerry Sumney, “Studying Paul’s Opponents: Advances and Challenges,” in *Paul and His Opponents* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 87-94.

⁹ George Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography* (SBLDS 73; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1985), 79-120.

Paul denies, his opponents have asserted and/or that what he asserts, they have denied.”¹⁰

As noted in the previous chapter, very often it works backward from Paul’s antithetical “not . . . but” formulation (οὐκ . . . ἀλλὰ; cf. 1 Cor 1:17; 2:1, 4, 13).

Since the 1980s, scholarly evaluations of the practice have remained predominantly negative, though they have varied in degree of dismissal. Hans Betz noted that “not everything that Paul denies is necessarily an accusation by his opponents.”¹¹ Margaret Mitchell denounces “mirror-reading” from Paul’s self-references.¹² Others, including Lyons, reject the method altogether. For Lyons, mirror-reading constitutes “an inappropriate, if not entirely fallacious, method for identifying either Paul’s opponents or the function of his autobiographical remarks.”¹³ Likewise, W. C. Van Unnik has declared that it seems “a wrong historical method . . . , to reconstruct the unknown ideas of the Christians there [in Corinth] by reverting Paul’s words to the opposite and by thinking that everything the apostle wrote was prompted by the necessity of contradicting very explicitly ideas held by them.”¹⁴

In Lyons’ favor, it should be said that many Pauline denials simply cannot be understood as answers to charges. I may quote Lyons regarding several instances from 1 Corinthians:

¹⁰ Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 81.

¹¹ Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 6.

¹² Margaret Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 54-55.

¹³ Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 96.

¹⁴ W. C. Van Unnik, “The Meaning of 1 Corinthians 12:31,” *NovT* 35 (1993): 144.

Is it conceivable that . . . God allows one to be tempted beyond his strength (1 Cor 10:13)? . . . Or should 1 Cor 3:7 be taken to suggest that it had been charged that God mattered little by comparison to his servants? Or does 1 Cor 1:17 require the presumption that Paul had been charged with having been called only to baptize and not to preach?¹⁵

Moreover, Lyons questions whether the formulation functions primarily to *deny*, or whether it actually performs the more rhetorical purpose of *affirmation*. That is, Paul's antithetical statements may be more "epexegetical" than "polemical" in purpose, serving to amplify the meaning of a point rather than to deny the stance of his opponents.¹⁶ As such, "Paul's 'rhetoric' rather than his 'opponents' may be responsible for these statements."¹⁷ Rhetorical practices from Paul's day confirm Lyons' suspicions: as already noted, antithetic formulations made by a speaker need hardly imply that specific charges had been made.¹⁸

Though countless others have expressed a negative evaluation of mirror-reading,¹⁹ scholars generally advocate caution rather than outright rejection of the practice. Indeed, for the majority of scholars today, the problem with mirror-reading is not that it constitutes an "inherently fallacious" method of interpretation, but that it leads to precarious conclusions when it is practiced "injudiciously," "incautiously," or "overconfidently."²⁰ This is the more balanced assessment of John Barclay in what is

¹⁵ Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 111.

¹⁶ Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 120.

¹⁷ Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, 120.

¹⁸ Malherbe, "'Gentle as a Nurse,'" 204-5, 214-15, 217.

¹⁹ E.g., Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study in the Argument and Theology of Galatians* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988), 31-38; William Baird, "'One against the Other': Intra-Church Conflict in 1 Corinthians," 119.

²⁰ So Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 13; cf. Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 8; Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 6-7.

perhaps the most thoroughgoing treatment of the subject to date—his article “Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case.”²¹ Acknowledging that Paul’s letters are very often polemical in tone, Barclay nonetheless recognizes that, if we are to understand the nature of the relevant disputes, we must attempt to reconstruct the stance of those on the other side of the debate, and from the text itself, since we have no further witnesses to the specific occasions addressed. Hence, though the practice is problematic, it is also essential: “we must use the text which answers the opponents as a *mirror* in which we can see reflected the people and the arguments under attack.”²²

Therefore the trick, Barclay says, is to delineate criteria whereby mirror-reading might be practiced *responsibly*. Practiced *ir-responsibly*, mirror-reading would involve undue selectivity (e.g., focusing only on Paul’s defensive statements), over-interpretation (e.g., assuming that Paul’s rebuttals were each matched by counter-statements made by his opponents), and/or the hanging of an entire thesis on dubious verbal or phraseological pegs. A *responsible* approach, on the other hand, would be moored by the following considerations (some of them, I might add, supplementary to the act of mirror reading properly speaking):

- (1) What type of utterance is Paul making? Is it a statement? a denial? a command? a prohibition?
- (2) What is Paul’s tone? Is it emphatic? urgent? polemical?
- (3) How frequently is the matter broached in the letter?
- (4) How clear is the meaning of the statement?

²¹ J. M. G. Barclay, “Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *JSNT* 31 (1987): 73-93.

²² Barclay, “Mirror-reading a Polemical Letter,” 73.

- (5) Is the language unfamiliar in Paul's writings and therefore likely to stem from his opponents?
- (6) Does Paul represent perspectives so diverse that we must imagine multiple opponents and views?
- (7) How plausible is the reconstruction historically?

Taken together, it could be said that clear and frequent statements made in non-polemical contexts, and conveying atypical Pauline language, would be more likely to represent the positions of Paul's opponents than other sorts of material, particularly if the reflected behavior or stance is plausible within the social context. Nonetheless, as Barclay points out, mirror-reading should not be made the "cornerstone" of any reconstruction. It must remain supplementary to other reconstructive considerations. Were we to follow this recommendation, we would have to exercise caution toward any attempt to reconstruct 1 Corinthians that was predicated upon Paul's "denial of rhetoric" in 2:1-5. Other considerations must remain primary.

Reconstructing Paul's "Opponents"

In beginning this section, a terminological clarification is in order. I have been using the customary label "opponents" in speaking of the people blamed by Paul for the problems that transpired among his addressees. While this is a helpful label when dealing with many of Paul's letters, however, it does not best characterize the people blamed in 1 Corinthians. That is, ordinarily when we speak of Paul's "opponents," we refer to antagonists who beleaguer the community from the outside. In 1 Corinthians, however, the agitators seem to stem from within the community itself: they are not antagonistic *outsiders* but rather ill-behaved *insiders*. Even so, the methodological *principles* followed in reconstructing these two classes of people remain essentially the same. That said, in

this section we shall continue to have recourse to the term “opponents,” inasmuch as it echoes those studies that have aimed to lay out a methodology for reconstructing those whom Paul *opposes*. Thus this label will be used as a temporary catch-all for methodological purposes and should not be taken to imply that Paul had “opponents” *per se* in the Corinthian church.

At this point a distinction needs to be drawn between “reconstruction” and “mirror-reading.” The two are not synonymous. Properly speaking *mirror-reading* is the practice of assuming that what Paul denies his opponents have asserted, and vice versa. But this is only one of several means that can be used to formulate a full picture of his opponents. Indeed, *reconstruction* additionally involves the examination of material actually *quoted* (or alluded to) from his opponents, assessment of the nature of the ethical and/or theological problems clearly narrated or addressed, and consideration for the wider social-historical context in which the dispute takes place.

Of course, mirror-reading has continued to play a role in the larger task of reconstruction. Accordingly scholars have often tried to isolate certain types of discourse as being the most likely to convey material about Paul’s opponents. Charles Cosgrove proposes that the “first unit” that gives specific and direct information about the opponents should act as the starting point of reconstruction, since it is likely to introduce the main occasion of the letter.²³ Mark Nanos, on the other hand, says we should begin with Paul’s “situational discourse” (i.e., that written directly to the addressees, especially using ironic rebuke, so as to persuade them toward or dissuade them from certain courses

²³ Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit*, 38.

of action), as opposed to “narrative discourse” (i.e., that drawn from “other experiences or stories to support the lines of argument taken up in the situational discourse”).²⁴

Others, however, have sought out a more comprehensive methodology. Years ago, Nils Dahl enumerated several guiding principles for interpreting 1 Corinthians 1-4, which, now more than three decades later, continue to resound with judiciousness. His five principles may be summarized as follows:

- (1) The interpreter must try to understand both Paul and the Corinthian reaction to him.
- (2) Reconstruction must be based mainly on information contained within the relevant section of the letter [i.e., 1 Corinthians 1-4], beginning with the clearest and most objective statements.
- (3) The integrity of 1 Corinthians may be assumed as a working hypothesis, and can be confirmed if thematic unity can be shown to cut across chapters 1-4 to material in 5-6 and beyond.
- (4) Information from other Pauline epistles, Acts, and extra-biblical comparative material should not be brought in until the epistolary situation has been clarified as far as possible on the basis of the internal evidence.
- (5) Any reconstruction is at best a reasonable hypothesis, though the more likely to the degree that it can account for the total argument and details within 1 Corinthians 1-4.

No scholar, however, has addressed the issue of methodology as thoroughly as has Jerry Sumney. His 1990 monograph devotes nearly fifty pages to the question of how to reconstruct Paul’s opponents.²⁵ It will be useful for us to summarize briefly his conclusions.

²⁴ Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul’s Letter in First-Century Context* (Augsburg: Fortress, 2002), 62.

²⁵ Jerry Sumney, *Identifying Paul’s Opponents: The Question of Method in 2 Corinthians* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1990), 76-113.

His first chapter on the issue (“Historical Reconstructions”) concludes that (1) sources written later than the relevant letter should not be used; (2) *a priori* reconstructions (e.g., Baur’s Peter-Paul dialectic) cannot be imposed on the letter; and (3) we cannot presume to know the situation better than the author (i.e., Paul) did himself.

The second chapter (“Sources Other than the Primary Text”) concludes that (1) each letter must be interpreted individually; (2) parallels can only be established as such if they share a similar conceptual framework; and (3) parallels add to rather than determine the meaning of a passage.

The third chapter (“Assessing Passages within the Primary Text”) is Sumney’s most rigorous. It considers four kinds of contexts for Pauline statements: (1) polemical sections, (2) apologetic sections, (3) didactic sections, and (4) conventional periods (i.e., greetings, thanksgivings, hortatory material, and closings). Within each context, he considers three types of statements: (a) explicit statements about opponents, (b) allusions to opponents, and (c) affirmations. He then ranks each type of text according to both its *certainty of reference* to Paul’s opponents and its *reliability* in its depiction of Paul’s opponents. Levels of *reference* range from 1 to 5, with 1 constituting the highest level of certainty and 5 the least; levels of *reliability* range from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating the most reliable information and 4 the least. His conclusions are summarized in table 3. On the whole, there seems to be surprisingly little difference whether the context is polemical, apologetic, didactic, or conventional. According to Sumney’s analysis, what matters most is Paul’s explicitness: references to his opponents can be identified most certainly in explicit statements, less so in allusions, and least of all in his own affirmations.

Table 3. Reference and reliability according to Sumney

Context	Type of Statement	Sub-Context	Certainty of Reference	Reliability
polemical	explicit		1	3
	allusions		3	3
	affirmations		3	2
apologetic	explicit		1	3
	allusions		2	3
	affirmations		3	2
didactic	explicit		1	1
	allusions		3	1
	affirmations		5	-
conventional	explicit	greeting	1	3
		thanksgiving	1	1
		hortatory	4	4
		closings	1	3
	allusions	thanksgiving	3	1
	affirmations	thanksgiving	5	-

Corinthian Language

When treating the question of epistolary reconstruction, several factors distinguish 1 Corinthians from the other Pauline letters. First, this letter includes a unique and plentiful quantity of *quoted* material from the agitators in the church. Second, it *names the sources* from which Paul derived this information—an oral source (1:11), and a written one (7:1), the latter likely delivered by the delegation named in 16:17. And third, it speaks directly *to* the agitators rather than speaking to a third party *about* them. Together, these factors allow for a much clearer and fuller picture of the agitators than is permitted with Paul’s other letters, and with a rather higher likelihood that the relevant individuals are being represented fairly—since under these circumstances Paul is unlikely to have publically attributed to them words or positions that were not their own, and since

his representation of them is based in large part on quotations from a letter they themselves had written.

It has long been noted that Paul's sources conveyed to him not only certain catchwords and phrases, but also several "slogans" in currency in the church. However, since their language is not always formally introduced, we must rely on a number of criteria for separating it out from the distinctive voice of Paul.

Usually scholars rely on a combination of mirror-reading and arguments from lexical usage or style. Richard Horsley, for instance, remarks that the language of Paul's opponents can be discerned through noting those aspects to which he responds negatively (i.e., an argument from mirror-reading), and can be confirmed when such contexts involve language that is either absent from or relatively insignificant in Paul's other letters (i.e., an argument from style or lexical usage).²⁶

David Hall treats the question in more detail. He lists five types of statements that may be suspected of representing Corinthian language:²⁷

- (1) *Quoted statements*, as when Paul says that "some say" (e.g., 3:4, 18; 8:2; 14:37; 15:12).
- (2) *Modified statements*, as when a statement is made and then immediately modified (e.g., 6:12; 7:1; 8:1; 10:23; possibly 8:3-4).
- (3) *Untypical [sic] language*, as when a cluster of language infrequent or absent in Paul appears (e.g., 2 Cor 2:1-7; 7:8-11).
- (4) *Unexplained ideas*, as when Paul suddenly introduces a word or phrase that is unexplained and not immediately germane to the context (e.g., 2 Cor 6:12; 7:2).

²⁶ Horsley, "How Can Some of You Say That There Is No Resurrection of the Dead," 204.

²⁷ David Hall, *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence* (JSNTSup 251; Continuum, 2003), 201-4.

(5) *Apologetic contexts*, as when Paul defends himself (e.g., 1 Cor 4:1-5; 9:3).

These are all helpful guidelines, though some will be more reliable than others. In

the end, we can probably devise no hard and fast rules for discerning Corinthian language. Instead, judgments must be based on the context of the unit under consideration, using a combination of formal, stylistic, logical, syntactical, and other contextual indicators as a guide. For instance, is a particular phrase or clause explicitly attributed to the Corinthians? Does it create syntactical tension within the immediate context? Does it present logical tension with positions otherwise known to be espoused by Paul? Does the language present a lexical or stylistic anomaly within the Pauline corpus? Moreover, after examples of Corinthian language have been clarified, and a hypothesis as to the letter's occasion begins to take shape, we should ask whether other, less obvious examples of Corinthian language can be established as such on the basis of coherence or fit with the situation, if other factors have already made such an identification likely.

Finally, the opinions of commentators should be enlisted, not as definitive proof, but as a means of confirmation on arguments made from existing internal evidence. As we shall see, commentators share an extraordinary level of agreement on most of the language under consideration in 1 Corinthians, and we shall have little trouble establishing this material as genuine Corinthian language.

Social History

Beginning in earnest with Theissen, Malherbe, and Meeks in the 1970s and 80s,²⁸ scholars began to consider whether the divisions in Corinth might have had more to do

²⁸ Though we find rudimentary sociological analyses of 1 Corinthians as early as C. Heinrici, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (KEK5/6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896).

with the broader social values of the Roman Empire than with Gnosticism or the Hellenistic mystery religions specifically. Thus the strong emphasis on linguistic parallels that characterized much of scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has given way in recent decades to broader social-historical considerations. Now less weight is given to comparative literary evidence focused on religious parallels, and more to a combination of literary, inscriptional, archaeological, and other socio-cultural data. The shift has ushered in a welcome corrective to scholarship that often showed too little regard for the particularities of social and political context. Indeed, the Corinthian church was not an embodiment of some typical Greco-Roman religious “idea,” but a particular community with its own social idiosyncracies and, to some extent, peculiar influences.²⁹

This sensitivity to social history has shifted the direction of Corinthian scholarship considerably. We have become more aware of the potential role of social stratification in issues such as the eating of “meat sacrificed to idols” (1 Cor 8-10) and the disorderly observance of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34), as well as of the Corinthians’ apparent embrace of “secular” values such as wealth, patronage, honor, or even wisdom itself (1:26; 2:1-5; 4:8-10; chs. 5-6).³⁰ But perhaps most importantly, the study of social history has set much needed restraints on what seem to be the possible interpretations for the internal evidence of the letter. As Andrew Clarke has observed:

The problems inherent in mirror-reading the social situation . . . can be diluted by using the relevant and available evidence which can place . . . 1 Corinthians

²⁹ With the permission of the *Journal of Theological Studies*, this paragraph has been revised from my earlier article “The Wise Corinthians: Their Stoic Education and Outlook,” *JTS* 62 (2011): 51-76, esp. 52. Where changes have been made, the present argument should be preferred.

³⁰ On chs. 8, 10 and 11:17-34, see Gerd Theissen, “Social Integration and Sacramental Activity: An Analysis of 1 Cor. 11:17-34,” in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 145-74. On the role of patronage, see Chow, *Patronage and Power*. On the role of social stratification in the divisions discussed in chs. 1-4, see William Baird, “One against the Other,” 116-36.

within its social context. The information gleaned largely from ‘one end of a telephone conversation’ can be carefully added to what is already known about the circumstances in order to reconstruct the other side of the conversation.³¹

That is, in order for a particular interpretation of the internal evidence to be plausible, it needs first to be *possible* vis-à-vis the mores and circumstances of first-century Corinth.

Indispensable as social-historical considerations continue to be, however, I wish to register some misgivings at how this paradigm is often used. When Theissen and others made their foray into the social sciences decades ago, they did not mean to rule out “theological” factors in the Corinthians’ divisions, but merely wished to *emphasize* what had long been underemphasized in explaining them—secular social values.³² Many who have followed Theissen’s approach continue to recognize theological factors even while placing new emphasis on other sociological considerations.³³ Many others, however, have seemed to pose a false dichotomy. Pogoloff states that in 1 Corinthians 1-4 “Paul is addressing an exigence of the ethical dimensions of division, *not doctrinal divergence*” (my italics).³⁴ Likewise, Laurence Welborn says that “It is a power struggle, *not a*

³¹ Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 6-7.

³² See, for example, Theissen (“Social Integration and Sacramental Activity,” 123): “The sociological analysis of a theological quarrel does not, in my opinion, mean reducing it to social factors.” So also Malherbe (*Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 84): “The history of research does reveal a neglect of the sociological aspects of the Corinthians’ problems, but it equally reveals that theological issues have been identified and explored successfully. Therefore Theissen’s work provides a welcome new perspective from which to view those discussions, but it cannot be regarded as an alternative.”

³³ Chow (*Patronage and Power*) notes that he “does not take theological matters to be of minor importance” (p. 12), though his express aim is to turn attention to sociological explanations (esp. pp. 133-66). Marshall (*Enmity in Corinth*) says: “Much success has been achieved in identifying the theological issues but I suggest that any such interpretation is incomplete without an adequate social understanding of the problems in Corinth” (vii). John Hügel (*Leadership in 1 Corinthians: A Case Study in Paul’s Ecclesiology* [Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 57; Lewiston, N.Y.: E. Mellen, 2003], 3) says: “the divisions in the Corinthian church are rooted both in secular social competition and in a theology which fostered individual spiritual ambitions.”

³⁴ Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 104.

theological controversy, that motivates the writing of 1 Corinthians 1-4”³⁵ (my italics). Going farther, Ben Witherington says that “every problem” addressed in the letter, except “perhaps” the resurrection, was “social, *not* theological in origin” (my italics).³⁶ Andrew Clark is similar in suggesting that the Corinthians’ acceptance of secular perceptions of leadership constituted the “single, dominant problem in the community,” a thesis he follows throughout, but does not limit to, 1 Corinthians 1-6.³⁷ In tracing the history of scholarship on 1 Corinthians, Adams and Horrell observe how Corinthians scholarship has “shift[ed] in focus from religious or theological ideas to social and political ones”; but several essays in the same volume put things in starker terms. James Dunn notes that the problems of 1 Corinthians 11 were “*not theological but social*” (his emphasis).³⁸ Bengt Holmberg extends this point to the whole letter: “what may look at first like theological and ethical problems and discussions are actually caused more by social factors like stratum-specific behavior patterns operative in the everyday life of these Christians than by differing religious perspectives or theological traditions.”³⁹ Ciampa and Rosner speak in more dichotomous terms:

Numerous religious and philosophical parallels with the putative behavior and beliefs of the church there (inferred from a mirror reading of 1 and 2 Corinthians) have been adduced . . . However, in recent years a rough consensus has begun to emerge in which scholars agree that the problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians reflect the infiltration of Corinthian social values into the church.⁴⁰

³⁵ Welborn, *Politics and Rhetoric in the Corinthian Epistles*, 7.

³⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 74n9.

³⁷ Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, xiii.

³⁸ James D. G. Dunn, “Reconstructions of Corinthian Christianity,” in *Christianity at Corinth* (eds. Adams and Horrell; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 303.

³⁹ Bengt Holmberg, “Methods of Historical Reconstruction,” in *Christianity at Corinth*, 261.

⁴⁰ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter to the Corinthians*, 4.

Whether it is their intention or not, Ciampa and Rosner clearly leave the impression that religious or philosophical explanations on the one hand, and social explanations on the other, must somehow be categorically opposed.

For all they may get right, statements such as these also manifest several problems. First of all, they pose a dichotomy that cannot be sustained in reality, depending as they do on a fallacious distinction between “religion” or “theology” on the one hand, and the “social” patterns of everyday life on the other. Upon more careful reflection, it must be said that religious values and beliefs are part and parcel of the general social systems that comprise one’s worldview.⁴¹ “Theology” and “sociology,” or as it were, “beliefs” and “behavior,” are mutually reinforcing: beliefs drive behavior, behavior in turn modifies beliefs, and the process goes on in an endless dialectic. Even if it *were* possible to separate theology and sociology, it surely overstates the case to say, not simply that a problem is *more* social than theological (or vice versa), but that a problem, or indeed “every problem in the letter,” is “social *not* theological” in origin. Moreover, we must not make the mistake of limiting the meaning of “theology” to abstract and systematic doctrinal speculation. Indeed, thusly understood, we may doubt not only whether the Corinthians had a theology, but also the extent to which Paul had one. In a less limiting sense, we should recognize theology merely as a way of thinking about the relation between the human and the divine—whether systematically or disconnectedly, whether in the abstract or in life’s particulars. The Corinthians were undoubtedly driven by theology in this sense.

⁴¹ For a fuller proposal as to how these might fit together, see David Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement* (Studies of the New Testament and Its World; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 18-22, 113-23.

Second, these statements reveal that an older error has simply been replaced with a new one: rather than reducing the divisions to “theological” differences as they were before Theissen, for many the dominant problem has now become “socio-economic, *not theological*” in nature.

Third, the banner of “sociology” as an explanation for the divisions could be said to constitute mere “settlement” with general rather than specific explanations. One will notice that reconstructions of 1 Corinthians are said to have moved from specific *religious* systems such as Gnosticism or Hellenistic Judaism now to general Hellenism and broad *secular* values. To be sure, many of the texts from 1 Corinthians once thought to find their closest parallels in one of these specific systems have now been shown to reflect values shared widely in secular society. For example, references to the “well-born” (1:26), “carnal” (3:3), or “prudent” (4:10) need not be connected with the spiritual values of Philo’s Judaism, or whatever, but may simply reflect the literal external values (or vices) of the secular world. While this seems to be a fair contention, however, it may be doubted whether *secular* social values can explain all of the material found in these same contexts—the distinction between the “spiritual” and “unspiritual” (2:6-16; 3:1-3), which seems to be connected with the Corinthians’ views on spiritual gifts (chs. 12-14), comes to mind. It may also be doubted whether it is the best explanation for material that seems to be more figurative in nature—for example, when Paul asks, “are you *kings*?” (4:8). And it may be doubted still *how much* of the letter this explanation can account for with a high degree of probability, without *over*-generalization, and with attention to the *full complexity* of the phenomena—several texts could make this point. “Social” may therefore be a better description of these general values than “*secular* social.” But even

so, we must be aware that *general* social values may be incorporated within *specific* religious or philosophical systems; thus, identifying the root of the Corinthians' divisions as "social" in nature need not rule out the presence of specific systems of thought. And again, we must resist the assumption (which some of those quoted above seem to have adopted) that religion or philosophy on the one hand, and social values on the other, are categorically opposed. In any case, preferring the general explanation to the specific is only advisable if all the more specific explanations have in fact been ruled out. That much, I believe, is still to be determined.

In all of this, it is evident that we are entangled in a morass of ill-defined categories. "Theology" has been pitted now against "sociology," now against "secular values," with as little regard for whether sociology might include theology as for whether there is any difference between *social* and *secular* values. Add to this that the term "theology" has been used (perhaps carelessly, in certain cases) to embrace both "religion" and "philosophy," as it has in at least one recent important summary of Corinthians scholarship.⁴² Equivocation added to equivocation has thus allowed us to view a "sociological" explanation for the divisions as exclusive not only of a "theological" explanation, but then *also* of a philosophical one. As such, we can see how our swift career toward "sociology" as a replacement for the Gnostic thesis has allowed us to look almost completely past (say) Stoicism.

In concluding this section, let it be emphasized, first, that consideration for social history remains an essential part of our task, for it provides some necessary restraints on the range of possible interpretations. But let us be clear about what social history really

⁴² This is how Adams and Horrell (*Christianity at Corinth*, 17-23), for instance, organize the data.

is. We must regard it as either embracing all aspects of first-century life and practice—religion and all—or (if it is thought exclusive of theology) as only one angle from which the divisions in Corinth can be viewed. Otherwise “social history” as a methodological approach leads us, *as a matter of course*, to an exclusively non-“theological” set of possible conclusions, regardless of the full range of evidence.

Synthesis

Based on our methodological survey, we can now draw together some guiding principles for the present pursuit.

(1) *Reliance on Paul.* We must continue to rely on Paul as a sufficiently accurate source for what is going on in Corinth. He did not know the situation fully; but he did know it better than we do.

(2) *Rejection of a priori reconstructions.* *A priori* reconstructions, such as the postulate that Paul’s opponents were invariably Judaizers, regardless of the letter under consideration, should be rejected. Reconstructions must be made from within, rather than imposed upon, the letter.

(3) *Cautious use of mirror-reading.* It has been observed that mirror-reading lays a precarious foundation for the task of epistolary reconstruction. Assuming, as a general rule, that in each of Paul’s denials is reflected a Corinthian affirmation, and vice versa, indeed involves a sort of hermeneutical fallacy. Without proper restraints, such a maneuver presents the risk of foisting upon the Corinthians views that Paul never intended to attribute to them. Paul’s own apparent disavowal of “rhetoric” (if that is what is happening in 2:1-5), for instance, need not indicate that the wisdom of the Corinthians was that of rhetoric and that rhetoric in turn was the central cause of the divisions; such a

claim would need to be established on other grounds. Nonetheless, it has been said that mirror-reading can still be useful, if undertaken with caution and as a tool subordinate to other means of analysis.

(4) *Separation of occasion and response.* As an extension of the previous point, care must be taken to distinguish properly between the *occasion* behind the letter, reflected in the views and language that Paul clearly attributes to the Corinthians, and Paul's own theological *response* to that occasion, in which he may expatiate more broadly.

(5) *Initial sequestering of 1 Corinthians.* We must treat 1 Corinthians separately before taking recourse to evidence deemed expedient from other sources, be it Acts, 2 Corinthians, or other ancient literature.

(6) *"Simplicity" of the agitators.* Unless we have compelling reasons to conclude otherwise, we should assume only one main group of agitators within the letter.

(7) *Basic unity of contents.* Assuming the integrity of the letter, we should be able to find unifying threads, if not an overarching explanation, for its various parts, allowing us to account not only for the material in chapters 1-4, but also for that in chapters 5-16. The more material our hypothesis can satisfactorily account for across the letter, the more likely it becomes.

(8) *Priority of certain types of information.* Any hypothesis should be based on the clearest, most explicit, and most objective statements Paul makes about the agitators. Where they can be identified, quotations are among the most reliable material. Topics addressed clearly or frequently, or both, are more likely to be at issue in the church than those mentioned seldom or without lucid narration.

(9) *Identification of Corinthian language.* Corinthian slogans must be identified as such on contextual grounds, on the basis of formal, logical, syntactical, stylistic, and broader contextual indicators. Arguments for Corinthian vocabulary can be made from “typical” Pauline style or lexical stock and known Pauline theology, but only with due caution. A dense cluster of consistently atypical vocabulary, especially if it is related to Corinthian language already established on other grounds, is more likely to belong to the Corinthians than terms that seem atypical of Paul but that stand alone.

(10) *Use of outside sources.* If outside sources are used to help clarify the internal evidence, we must rely chiefly on contemporary sources, less so on earlier sources, and on later sources only if we have good reason to believe that they accurately reflect earlier thought or practice. Parallels with other Pauline letters, Acts, or extra-biblical literature can only be established as such on the basis of linguistic and social context. Substantial parallels with extra-biblical material are more likely attributable to a common thought world than to literary dependency.

(11) *Constraints from social history.* Social-historical considerations provide the parameters for possible interpretations. Nonetheless, such considerations remain ancillary to the internal evidence itself.

(12) *Confirmation from interpreters.* Wide agreement among interpreters may be used to confirm, but not alone to establish, a particular interpretation that has been shown valid on other grounds.

In sum, we must deal with the internal evidence of 1 Corinthians in its entirety, first relying on the most clear, objective, and explicit statements from Paul regarding the Corinthians, before taking recourse to material in Acts, 2 Corinthians, the other Pauline

letters, or extra-biblical material. As already suggested, the clearest and most explicit information regarding the Corinthians is to be found in the topics specifically identified throughout the letter as areas of disagreement or doubt in the community; in the Corinthian slogans, quoted by Paul; and, to a lesser extent, in allusions to and interpellations of Corinthian language; but little (if at all) in Paul's apologetic denials or polemical affirmations. Only after we have dealt with this material can we broaden the scope of our investigation to other NT material, extra-biblical literature, and social-history generally. We therefore turn next to an examination of the internal evidence, with primary attention to two types of data: (1) the specific problems that seem to have prompted the letter, and (2) identifiable Corinthian slogans, catchphrases, and catchwords.

Reconstructing 1 Corinthians

Specific Problems Addressed

Following an exordium on the Corinthians' divisions and its relation to wisdom in chapters 1-4, Paul treats a number of other issues, some related to Corinthian misconduct or misunderstanding, others to queries they wanted answered, and others to both. Many of these issues certain Corinthians had brought to Paul's attention by letter (7:1). Perhaps the rest was conveyed through Chloe's people (1:11).⁴³ Thus, in the case of 1 Corinthians, we are fortunate enough not to have to resort to mirror-reading (from vice

⁴³ At one time it was assumed that Paul's *περὶ δέ* formula invariably introduced material quoted from the Corinthians' letter to Paul. As such, the material in chapters 1-6 derived from his oral source, and that in chapters 7-16 from the Corinthian letter. However, it is now acknowledged on the basis of rhetorical theory that this formula may mark no more than a change of topic. On this see Margaret Mitchell, "Concerning *peri de* in 1 Corinthians," *NovT* 31 (1989): 229-56.

lists or hortatory material, for example) to identify what the issues were. In general Paul identifies them explicitly, either by quoting the Corinthians or by actually narrating the problems. We may identify the following as the issues that prompted the letter, offering for the present as little interpretation as possible.

(1) *Divisive human wisdom* (1:10-4:21). A number of the Corinthians have espoused some form of “human” wisdom, which has led to boasting; this wisdom, above all else, is integrally connected with the divisions in the church.

(2) *Sexual immorality* (5:1-13; 6:12-20). An unidentified man in the church is living with his father’s wife, and the church has condoned it (5:1-13). Either the Corinthians or the man himself, or both, have sought to justify lax sexual conduct (6:12-20), either categorically or with specific reference to the case discussed in 5:1-13.

(3) *Litigation* (6:1-11). Certain individuals within the church are litigating against others, relying on the secular law-courts rather than settling the disputes among themselves.

(4) *Abstinence* (7:1-40). The Corinthians have inquired about abstinence by way of letter to Paul.

(5) *Eating meat sacrificed to idols* (8:1-13; 10:1-11:1). Certain individuals within the church have asserted the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols. Their judgement to do so somehow arises out of their presumed knowledge. The “weak,” who do not share this knowledge, have been wounded in conscience on account of the former’s behavior.

(6) *Freedom* (9:1-27). In connection with 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, Paul discourses on his rights as an apostle. He states *both* that this is a “defense” (9:3) *and* that he is

setting himself up as an example for the Corinthians to “imitate” (11:1), insofar as he relinquishes his freedom for the well-being of his fellow believers.

(7) *Spiritual gifts and the order of worship* (11:2-16; 12:1-14:14; 13:1-13). Paul treats various questions of church order. The assembly experiences disturbances related to issues of head covering, prophesying, and speaking in tongues. Paul intercalates a parenthesis on the superiority of love to the spiritual gifts of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues.

(8) *Practices surrounding the Lord’s Supper* (11:17-34). When the church gathers for the Lord’s Supper, they are divided. Some batten themselves before others have arrived. Others are left with nothing to eat at all.

(9) *Denial of a general resurrection* (15:1-58). Paul responds to the view of those who say “there is no resurrection of the dead” (15:12).

Corinthian Slogans Quoted

Paul punctuates his discussion of the above issues with several full-sentence quotations of the Corinthians (or perhaps paraphrases, in one or two instances). In the majority of cases, attribution is easily established, whether because the slogan is attributed explicitly (15:12), or contains other formal markers indicative of a quotation (7:1; 8:1, 4), or because we have a combination of logical, syntactical, stylistic, and contextual indicators. The following texts have been identified as Corinthian quotations by many if not most recent interpreters.

2:15 – “*The spiritual man judges all things, but is judged by no one.*” Though this statement lacks the earmarks of a quotation and fits smoothly within its immediate context, several factors provide evidence that it was, if not in fact a Corinthian slogan, at

least reflective of the Corinthian position: (1) it is consistent with and occurs amid a cluster of related, but non-Pauline vocabulary (in either occurrence or meaning) in 2:6-16; (2) it defies extant Pauline thought in implying a spiritual status distinction between two types of Christians, viz. the πνευματικός (“spiritual”) and the ψυχικός (“unspiritual”); (3) Paul later implies that certain Corinthians have claimed to be πνευματικός (cf. 7:40, “I think that I *too* [κἀγὼ] have the Spirit of God”; 14:12, 37, see below); (4) the statement resembles another status distinction, which seems also to stem from the Corinthians themselves, viz., that of the so-called “strong” (or better, “knowledgeable”) versus the “weak” (8:1-13).

Paul of course would not have disagreed entirely with the slogan, but he does seem to want to qualify it: the truly spiritual man indeed judges all things and is judged by no one, but only because he, like *all* believers, has *the mind of Christ* (v. 16).

6:12a – “*All things are permissible for me.*” The context provides ample evidence that this assertion stemmed from the Corinthians. First, it is corrected as soon as it is asserted (“‘All things are permissible for me,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are permissible for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything.”). Second, it provides the requisite counterpoint to Paul’s present argument that the body is not meant for fornication/belongs to the Lord/is a temple of the Lord. Third, it is consistent with the claim to behavioral “freedom” shown in the immediate context of 5:1-13, and then also later in the matters of eating meat sacrificed to idols (chs. 8-10) and several other issues.

Perhaps the only viable argument against seeing this as a Corinthian slogan is that it lacks explicit attribution.⁴⁴ Yet the force of this argument is attenuated by the fact that Paul frequently quotes material without introduction or attribution, whether that material is from Scripture (2:16; 10:26; 15:27; 15:32) or from pagan literature (15:33).⁴⁵ How much less would his quotations of the Corinthians require introduction, when the words were their own? The words are already introduced abruptly enough. Nor is it of any consequence that Corinthian slogans later in the letter are generally introduced with the *περὶ δέ* (“now concerning) formula (see below). Indeed, while the latter are undoubtedly quoted from the Corinthians’ letter to Paul, we must not forget that Paul received intelligence by oral report as well (1:11). If 6:12 was received by word of mouth, the *περὶ δέ* formula should not have been expected.⁴⁶

6:13a – “*Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other.*” With this text we must answer both *whether* it is a Corinthian quotation and, if so, *how far* it extends. Most likely it is Corinthian to the extent quoted above. Again it may be said that Paul is not required to introduce formally quotations which the Corinthians would surely have recognized as their own. Moreover, we know from other texts in the letter that some Corinthians had in fact disparaged the

⁴⁴ As Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 226) argues. Though, at certain points he seems to contradict himself, as when he says, “The Corinthians understand freedom in terms of the slogan ‘All things are permissible for me [6:12; 10:23]’” (p. 404), or, “Their attitude could have been bolstered by the maxim ‘All things are permitted’” (p. 488).

⁴⁵ Consider also Douglas Campbell’s (*The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Re-Reading of Justification in Paul* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 541-2) excursus on multiple textual voices and hidden transcripts in ancient texts, which were usually performed rather than simply read.

⁴⁶ If this is not a Corinthian slogan, the *least* that can be said is that with it Paul means to parody their position. For this view, see Will Deming, “The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6,” *JBL* 119 (1996): 311.

body—as they seem to be doing here—for Paul says explicitly in 15:12 that some of them denied the general resurrection, where their objection seems almost certainly to be related to the problem of *somatic* post-mortem existence.⁴⁷ Conversely, where Paul is already pressed to convince them of the relevance and ongoing importance of the body (6:12-18), it would hardly aid his case to broach its limited range of significance (“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”) and its transience (“God will destroy both one and the other”). Indeed, this would counteract his repeated insistence on the relevance of the body found not only within the immediate context (6:19, “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit”), but also elsewhere in both this letter (7:34, “holy in body and in spirit”; 9:27, “I punish my body and enslave it”; 15:12-58, the resurrection of the body), and others (1 Thess 5:23; 2 Cor 7:1). These arguments apply equally to the possibility that the Corinthian quotation ends after “food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”: for Paul then to add an editorial comment about the imminent destruction of the physical could only weaken his case.⁴⁸ Furthermore, to concede Paul’s emphasis on the body while still ascribing to him this statement about the belly would drive too great a wedge between the belly and the body.⁴⁹ In any case, if the contrast were between (1) food and the belly, which will be destroyed, and (2) the body, which has permanent existence, we should expect a μὲν . . . δὲ construction. Thus:

⁴⁷ See the excellent summary in Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1174-5.

⁴⁸ Against the NRSV and NIV, which so divide the material. Actually, many notable interpreters are now preferring the longer version of the slogan: e.g., Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 244-5; Wolff, *Erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1.126; Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 168; and Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 102-3.

⁴⁹ As Garland does (*1 Corinthians*, 230). J. E. Smith (“1 Corinthians 6:13-14: Isolating Slogans, Rethinking Soma, ‘Correcting’ Translations,” [paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southwest Commission of Religious Studies, Irving, TX, 10 March 2012]) provides conclusive arguments that such a distinction disrupts the order of the discourse and makes it essentially incoherent.

“For the stomach (μὲν) is food meant, and likewise the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. . .”

“But the body (δὲ) is not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.”

But instead, consistent with both the immediate and broader context of the letter, “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other” appears to constitute a further example of how the Corinthians have subordinated the physical to the spiritual in importance: not only sex, but also matters of diet, were regarded as mere matters of the body. The Corinthians could therefore boast special freedom in these things.

6:18b – “*Every wrong a person commits is outside the body.*” This text has been a source of greater disagreement. St. Augustine’s despair that he did “not know if the difficulties in this text can be completely cleared up” seems to be shared by more recent interpreters, whose solutions have multiplied with staggering diversity.⁵⁰ If these are Paul’s words, they would seem to imply some qualitative or quantitative distinction between sexual sin and other types of sin—in the one case meaning that sexual sin is in a class of its own, because it is the only sin that is carried out exclusively by means of the body, and in the other case meaning that sexual sin is somehow graver or more detrimental than other sins. Besides logical problems, however, such explanations, in all their varieties, ultimately depend on the insinuation of the gloss “other” into the Greek text (i.e., “Every *other* wrong a person commits is outside the body”). But the difficulties

⁵⁰ For Augustine’s remarks see Judith Kovacs, *1 Corinthians* (The Church’s Bible; Downer’s Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1999), 100. Fee (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 261) notes that already in 1956 Allo could cite 20 or 30 solutions. For an overview of modern interpretations, see Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 470-4.

remain only as long as we insist on attributing the expression to Paul. An alternative, which does not resort to such an emendation, is to take the text as a Corinthian citation which, consistent again with both the immediate and broader context of the letter, bespeaks subordination of the physical to the spiritual. As such, the assertion would mean that the body is morally irrelevant—sin occurs only on the spiritual level.

The linguistic context supports this conclusion. Indeed, most have passed over the peculiarity of the term used here for sin/wrong—ἀμάρτημα. The term appears otherwise in Paul only *once* (Rom 3:28). His usual word for sin is ἀμαρτία, which by striking contrast occurs some *50 times within the major Pauline epistles alone*. Thus 6:18 is both incoherent with respect to the demands of the logic and inconsistent with Paul’s preferred idiom. Along with 6:12a and 6:13a, this is a Corinthian quotation, with which the surrounding context stands in dialogue.

7:1 – “*It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*” Historically, this text has presented a notorious crux. Nonetheless, arguments in favor of seeing it as a Corinthian quotation are the stronger. On the one hand, the view that this is Paul’s position could perhaps be supported with an argument from “Pauline style”—as Conzelmann notes, καλὸν (7:1) appears also in 7:8, 26.⁵¹ Moreover, it was the virtual consensus of later patristic interpreters that these words were Paul’s own, spoken in advocacy of an ascetic lifestyle. For a host of reasons, however, this view has not held sway in recent years. Gordon Fee remarks that, in the first place, Paul nowhere else appears to be an ascetic, whether on food, drink, or marriage;⁵² at any rate, he says, such a position on marriage

⁵¹ As does Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 115n10.

⁵² Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 276.

would have been almost unheard of for a Jewish man in his day.⁵³ But more can be said from the immediate context. First, the text is introduced in such a way as would mark a quotation: “Now concerning the things which you wrote about (Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε)— ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman.’” While, it is true, we can no longer be certain that the introductory *περὶ δέ* (“now concerning”) *must* be a citation formula,⁵⁴ for several reasons we should probably take it as such here. Indeed, the formula is the same as that used in 8:1,⁵⁵ which is certainly a Corinthian quotation (see below). Moreover, unless the statement that follows—“It is good for a man not to touch a woman”—is itself that “which” (or at least one of the things “which”) the Corinthians wrote in their letter, then the relative (ὧν) remains vague, leaving even the Corinthians in doubt as to what Paul is referring to. Second, the assertion immediately contrasts with the contrapuntal injunction that “each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (7:2). Third, the assertion contradicts a biblical principle with which Paul himself is sure to have agreed: “it is *not* good (καλόν) for the man to be alone” (LXX Gen 2:18).⁵⁶ Fourth, the “concession” (συγγνώμη) that Paul mentions in 7:6 makes most sense as referring not to marriage but to the “temporary agreed *abstinence*” of the previous verse. Fifth, Paul acknowledges that marriage is a gift (χάρισμα) from God

⁵³ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 332.

⁵⁴ See n42, referencing Mitchell, “Concerning *peri de* in 1 Corinthians.”

⁵⁵ The structural similarities are striking: in both cases *περὶ δέ* is followed first by an object (relative pronoun in 7:1, noun in 8:1), and then by an exegetical or appositive independent clause. Thus:

“Now concerning the things which you wrote about ‘It is good for a man not to touch a woman.’”

“Now concerning meat sacrificed to idols ‘We know that we all have knowledge.’”

⁵⁶ See S. J. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 209.

(7:7). All said, the flatness of the initial statement in 7:1 contrasts sharply with the subtle qualifications Paul makes of it in his subsequent discussion (vv. 2-40).⁵⁷ For all these reasons, this text is best taken as a quotation from the Corinthians' letter to Paul.

8:1 – “*We know that we [all] have knowledge.*” More certainly than perhaps any other, this slogan is a quotation from the Corinthians' letter. First of all, the statement is immediately corrected: γνῶσις “puffs up” and the one who thinks he has knowledge “does not yet know as he ought to know” (8:2). Second, this interpretation dovetails with the context of chapters 8, 10, in which it seems clear that the Corinthians have drawn a spiritual status distinction between those thought to possess “knowledge” and therefore the freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols, and those who are ignorant of this freedom and therefore “weak” (ἀσθενεῖς) or inferior. Third, γνῶσις (“knowledge”) was almost surely a Corinthian catchword. It occurs 10 times in 1 Corinthians alone, but only 13 times in the remaining twelve letters of the Pauline corpus.⁵⁸ In chapters 12-13, as in 8:2, Paul lists it among the spiritual gifts that contrast with love (12:8; 13:2, 8), indicating that the Corinthians may have seen it as a charism of sorts.⁵⁹ Once, he seems to attribute it to the Corinthians explicitly (“If anyone thinks he *knows* something, he does not yet *know* as he ought to know,” 8:2). Twice, he says to them, “I do not want you to be *ignorant* (ἀγνοεῖν)” (10:1; 12:1). Then, there is his repeated question, “do you not *know* that . . . ,” which appears no less than *ten times* in this epistle (3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13,

⁵⁷ Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 244) for instance notes the prevalence of qualified language like “I wish,” “I do not command,” “I think,” etc.

⁵⁸ And then only 6 times in the remaining NT writings.

⁵⁹ For a sustained argument on this point, see P. D. Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8-11* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1994).

24) and only *once* in all of Paul's other epistles (Rom 6:16). Not only does the syntax of this expression mirror that of 8:1, but, framed as a rhetorical question, the expression implies that the addressees have in fact made some claim to knowledge. Compare:

οἶδμεν ὅτι . . . (8:1)
οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι . . . (3:16; 5:6; 6:2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 9:13, 24)

This would suggest that the quotation begins not with πάντες, but with οἶδμεν. That is, not: “We [wise Corinthians and Paul] know that ‘We all have knowledge,’” but: “‘We [wise Corinthians] know that we all have knowledge.’”

Perhaps Paul could have agreed that “all have knowledge,” provided their understanding of knowledge were qualified. As it is, however, he seems to set himself against their claim, for v. 7 blatantly contradicts v. 1:

“We know that we all have knowledge” (8:1)
“But knowledge is not in everyone” (8:7)

On the other hand, it is possible that the original Corinthian slogan was “We know that we have knowledge,” and Paul is responsible for adding the “all.” If so, he would be employing one definition of “knowledge” in 8:1, and another in 8:7. Thus:

8:1 – “We know that we *all* have knowledge” (where Paul has added the “all” so that he can agree with the statement)

8:7 – “Your ‘*knowledge*’ is not in everyone” (where Paul means knowledge only as the Corinthians understand it).

Whichever solution we prefer, 8:1 is one of our clearest examples of a Corinthian assertion. Certain ones have surely said, “We know that we [all] have knowledge.”

8:4 – “*An idol is nothing in the world; there is no God but one.*” Just as 8:1 parallels the structure of 7:1, so does 8:4 parallel both of these verses. Περὶ re-introduces the topic of eating meat sacrificed to idols, broached first with a quotation from the

Corinthian letter in 8:1. Οἶδαμεν plus the ὅτι recitative follows, also as in 8:1, before the assertion, “An idol is nothing in the world; there is no God but one.”⁶⁰ With strong arguments for a Corinthian origin of 8:1, these structural similarities, in conjunction with the consistency of content, are sufficient to establish a high probability that the two statements introduced by the ὅτι clause here constitute Corinthian assertions as well.

Still, there are further arguments. On the one hand, it is true that these statements express principles consonant with biblical monotheism and its stance against idols (e.g., Deut 6:4; 32:39; Isa 44:6), which will undoubtedly have resonated with Paul. But in the context, it makes far more sense for the Corinthians to have said “an idol is nothing, because there is only one God,” as a way of justifying indiscriminate eating of idol-meat, than it does for this to have been a fresh assertion of Paul, since here he is at pains to *deter* the Corinthians from eating idol-meat, and that largely on the grounds that it is perilous to do so (10:14, 19-21). Such statements could only undermine his case. More likely, these are Corinthian assertions, with which Paul could agree only with qualification.

8:8 – “*Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.*” As in a couple of our other samples, this verse includes none of the structural markers that ordinarily set off a quotation. But once again, the citation

⁶⁰ Although οὐδέν (“nothing”) could be taken attributively (i.e., “There is *no* idol in the world”), at least two points favor the predicative translation. First, the attributive rendering would create an assertion that seems to be simply untrue: idols *do* exist in the world. Thus, the question is not about their existence but rather their value—a point captured by the predicative rendering. Second, the predicative rendering makes more sense of the contrapuntal statement made in 10:19; compare:

“An idol is *nothing* (οὐδέν)” (8:4).

“What do I say? ...that an idol is *anything* (τί)?” (10:19).

makes more sense as a Corinthian quotation than it does as an assertion of Paul. On the one hand, it conveys a sort of indifference toward eating that countervails Paul's point in chapters 8-10—viz., that what one eats matters a great deal, as regards both one's relation with fellow believers (8:11) and one's relations with the divine, whether Christ or demons (8:12-13; 10:19-21). On the other hand, the assertion is remarkably consistent with the Corinthian assertion of ἐξουσία (“freedom”) not only seen in 6:12-13, but also distinctly highlighted throughout chapters 8-10, and especially in 10:23, where the essential quotation of 6:12 is repeated. If the Corinthians have boasted the freedom to do as they wish with their bodies, evidently this has implications for food just as much as it does for sex.

10:23 – “*All things are permissible.*” Paul repeats the quotation of 6:12, minus μοι (“for me”). Thus, consistent with other Corinthian slogans, 10:23 appeals to freedom in matters pertaining to the physical—in 6:12 it is sex, here it is food.

15:12 – “*There is no resurrection of the dead.*” This is one of only two places where Paul explicitly attributes speech to the Corinthians apart from a conditional: λέγουσιν ἐν ὑμῖν τινες ὅτι (“some of you say that . . .”). In this case, we have no reason to believe that the statement is anything but an accurate quotation, or at the very least a paraphrase, of what some of the Corinthians were in fact saying.

1:12 (cf. 3:4) – “*Each of you says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ.’*” I treat the “party slogans” last, because most interpreters now see these as Paul's own formulations, rhetorically representing a divided church, rather

than as verbatim quotations;⁶¹ this view reaches back at least as far as Chrysostom (*Hom. Cor.* 3.1). As evidence, it has been noted that Paul leaves no further indication that there were four distinct parties in the church, equipped with their own theologies, nor any inkling that the named persons lent support to the putative parties that claimed them for their leaders. In sum, while the so-called party slogans are sure to depict real fissiparous tendencies, we may not be able to regard them as “slogans” in the sense that the others are such. At all events, this text represents the *resulting* community problem, and not, as the other slogans, the *underlying* perspectives that were aggravating it.

Such are the texts most likely to represent Corinthian slogans.⁶² Over the last several decades, commentators have continued to attribute these texts to the Corinthians. In 1965, J. C. Hurd tabulated the views of twenty-four contemporary commentators (table 4) and found that they almost unanimously affirmed 6:12/10:23, 8:1, and 8:4 as Corinthian slogans, and that a near majority affirmed 7:1 and 8:8. The material from 2:15, on the other hand, Hurd omitted from consideration, because he regarded all the Corinthian quotations as originating from the letter Paul had received from Corinth, which he thought was introduced only after chapter 6 (though the slogan of 6:12

⁶¹ Some agree with patristic sources (cf. Gerald Lewis Bray, *1-2 Corinthians* [ACCS; Downers Grove: IvPress, 1999] on 1 Cor 1:12; cf. 1 Clem 47:1-7) that the parties were not *distinct*: e.g., Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 46; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 14; Lang, *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, 20-21; Collins, *First Corinthians*, 73, 81; Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 39; Helmut Koester, “The Silence of the Apostle,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth*, 342; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 24. Others say there were no parties at all: e.g., Munck, “Menigheden uden Partier”; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 5, 47, 59; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 44; Mitchell (*The Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 84) says that the slogans of 1:12 merely caricature childish behavior. Still others say that there were parties, though without the consent of the leaders named: e.g., Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, 5. For a summary of the current consensus: Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 50-51.

⁶² A couple of others have been proposed over the years—i.e., 11:19; 14:33b-34; 15:19—but these have, rightly, never been widely entertained.

anticipated 10:23). 6:18 he passed over. The Corinthian origin of 15:12 was never subject to question.

I have undertaken it to tabulate the views of twenty, more recent commentators (table 5).⁶³ In accordance with Hurd's tabulation, I have found that virtually no one questions whether 6:12/10:23, 6:13, 8:1, and 8:4 (as also 15:12) represent Corinthian slogans. Furthermore, a majority are now taking 7:1 and 8:8 as Corinthian as well—17 of 20 for the one, and 12 of 20 for the other. Finally, though passed over by Hurd, 2:15 and 6:18 have also begun to receive a fair amount of support—5 of 20 and 6 of 20, respectively.

Table 4. Corinthian slogans according to commentators up to 1965

Verse	Corinthian Slogan	Not Corinthian Slogan
6:12/10:23	22	2
6:13	15	9
7:1	10	14
8:1	24	0
8:4	19	5
8:8	10	14

Table 5. Corinthian slogans according to commentators from 1965 to the present

Verse	Corinthian Slogan	Not Corinthian Slogan
2:15	5	15
6:12	19	1
6:13/10:23	18	2
6:18	6	14
7:1	17	3
8:1	20	0
8:4	20	0
8:8	12	8
15:12	20	0

⁶³ Included are those of Barrett, Lietzmann, Conzelmann, Fee, Senft, Schrage, Witherington, Murphy-O'Connor, Collins, Hays, Horsley, Kremer, Wolff, Lang, Lindemann, Thiselton, Talbert, Garland, Fitzmyer, and Ciampa and Rosner.

Commentators are representative of recent interpreters generally. 6:12/10:23; 6:13; 8:1; 8:4; and 15:12 are virtually unquestioned as Corinthian slogans. 6:18 and 8:8 command a lot of support, though not a unanimous consensus.⁶⁴ And almost all agree that 2:15 picks up Corinthian language, even if it is not an actual slogan (see below).

In the light of our analysis and the accompanying tabulation of interpreters, we can now state some tentative conclusions. For most of the texts in question, a high level of probability can be established on the basis of the immediate context alone. In other cases, we have suggestive contextual indicators, but also rely to some extent on support from our more certain fixtures. Therefore, we should keep in mind that our initial judgments are based largely on immediate logical and structural indicators in the text; probability may increase for particular texts once we have considered additional catchwords and phrases from the Corinthians (discussed below), and as an overarching thesis begins to take shape.

Most probable. 6:12, 13; 7:1; 8:1, 4; 15:12 reflect Corinthian slogans almost without question. 7:1, 8:1, and 8:4 share structural indicators that seem to set off

⁶⁴ Besides the commentaries already tabulated, see for example on 6:18: Roger L. Omanson, "Acknowledging Paul's Quotations," *BT* 43 (1992): 201-13; Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (TNTC; London: Tyndale, 1958), 103; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Corinthian Slogans in 1 Cor 6:12-20," *CBQ* (1978): 391-6; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 196-7; M. E. Thrall, *The First and Second Letters of Paul to the Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 49; R. Kempthorne, "Incest and the Body of Christ: A Study of 1 Corinthians 6.12," *NTS* 14 (1967-68): 568-74; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (ABRL; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1997), 527; Jay E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Cor 6:18," *JTS* 59 (2008): 63-95—on 8:8: Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Food and Spiritual Gifts in 1 Cor. 8:8," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 297; Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian*, 48; Leon Morris, *the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 128; Khiok-Khing Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8-10* (BibIntMon 9; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 192-3; John Fotopoulos, "Arguments Concerning Food Offered to Idols: Corinthian Quotations and Pauline Refutations in a Rhetorical *Partitio* (1 Corinthians 8:1-9)," *CBQ* 67 (2005): 618; Thiselton (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 647) lists eight further writers supporting this view.

quotations, and 15:12 is explicitly introduced as Corinthian material. Moreover, all six texts arguably reflect either a departure from Pauline style or thought, or a contradiction with the logic of Paul's present argument, or a closer affinity with the apparent Corinthian position, or some combination of these. And in all cases, it can be said objectively that an overwhelming majority of commentators has confirmed our judgment.

Probable. Though 6:18 and 8:8 involve no telltale structural indications of quotation, they pose enough tension with Paul's own logic or perspective, and cohere closely enough with texts that we have seen are more certainly of Corinthian origin, to establish a level of high probability that they too represent Corinthian slogans. 6:18 offers the added, striking, evidence of un-Pauline terminology for an otherwise dominating Pauline concept (ἀμάρτημα for ἀμαρτία). In any case, we have seen that formal introduction is not required, for almost everyone has accepted 6:12 and 6:13 as Corinthian without it. Moreover, 6:18 and 8:8 have increasingly been regarded as Corinthian slogans within the last thirty years of interpretation.

Possible. The two remaining texts, 1:12 (cf. 3:4) and 2:15, can be said with some confidence to reflect the Corinthian viewpoint, if not their actual words. 1:12 is less important for our purposes, since it encapsulates the community problem itself rather than the perspectives or behaviors underlying it. 2:15 is difficult since it lacks the formal earmarks of a quotation and seems to express a thought with which Paul would in a certain respect agree; as such, it could simply be an assertion of Paul. Nonetheless, 2:6-16 abounds with terminology and accompanying ideas uncharacteristic of Paul, and we have good reason to believe from other material in the letter (discussed below) that certain Corinthians did style themselves "spiritual" in a sense meant to set them apart from the

“unspiritual.” All this renders it likely that *either* 2:15 is a simple Corinthian slogan which Paul has repeated, *or* Paul has appropriated a Corinthian slogan and either conceded it to the Corinthians tongue in cheek or filled it with new content in the light of his own theology. But we shall have to consider this more fully below.

Other Corinthian Language Quoted

Besides the full-sentence slogans examined above, 1 Corinthians contains several other terms or phrases that can be confidently attributed to the Corinthians.

Σοφία and σοφός. As already noted, interpreters have long recognized the Corinthians’ “wisdom” as the principal agent stimulating divisions within the church. The term σοφία appears already *15 times* in the first *three chapters* of the letter,⁶⁵ though only *11 times* in the remaining *twelve letters* of the Pauline corpus. Given the centrality and frequency of the word, and Paul’s singularly negative evaluation of it in 1 Corinthians, we can reasonably conclude that it was in popular usage in Corinth.

The importance of wisdom in Corinth is thrown into relief by Paul’s repeated use of σοφός, or “wise” person.⁶⁶ The term appears, either as an adjective or as a substantive, no less than 11 times in 1 Corinthians—that’s more than twice as often as it appears in the rest of the Pauline corpus together, and more frequently than it occurs in the entire NT outside 1 Corinthians. Twice Paul insinuates that the Corinthians have attributed the label to themselves: “If anyone among you thinks himself wise (σοφός) . . .” (3:18); and “Is there no wise man (σοφός) among you who is able to judge between his brothers?”

⁶⁵ The complete list of its occurrences in 1 Corinthians is as follows: 1:17, 19, 20, 21 (x2), 22, 24, 30; 2:1, 4, 5, 6 (x2), 7, 13; 3:19; 12:8.

⁶⁶ Found in 1:19, 20, 25, 26, 27; 3:10; 3:18 (x2), 19, 20; 6:5.

(6:5). And twice he inserts the term into OT citations, where no known text type actually includes it (3:19/Job 5:13; 3:20/Ps 93:11).

That σοφία and σοφός were catchwords of the Corinthians is often noted by interpreters explicitly;⁶⁷ but all have taken it for granted in fact. Along with the consensus, we may conclude with a high degree of certainty that both σοφία and σοφός were catchwords in Corinth, and that certain Corinthians considered themselves “wise men” possessed of extraordinary “wisdom.”

Γνωσις. This term has more occurrences in the Corinthian correspondence than it does in the remainder of the NT (16 against 15).⁶⁸ Moffatt observes that (chronologically speaking) 1 Corinthians is the first NT writing to use the word.⁶⁹ Moreover, we have already seen that it appears in 8:1, which is almost certainly a Corinthian slogan, and that it plays a central role in the debate over eating in chapter 8. We have also noted that Paul classes it among the spiritual gifts (12:8), subordinates it to love (13:2, 8), and all but states that the Corinthians have predicated it of themselves (“If anyone thinks he has knowledge,” 8:2). Interpreters agree: without doubt, γνωσις was a special word for the Corinthians.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Publications mentioning this possibility include: *TDNT* 7:522; Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 60; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 37; Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 48; Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth,” 61.

⁶⁸ It occurs in 1 Corinthians in 1:5; 8:1 (x2), 7, 10, 11; 12:8; 13:2, 8; 14:6.

⁶⁹ Moffatt, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 6.

⁷⁰ E.g., Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 39, 367; Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth,” 61; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 184.

Λόγος. In terms of sheer numerical comparison, λόγος is a rather unexceptional word in 1 Corinthians. It does occur 9 times in the first four chapters of the letter,⁷¹ but it is equally frequent in most of the NT letters, both Pauline and non-Pauline. Its uniqueness in this letter derives from how it is combined with other Corinthian concepts. On one occasion it is conjoined with γνῶσις (1:5); six times, however, it is conjoined with σοφία (1:17; 2:1, 4 [x2], 13; 12:8). This latter combination, together with Paul's repeated repudiation of "wisdom of word," has led many to conclude that the combination σοφία λόγου was a Corinthian catchphrase.⁷²

"Freedom" language. It is evident from our earlier discussion that the problems in Corinth involved abusive claims to "freedom." In treating their abuses, Paul employs an array of cognate terminology, including ἔξεστιν, ἐξουσία, ἐξουσιάζω, ἐλεύθερος, ἐλευθερία. We can be sure that the Corinthians had made use of some of these. We have already noted that ἔξεστιν appears in the Corinthian slogan of 6:12. Moreover, 8:9 implies that they have used ἐξουσία, for Paul speaks there of "that freedom (ἐξουσία) of yours." Together these terms appear in almost every major issue in the letter. In sum, while we may be unable to determine whether the Corinthians had used *all* of these terms, it cannot be doubted that, in their assertions of freedom, they had used some of them.

⁷¹ The complete list of its occurrences in 1 Corinthians is as follows: 1:5, 17, 18; 2:1; 2:4 (x2), 13; 4:19, 20; 12:8 (x2); 14:9, 19 (x2), 36; 15:2, 54.

⁷² Grosheide, *Epistle to the Corinthians*, 41; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 64; Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 43; Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 148.

Contrasts in 2:6-16, 3:1-3. These verses involve a cluster of contrasts likely employed by the Corinthians.⁷³

πνευματικός	ψυχικός
τέλειος	νήπιος
	[σάρκινος]

Several pieces of evidence reveal that Paul is repeating Corinthian terminology. In the first place, 2:6-16, just as 2:15 above, appears to promote a system of spiritual elitism nowhere else articulated by Paul: that wisdom is only for the “perfect,” that the “spiritual man” alone can fathom the deep things of God, and that he is exempt from the judgment of others, all imply, in the presence of contrary terms (ψυχικός, νήπιος, σάρκινος), a spiritual hierarchy uncharacteristic of Pauline thought. Second, the terms themselves are rather rare in the NT, and in Paul in particular. Πνεύματικός is attributed to a person on only one other occasion in the NT (Gal 6:1, where the reference could be ironic); τέλειος appears elsewhere in Paul, though almost as infrequently; outside 1 Corinthians, ψυχικός is attributed to a person only in Jude 19; νήπιος and σάρκινος are equally rare. Third, though appearing nowhere else in the Pauline corpus, the τέλειος-νήπιος contrast emerges still two further times in 1 Corinthians (13:10-11; 14:20), once in connection with the Corinthians (14:20). Fourth, that the most frequent and overt contrast, πνευματικός versus ψυχικός, is paralleled in no extant literature prior to 1 Corinthians—Jewish, Christian, or otherwise—and only here in Paul, would suggest that it is a new coinage.⁷⁴ In that regard, we should note that Paul later seems to place πνευματικός in the Corinthians’ own mouths (“Anyone who claims to be . . . spiritual [πνευματικός] . . .”

⁷³ Πνευματικός and ψυχικός (cf. 2:13 [x2], 14, 15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3; 10:4 [x2]; 12:1; 14:1, 37; 15:44, 46); τέλειος and νήπιος (cf. 2:6-3:3; 13:10, 11; 14:20); σάρκινος (3:1).

⁷⁴ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 57.

14:37; cf. 14:12, “since you are zealots for spiritual things,” ἐπεὶ ζηλωταὶ ἐστε πνευμάτων). Fifth, all of these terms (minus σάρκινος) reemerge in contexts where Paul is at pains to stem the Corinthians’ overemphasis on the spiritual, or to correct their de-emphasis on the physical (cf. 13:10, 11; 14:20; 15:44, 46), which again would suggest that the Corinthians were thinking of themselves as “spiritual,” “mature,” or perhaps beyond the paltry matters of the body. For all these reasons, interpreters have agreed with overwhelming accord that in 2:6-3:3 Paul picks up this Corinthian language for the sake of argument, though he fashions it to his own ends.⁷⁵

Contrast between the knowledgeable and the “weak.” In 1 Corinthians 8, 10 we find a contrast between the person who has “knowledge” and the person who is said to be ἄσθενῆς, or “weak.” In 8:10-11, these two types are contrasted explicitly: “If someone sees you who have knowledge (γνώσει) eating in the temple of an idol, will not the conscience of the person who is weak (ἄσθενοῦς) be encouraged to eat idol-meat? In that case, the weak person (ὁ ἄσθενῶν) is destroyed by your knowledge (γνώσει).” We have already noted that γνώσις was a Corinthian catchword. While the latter term could be Paul’s own formulation, the fact that we know that the first term belonged to the Corinthians, that there were factions in the church, and that they had chiefly to do with

⁷⁵ E.g., Moffatt, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 25; Funk, “Word and Word in 1 Cor 2:6-16,” 300n107; James D. G. Dunn, “1 Corinthians 15:45—Last Adam, Life-Giving Spirit,” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule* (eds. B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 129; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 58; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 99-100, 737, 779, 785; Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth,” 61; Wolff, *Die erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther*, 63; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 42; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 124, 128-9, 136, 139-40; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 57-61; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 224; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 18; Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 183; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 153, 558 (cf. 93-94, 107, 735); cf. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 174; Senft, *La Premiere Epitre de Saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, 48, 54; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:240-1; Kremer, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 57-62, 67.

wisdom and knowledge, all suggests that those who ostensibly possessed this knowledge had in fact disparaged those who did not, in which case “weak” was probably the term they had used to do so. No more can be said with certainty. Nonetheless, that both terms and not just the first one belonged to the Corinthians seems to be taken for granted by most interpreters.⁷⁶

“*Rich . . . kings.*” One further text deserves mention. In 4:8, Paul formulates two clauses as if they reflected indirect discourse: “Are you already rich (ἐπλουτήσατε)? Are you already kings (ἐβασιλεύσατε)?” He follows in v. 10 with a series of contrasting predicates, one set characterizing the Corinthians (φρόνιμοι, ἰσχυροί, ἔνδοξοι), the other himself (μωροί, ἀσθενεῖς, ἄτιμοι). Inasmuch as 4:8 is framed in terms of implied indirect discourse, I am inclined to take the language of Paul’s rhetorical questions as that of the Corinthians themselves; but my reasons for doing so will become more apparent in chapter 5. In terms of 4:10, we may not be able to take these predicates as Corinthian language, but we will not go astray in taking them as an accurate depiction of the Corinthians’ self-understanding.

With a high degree of confidence, we can add most of this terminology to those slogans identified above as probable Corinthian language. It is *most probable* that their catchwords included σοφία, σοφός, γνῶσις, perhaps a variety of terms for “freedom,” and a contrast between the πνευματικός (“spiritual”) and ψυχικός (“unspiritual”) person. In

⁷⁶ Representative are Wayne Meeks, *First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 179; Stanley K. Stowers, “Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason,” 276; Malherbe, “Determinism and Free Will in Paul,” 235; and John Fotopoulos (*Food Offered to Idols in Roman Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Reconsideration of 1 Cor 8:1-11:1* [WUNT 2/151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003], 188-90), who provides a list of predecessors who agree as well. Though some, such as Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 353-95), believe the distinction was a hypothetical one introduced by Paul.

addition to what has already been said, it is worth adding that most of these are implicitly attributed to the Corinthians at key points in the letter, using a consistent formula:

“If anyone thinks he is wise [σοφός] . . .” (3:18)

“If anyone thinks he knows [ἐγνωκέναι] something . . .” (8:2)

“If anyone thinks he is spiritual [πνευματικός] . . .” (14:37)

If λόγος too was a catchword, it should surely be seen in connection with, and probably in subordination to, σοφία and σοφός, given the greater predominance and independence of the latter two. That the contrast between τέλειος and νήπιος is analogous to that between πνευματικός and ψυχικός, appears in the same passage, is equally anomalous in Paul, and is elsewhere in the letter applied to the Corinthians, renders it *probable* that this too was a Corinthian contrast. Finally, inasmuch as the claim that they were “rich” and “kings” is patently imputed to the Corinthians, it is, at the very least, *possible* that this reflects Corinthian language, though in combination with considerations to be discussed later, we may very well take it as a *probable* reflection of the actual Corinthian viewpoint, if not even their *ipsissima verba*.

Conclusions on Corinthian Language

Scholars have long been aware that Paul quotes the Corinthians throughout the letter. If reconstruction should be based first and foremost on material that gives the most objective and explicit information about Paul’s opponents or (in our case) agitators, then these quotations are of cardinal significance.

Of course, the matter is not *entirely* cut and dry, for not only do some of these quotations lack formal markers, but some of them also voice perspectives with which Paul might to some extent have agreed. Despite these complications, however, it can be said that 1 Corinthians affords us with information about the troublemakers that is,

among Paul's letters, unique both in its quantity and in its quality. Through a combination of written and oral sources, Paul has been apprised of catchwords and -phrases in currency among the Corinthians as well as of several seemingly verbatim slogans. For us, these remain some of the most *explicit* (if not *the* most explicit) indicators of the Corinthians' views, even if their attribution is not in every case entirely *clear*. Paul of course does not set off these slogans with inverted commas, as if to anticipate a later audience, unprivy to attributions which the Corinthians would have had no trouble making. Nonetheless, we have seen that several slogans are surrounded by telling formal markers, and that all of those listed above present enough tension with Paul's argument, style, or thought, to incline us almost decisively toward Corinthian attribution. Indeed, in almost every case, the vast majority of commentators has confirmed our conclusions.

It should be reiterated that we have examined these texts to a large degree as autonomous units, divorced from the clarifying light of an overarching thesis (as we should always begin, if we wish to avoid selective or procrustean procedures). This approach allows us to identify "anchor" texts that can be identified as representative of the Corinthian viewpoint on basically independent merits, before turning to arguments from coherence. These foundational texts may then be used to moderate how we understand those of less certain origin. Thus, our certainty that texts such as 2:15, 4:8, 6:18, and 8:8 reflect the views of the Corinthians, whether in word or in fact, may solidify as we build our thesis upon the bedrock of firmer examples such as 6:12, 6:13, 8:1, 8:4, and 15:12, and the community problems clearly spelled out in the letter.

We can now summarize our discussion of Corinthian language as follows:

Most probable

“wisdom” (σοφία)

“wise man” (σοφός)

“knowledge” (γνώσις)

“spiritual” vs. “unspiritual” (πνευματικός vs. ψυχικός)

“freedom” language (a variety of terms)

“All things are permissible for me.” (6:12)

“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy
both one and the other.” (6:13)

“It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” (7:1)

“We know that we [all] have knowledge.” (8:1)

“An idol is nothing in the world; there is no God but one.” (8:4)

“All things are permissible.” (10:23)

“There is no resurrection of the dead.” (15:12)

Probable

“perfect” vs. “immature” (τέλειος vs. νήπιος)

“weak” (ἀσθενής) vs. “knowledgeable”

[“word/argument/reason” (λόγος)]

[“The spiritual man judges all things, but is judged by no one.” (2:15)]

[“rich . . . kings” (4:8)]

“Every wrong a person commits is outside the body.” (6:18)

“Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do.” (8:8)

Possible

[“word/argument/reason” (λόγος)]

[“The spiritual man judges all things, but is judged by no one.” (2:15)]

[“rich . . . kings” (4:8)]

Besides the explicit information provided from quoted Corinthian language, it has been said that we can rely on the foundation of the explicit and *clear* information conveyed in Paul’s discussion of the various issues mentioned in the letter. In this regard, we have identified the following items:

(1) *Divisive human wisdom* (1:10-4:21)

(2) *Sexual immorality* (5:1-13; 6:12-20)

(3) *Litigation* (6:1-11)

(4) *Abstinence* (7:1-40)

(5) *Eating meat sacrificed to idols* (8:1-13; 10:1-11:1)

(6) *Freedom* (9:1-27)

(7) *Spiritual gifts and the order of worship* (11:2-16; 12:1-14:14; 13:1-13)

(8) *Practices surrounding the Lord’s Supper* (11:17-34)

(9) *Denial of a general resurrection* (15:1-58)

Recurring Topics

It is on these two pegs, quoted Corinthian language and the behavioral problems specifically and clearly delineated in the major units of the letter, that we can begin to hang a thesis. These problems, together with identifiable Corinthian language, lay bare a number of recurring topics which, importantly, must be said to have characterized the *historical situation*, and not simply *Paul's* theological response or personal apology, for they are the surest indicators we have of the Corinthians' behavior and perspectives.

These topics include:

(1) *Wisdom and the wise man.* This topic, and its relation to the divisions, stands front and center in chapters 1-4. It seems to bear some relation to personal status and boasting (also important themes in this section), as well as to λόγος (perhaps *qua* rational speech or argumentation) and to γνῶσις, which becomes salient from chapter 8 onward.

(2) *A strong emphasis on freedom.* Finding expression with an array of terminology (i.e., ἔξεστιν, ἐξουσία, ἐξουσιάζω, ἐλεύθερος, ἐλευθερία), an appeal to freedom or individualism underlies the justification of loose sexual conduct in 5:1-13 and 6:12-20, of sexual abstinence in chapter 7, and of lax dietary practices in chapters 8-10, and seems to play some role in the divisions plaguing meetings for the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) and the church's assemblies for worship (11:2-16; chs. 12, 14).

(3) *The notion of "indifference."* The Corinthian cry for freedom seems to be shored up by a principle of "indifference" applied toward material reality: as contingencies of the physical realm, matters of food and the human body have become morally irrelevant. As such, whether we "eat or do not eat," and so forth, is treated as a matter of indifference (cf. 6:13, 18; 8:8).

(4) *Subordination of the physical to the spiritual/intellectual.* The previous two topics seem to relate closely with a Corinthian tendency toward “dualism.” If for the Corinthians the physical realm was inferior to the spiritual/intellectual, not only would food and bodily matters have become morally irrelevant (6:12a, 18a; 8:8), but the Corinthians may no longer have been able to accept the notion of a somatic post-mortem existence—thus, their denial of a bodily resurrection, as seen in 1 Corinthians 15.

(5) *Contrasting intellectual/spiritual status indicators.* The Corinthian “wise” seem to have thought of themselves as “spiritual,” “perfect,” or “knowledgeable” over against the “unspiritual,” “immature,” or “weak” (2:6-16; chs. 8, 10). Moreover, if they thought of their wisdom and spiritual achievement as that which set them apart from their more jejune counterparts, this could also explain their charismatic obsession, against which Paul inveighs in chapters 12-14.

One will notice that these five topics (which conceptually overlap with each other) comprise virtually all the material found in the letter. It should also be said that several of these topics may be operative in issues where they have not been immediately obvious. For instance, the possible effacement of gender distinctions at stake in the issue of head covering and hair length (11:2-16) may very well relate to the over-spiritualizing tendency inherent in (4) and (5) above, and the inappropriate consumption of the elements of the Lord’s Supper may easily have gained impetus from (3) and (4). The single remaining issue in the letter (6:1-11), I will argue in chapter 5, may have been caused (in part) by reasons not at all unrelated to these same tendencies. Of course, this is not to say that each and every issue in the letter can be *reduced* to one of these five causes—for matters are always more complex than this—but that these five topics are

nonetheless dominating motifs in the letter, playing a major role in most of the problems, and *perhaps* a minor role in all of them.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have aimed to devise a synthetic set of methodological principles for use in reconstructing the background behind 1 Corinthians. It was concluded that our most explicit and clear information regarding the Corinthian viewpoint must be gleaned, not primarily from mirror-reading, nor even (initially) from social history, but from a combination and comparison of quoted Corinthian language, which Paul provides in abundance, and from the pattern of the problems discussed throughout the *whole* of the letter. Based on this information, we were able to distill a list of several recurring topics that seem in large part to have regulated the perspectives and behavior of certain Corinthians: wisdom and the notion of the wise man, a strong emphasis on freedom, a principle of “indifference,” subordination of the physical to the intellectual/spiritual, and distinctions in intellectual/spiritual status. It will be my contention not only that these topics all commend Stoicism as the nearest source of these Corinthians’ wisdom, but also that the particular *forms* in which their perspectives were uttered consistently betray this school of thought. To make this proposal more plausible, however, it will first be necessary to address the sociological situation of first-century Corinth and its church.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Corinthian Social World

So far we have examined the problems inherent in the now-popular, rhetorical interpretation of the Corinthians' wisdom (Chapter 2) and have attempted to lay a methodological foundation from which to provide an alternative reconstruction (Chapter 3). The present chapter will be concerned to shed light on the social world in which the Corinthian church was enmeshed. Indeed, with the death knell of the old Gnostic thesis still echoing audibly, we are reminded of the crucial importance of a chapter such as this one: before demonstrating the plausibility of the Stoic thesis exegetically, one must first be able to show that Stoicism was both a palpable force in the Corinthians' present environment, and a system of thought to which they were likely to have had meaningful exposure.

To this end, the present chapter treats a number of issues related to Corinthian social history. I begin with socio-economic considerations, focusing especially on evidence related to the socio-economic level of certain Corinthian Christians. Next, I canvass issues related to the religio-cultural orientation of the church and its environment (i.e., Was the Corinthian church of a more "Gentile" or more "Jewish" orientation? Was first-century Corinth "Greek," "Roman," or a complex hybrid of the two?). Finally, in the light of our socio-economic analysis, I address the question of literate and philosophical education in the Corinthian church. In that regard our main concern will be to determine, based on what we know of their socio-economic position, what level of exposure the

Corinthians might be expected to have had with Stoic philosophy. As we shall see, for some the prospects looked promising.

Socio-Economic Considerations

Social Stratification

In the first half of the twentieth century scholars widely agreed that the primitive church was a movement of the lower classes—of poor artisans, peasants, and slaves.¹ In 1960, however, a slender volume from E. A. Judge, focused on the contribution of the social sciences to the NT, broadened our attention to Christianity’s wider social spectrum: it was made up of a “broad cross-section of society,” including a poor majority, but also a small number of influential and relatively high status people.² By 1977, Abraham Malherbe could report an “emerging consensus” regarding the economic profile of Pauline church communities: they represented a “cross-section of most of Roman society.”³ A few years later, Gerd Theissen published a collection of earlier essays which had served as a major impetus for Malherbe’s remarks.⁴ Soon after, Wayne Meeks ratified the consensus decisively in his exhaustive study *The First Urban Christians* (1983): “The ‘emerging consensus’ that Malherbe reports seems to be valid: a Pauline

¹ The most well-known champion for this view was Gustav Adolph Deissmann, in *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (trans. Lionel R. M. Strachan; 1927; repr., Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995).

² *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century* (London: Tyndale, 1960), 59-61, 69, 127-34.

³ Abraham J. Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 86-87, finding precedent in Judge, *The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century*, 49-61.

⁴ *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982).

congregation generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society.”⁵ The perspective of Meeks and his predecessors, often designated collectively as the “new consensus,” has now been accepted by a majority of scholars,⁶ with only slight revision.

As a consequence of this more comprehensive model of early church composition, scholars have begun to explore how issues such as social stratification might have affected early church communities. For a number of reasons, the Corinthian correspondence has stood at the center of the discussion.

To begin, the city of Corinth had always been known for its wealth, at least since the Classical period (Pindar, *Paean*. 122; Thucydides 1.13.2, 5; Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.23). This had to do in large part with its location. Ensclosed on the Isthmus between Achaea and the Pelopponese, the city controlled two major harbors, one leading straight to Asia, and the other to Italy (Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.20). This location generated a steady flow of trade, commerce, and incoming tourists (cf. Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 46.22-23; Plutarch, *Mor.* 831a; Dio, *Or.* 37.8). Moreover, both in earlier days and in Paul’s lifetime the city was home to the biennial Isthmian Games, the largest celebration of Greek athletics in the ancient world (Pausanias 2.2.2; Dio, *Or.* 8.5-10; Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 46.23). The games, along with Corinth’s flourishing bronze industry, further contributed to its wealth (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 34.1.6-8; Josephus, *Vit.* 68; Pliny, *Ep.* 3.6). In sum, with its profitable location,

⁵ *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁶ Justin Meggitt’s monograph, *Paul and Poverty* (Studies of the New Testament and its World; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), is an exception. Though provocative, it has found little acceptance. Meggitt argues that “over 99% of the Empire’s population could expect little more from life than abject poverty” (p. 50), a “bleak material existence” to which Paul and his communities were equally subject (p. 99).

regular tourist attractions, and coveted wares, Corinth was one of the wealthiest cities of its day.⁷

But the importance of the Corinthian correspondence in this discussion has more to do with the evidence of the Corinthian letters themselves. In 1 Corinthians, Paul makes several passing references that seem to represent some within the Corinthian church as people of high means. Theissen's remarks on 1:26 have become almost proverbial: "If Paul says that there were not many in the Corinthian congregation who were wise, powerful, and wellborn [1:26], then this much is certain: there were some."⁸ Rightly or wrongly most recent scholars have taken the terms "wise," "powerful," and "of noble birth" literally, as socio-economic indicators.⁹ Many conceive of 4:8-10 in similar terms: Paul is describing their economic standing when he calls certain Corinthians "rich," "kings," and "honored." Finally, in both 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul seems to imply that some Corinthians possessed enough resources to finance the travel and ministry of himself and others (1 Cor 1:4, 11; 2 Cor 8:14).

Additionally, many of the problems seen in 1 Corinthians are said to have been precipitated by socio-economic disparity in the church. (1) Some may have had hopes of elevating their social position by claiming the patronage of "powerful" Christian leaders such as Paul or Apollos (1 Cor 1-4). (2) The question of idol-meat in chapters 8, 10

⁷ See Susan E. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 158-61. See also Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), who argues that Corinth was a "service city" which earned considerable income from production and trade.

⁸ Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 72.

⁹ E.g., Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 70-73; Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 43-45; Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthians Correspondence*, 95; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 271.

arguably reflects class tensions between the “(so-called) strong/wealthier” and the “weak/poorer,” where the former took a liberal stance toward its consumption, and the latter an overly restrictive one. The difference arose from the fact that the “(so-called) strong/wealthier” were accustomed to eating meat regularly and in all kinds of contexts, whereas the “weak/poorer” were probably not prosperous enough to have afforded meat often and thus associated it strictly with the pagan dedications they knew from cultic meals. Social stratification may also help explain (3) the divisions at the Lord’s Supper in 11:17-34 (e.g., the wealthy dining in one room, and the poor in another) and (4) the litigation of some church members against others in 6:1-11 (i.e., the rich litigating against the poor?). (5) It may even be that the guilty man in 5:1-13 had staved off judgment by playing patron to the community. Far more could be said, but the possible socio-economic dimensions of these issues have been rehearsed too many times over the years to merit repeating in any detail.¹⁰ Suffice it to say that the argument that social stratification played *some* part in the church’s divisions has continued to stand up to scrutiny,¹¹ even if this perspective has sometimes been stretched beyond its due limit.

Before concluding our discussion of Corinthian stratification, however, we must finally address the profiles of individual church members, for several people are described in the NT with detail sufficient to tell us something of their social standing. We shall address these individuals at greater length.

¹⁰ They are summarized, among other places, in James D. G. Dunn, *1 Corinthians* (New Testament Guides; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 43-65; Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthians Correspondence*, 101-17.

¹¹ Theissen has defended his earlier views more recently in “The Social Structure of Pauline Communities: Some Critical Remarks on J. J. Meggitt *Paul, Poverty, and Survival*,” *JSNT* (2001): 65-84; and “Social Conflicts in the Corinthian Correspondence: Further Remarks on J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*,” *JSNT* (2003): 371-91.

Socio-Economic Profiling

Between Acts and the Pauline epistles, we have the names of seventeen persons from the Corinthian church. Theissen's early analysis had assessed their wealth on the basis of several criteria, including possible ownership of houses (and slaves), the holding of public offices, the means to travel, and the rendering of services to the Christian community.¹² From a coalescence of multiple criteria,¹³ Theissen concluded that nine of the seventeen known persons belonged to the "upper classes."¹⁴

Despite the precursory nature of Theissen's work, subsequent prosopographic analyses have differed only marginally. We are still working with basically the same, limited evidence, though how that evidence has been interpreted continues to vary. Let us look briefly at each of those Corinthians for whom evidence of wealth has been claimed, before turning to the most recent attempts to place them on an economic scale.

"Wealthy" Corinthians?

Gaius. Gaius is thought to have owned a larger than average house, one sizeable enough to have accommodated several house churches at once. This inference is drawn from the fact that several different house churches seem to have existed (1 Cor 11:18; 14:23; cf. 10:20), though "the whole church" (ὅλης τῆς ἐκκλησίας) is said to have met in his house (Rom 16:23). On such occasions, he may also have had to accommodate the church of Phoebe from the neighboring town of Cenchrea (Rom 16:1). Peter Oakes'

¹² Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 72.

¹³ Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 92.

¹⁴ Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 95. See also Meeks' assessment of the Corinthians: *The First Urban Christians*, 51-73.

recent analysis of houses from first-century Pompeii corroborates this scenario. Few urban houses were commodious enough to fit 40 people (probably the minimum number of people in the Corinthian church). Homes spacious enough to have accommodated this number or more would need to have been much larger, indeed large enough to place the householder in the top 15% or so of society.¹⁵

Phoebe. Phoebe too has been noted for her means. More telling than Paul's hint that she had the ability to travel is the title he attributes to her in Rom 16:2. While some debate has surrounded the term προστάτης, most have agreed that it typically designated a "benefactor" or "patron" (Latin: *patrona*) rather than a mere "helper."¹⁶ Moreover, contemporary usage affords abundant examples where the title applies to women.¹⁷ Phoebe, therefore, in being a "benefactor" not only "of many" (πολλῶν) but also of Paul himself (ἐμοῦ αὐτοῦ), can probably (at the time of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, at least) have had nothing less than a moderate surplus of wealth.

Priscilla and Aquilla. At various points in Paul's ministry Priscilla and Aquilla either owned or—more likely—rented homes in Ephesus (1 Cor 16:19), Rome (Rom 16:5), and Corinth (Acts 18:18-19), and hosted churches in perhaps all of them. Even if they did not maintain all these properties simultaneously, their ability to move between

¹⁵ Cf. Peter Oakes' discussion (*Reading Romans in Pompeii* [Minneapolis: Fortress; London: SPCK, 2009], 80-89) of a hypothetical house church in the home of a Pompeian "cabinet-maker," who maintained a space large enough (310 sq. m.) to place him at this point on the socio-economic scale (cf. p. 61, Table 2.2).

¹⁶ See Meeks (*The First Urban Christians*, 60), citing Judge, *The Social Pattern*, 128f; also Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 34; and Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 241.

¹⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 34-35.

three different cities, separated by substantial distances, would imply some abundance of income. Moreover, Acts tell us that they were tentmakers, and prosperous enough to have offered Paul and others hospitality (18:2-3).

Stephanus. Stephanus is said to have stood at the head a “household” (οἶκος, 1 Cor 1:16; οἰκία, 16:15), which allows for the probable assumption that he also possessed slaves (though less than prosperous householders might have owned them also). Additionally, he enjoyed the leisure and the means to travel with the delegation mentioned in 1 Cor 16:15-17.

Crispus. That Paul names Crispus alongside Gaius and Stephanus (1 Cor 1:16-17), two other individuals of possible means, may indicate that he too was a person of economic distinction. This possibility becomes more likely, however, if we give notice to Acts’ assertion that he was the ἀρχισυνάγωγος (18:8): the “head of the synagogue” was probably not always, but was usually, a person of at least moderate wealth, as epigraphical references to his benefactions attest.¹⁸

Erastus. Most controversial of all is the figure of Erastus, whom Paul describes in Romans (16:23) as οἰκόνομος τῆς πόλεως, or as it is often rendered, “treasurer of the city.” Hot debate has surrounded the status of this man ever since the 1929 discovery of an ancient inscription bearing his name. Two portions of a paving slab situated east of the stage building of the Roman theatre together contain the inscription: “Erastus in return for his aedileship laid (the pavement) at his own expense (*Erastus pro aedilitate s.p. stravit*)” (*Corinth VIII 232*). Upon its discovery, the inscription immediately roused the

¹⁸ Theissen, “The Social Structure of Pauline Communities,” 81.

interest of biblical scholars. If this was the same man as the Corinthian Christian mentioned by Paul, it would have seismic ramifications for our understanding of the socio-economic composition of the early church, for the aedileship was one of the highest municipal offices in Corinth.

The earliest treatments on the subject showed no reservations in separating the two Erasti. Assuming the reliability of the Vulgate rendering of οἰκόνομος as *arcarius civitatis*, it was maintained that Erastus must have been only a menial or a slave, not one of the highest elites in the city, i.e., an *aedile*.¹⁹ Thus, for decades after the inscription's discovery, the question of the relationship between these two Erasti remained basically a dead issue. All that changed in the 1970s, however. In 1974, Gerd Theissen reset the agenda with his proposal that the two Erasti were in fact one and the same, and Paul's Erastus was therefore a man of high social and economic status—a municipal *quaestor* at the time of the Epistle to the Romans, and later an *aedile*. Continual debate has surrounded the Corinthian man ever since.

Three questions remain central to the debate: the date of the inscription, the nature of the office of οἰκόνομος, and the frequency of the name Ἐραστός in antiquity.

(1) Until just last year, it was virtually undisputed that the inscription dated to the middle of the first century A.D., precisely during the period of Paul's ministry. A new proposal from Steven Friesen, however, has given us reason to question this conclusion.²⁰ Friesen rightly notes that there is no firm archaeological evidence to establish a first

¹⁹ H. J. Cadbury, "Erastus of Corinth," *JBL* 50 (1931): 42-58.

²⁰ Steven Friesen, "The Wrong Erastus: Ideology, Archaeology, and Exegesis," in *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society* (eds. Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter, and James C. Walters; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 231-56.

century date. Moreover, he demonstrates convincingly that the inscription is not in its original location; rather, it was moved there in the late third or early fourth century as part of the foundation for a wall situated at the south end of the plaza where the inscription was found.²¹ As Friesen acknowledges, re-use of the inscription in the foundation clearly sets the late third century as a *terminus ad quem* for the original inscription. Friesen, however, doubts that it dates as far back as the first century. Based on a series of conjectures (which he admits cannot presently be proven),²² he concludes that the inscription probably dates to the mid second century, perhaps late in the reign of Hadrian. Apparently further details supporting this dating are forthcoming;²³ but at present a first century date cannot be entirely ruled out. Meantime, the identity of Paul's Erastus with the *aedile* can no longer be taken as certain.

(2) The second major issue is the exact meaning of οἰκόνομος (Rom 16:23). We need give no notice to Meggitt's suggestion that it refers to Erastus' "office *within* the church," for Paul clearly calls Erastus the οἰκόνομος "of the *city*."²⁴ Nonetheless, much ambiguity regarding the political office remains. Indeed, the term carried a wide range of meanings in antiquity, referring on the one hand to low-level bureaucrats or slaves, but on the other hand to eminent municipal officers, including on occasion even an ἀγοράνομος,

²¹ Friesen, "The Wrong Erastus," 239.

²² Friesen, "The Wrong Erastus," 242. Moreover, see the questions raised by John K. Goodrich, in "Erastus of Corinth (Romans 16.23): Responding to Recent Proposals on his Rank, Status, and Faith," *NTS* 57 (2011): 588.

²³ Says Goodrich, "Erastus of Corinth," 588.

²⁴ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival*, 136.

or *aedile* of a colony.²⁵ Latin equivalents of οἰκόνομος included *actor*, *dispensator*, *vilicus*, and *aedilis coloniae*.²⁶ Yet if Paul's Erastus was the same man as the one named in the inscription, then why did Paul not at least call him by what is said to be the more *common* Greek equivalent for the Latin *aedile*—ἀγοράνομος? Several reasonable answers have been submitted. Possibly it was because the *aedile* in Corinth undertook duties slightly different from the *aediles* in cities such as Ephesus, whence Paul is writing, and he is therefore attempting to find a term more suited to his audience.²⁷ Others, however, have pointed out that ἀγοράνομος does not appear at all in the sources until the second century, so Paul could not have used it in any case.²⁸ Furthermore, and significantly, there was no uniformity from city to city in the nature of the Greek offices themselves,²⁹ which helps explain why there were several possible Greek equivalents for *many* Latin offices.³⁰

Yet it is also possible that Paul indeed does *not* mark out Erastus as an *aedile*, but rather as the holder of some other high municipal office roughly equivalent to the Greek οἰκόνομος. According to one form of this argument—put forth years ago by Theissen and

²⁵ For examples in which οἰκόνομος refers to a high-ranking magistrate, see H. J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions: A Lexicon and Analysis* (Hakkert, 1974), 71, 175f. Goodrich ("Erastus of Corinth [Romans 16.23]," 588), further notes *CIG* 2811; *I AphrodMcCabe* 275; *SEG* 26.1044; *TAM* 5.743; *ISmyrna* 24.761; 24.771; 24.772; *I Stratonikeia* 22.1; and (on p. 592n41) another, disputed, reference—*IGRR* 4.813.

²⁶ Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions*, 71; as confirmed also in Bradley Hudson McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods from Alexander the Great down to the Reign of Constantine (323 B.C.-A.D. 337)* (University of Michigan, 2002), 342.

²⁷ Mentioned by Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 81.

²⁸ Clarke, *Secular Leadership and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 50.

²⁹ McLean, *An Introduction to Greek Epigraphy of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, 318.

³⁰ Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 79.

revived more recently by John Goodrich—Paul’s Erastus, οἰκόνομος τῆς πόλεως, might have been a *quaestor*, who only later climbed to the somewhat higher post of *aedile*.³¹

We may also add the oft noted observation that Erastus is the *only* Corinthian to whom Paul attaches a secular title (again, οἰκόνομος “of the city” is not a church office),³² a fact better explained on the postulate that the title somehow distinguished the man socially, than by the dubious hypothesis that Erastus was not actually a Christian.³³

All of these points offer compelling reasons to conclude that Paul’s Erastus *could* indeed have been a man of quite high social standing. On the other hand, given the great flexibility of the term, these points do not rule out Friesen’s counter argument, that Erastus could have been merely a low-level bureaucrat, or possibly a slave. Arguments on *both* sides, however, are impoverished by the fact that they depend on selective and sparse samplings of the data (οἰκόνομος *can* mean *x* or *y*) rather than on any kind of *comprehensive* look at the evidence. Most recently, Goodrich has been content to say that, even though quaestors are “absent from the majority of Caesar’s colonies” and “there exist no (extant) inscriptions attesting to municipal quaestors from Corinth,” the quaestorship “remains a viable interpretation of Erastus’ position”—viable simply

³¹ Gerd Theissen, “Soziale Schichtung in der Korinthische Gemeinde: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des hellenistischen Urchristentums,” *ZNW* 65 (1974): 232-72; Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 81-82; also picked up by Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 59; and revived by John Goodrich, “Erastus, Quaestor of Corinth: The Administrative Rank of οἰκόνομος τῆς πόλεως [Rom 16:23] in an Achaean Colony,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 90-115; though, see the formidable response to Goodrich by Alexander Weiss: “Keine Quästoren in Korinth: zu Goodrichs (und Theissens) These über das Amt des Erastos (Röm 16.23),” *NTS* 56 (2010): 576-81.

³² As both Theissen (*The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 76) and Murphy-O’Connor (*Paul*, 268-9) have noted.

³³ On this point at least, Goodrich (“Erastus of Corinth,” 589-90) clearly provides the better arguments against Friesen (“The Wrong Erastus,” 249-55).

because it is not impossible.³⁴ On the other side, Friesen feels justified in saying that the οἰκόνομος was “normally a subordinate financial manager” and “usually a slave” (my italics), on the basis of a mere *three* inscriptions (*IGR* 4.813; *SEG* 24 1969: 174 no. 496; *SEG* 1988, 214 no. 710), only *one* of which identifies the holder as either a slave or a person of potentially paltry means (i.e., *SEG* 24 1969: 174 no. 496).³⁵ But it should be recognized that such skimpy marshaling of the evidence constitutes weak (not to mention potentially misleading) proof of the term’s meaning. What is needed to advance the discussion further is a comprehensive look at all, or at least a significant percentage, of the extant occurrences of οἰκόνομος τῆς πόλεως, with an eye to whether there is in fact a sort of default usage, or—perhaps more likely—whether usage, while varied, might remain clustered more densely around some higher or lower swath on the socio-economic spectrum. Until such an analysis is undertaken, no meager sampling of the evidence, such as we have seen in treatments so far, can be said to settle the issue.³⁶

(3) The third major consideration in the debate has been the currency of Erastus’ name in antiquity. In this regard, Justin Meggitt tosses into the discussion two arguments that he thinks militate against the possibility that Paul’s Erastus was also the *aedile* of the inscription (granting the possibility that Paul’s οἰκόνομος was in fact an *aedile*). First,

³⁴ Goodrich, “Erastus of Corinth,” 586.

³⁵ Moreover, Friesen fails to mention two other common offices which οἰκόνομος renders—those of *actor* and *vilicus*. *Actor*, actually, is Mason’s (*Greek Terms for Roman Institutions*, 71) *first* entry under οἰκόνομος, before *dispensator*, *vilicus*, and *aedilis coloniae*. It is surely relevant to ask what is the usual social position of the *actor* and *vilicus*. Furthermore, the office of *arcarius*, which Friesen prefers alongside that of *dispensator*, is not even mentioned in Mason. As it is, Friesen appears to single out the “menial” equivalent *dispensator* without sufficient justification.

³⁶ John Goodrich’s forthcoming monograph, *Paul as an Administrator of God in 1 Corinthians: The Greco-Roman Context of 1 Corinthians* (SNTSMS 152; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) should be able to make a contribution in this regard.

Meggitt notes that Erastus is not as rare a name as has usually been thought.³⁷ He claims to have found 23 epigraphic attestations of the Greek personal name (Ἐραστός) and 55 examples of the Latin cognomen (Erastus).³⁸ As such, he says, we cannot assume that there could not have been another *aedile* named Erastus in mid first-century Corinth. Second, Meggitt gives us “another reason” for doubting the relevance of the Erastus-*aedile* inscription: since the upper left corner of the inscription is broken off, it is possible that the inscription originally contained not “Erastus,” but the compound “Eperastus.”³⁹

Of course, with these two arguments Meggitt has not actually given us *multiple* reasons for doubting, just two alternative and independent possibilities (they cannot both obtain at the same time), each one tenuous in itself.

The possibility that the name was “Eperastus” rather than “Erastus” is unlikely owing to the size and spacing of the letters on the inscription, as the original report of the excavator attests.⁴⁰ “Erastus” is simply a better fit. As it is, Meggitt fails to explain why, apart from ideological considerations, we should prefer the merely *possible* to the *probable*.

Second, while Meggitt’s research into the frequency of the name seems impressive at first, here too he is ultimately less than convincing. The fact is that 78 occurrences of the name Erastus over the course of several centuries *does* make the name

³⁷ Clarke (*Secular Leadership and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 139), for instance, calls the name uncommon.

³⁸ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival*, 139. Actually, he lists 22 Greek inscriptions and (mistakenly?) 1 papyrus (in which I have not been able to find Erastus). On the other hand, I count 56 rather than 55 Latin inscriptions.

³⁹ Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival*, 140.

⁴⁰ J. H. Kent, *Corinth*, Vol. VIII, part III, *The Inscriptions 1926-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1966), 100.

rare. In the first place, only a diminutive percentage of these occurrences actually date to the first century, and a great number of the others come from late antiquity (perhaps even referring to Christians named after the biblical Erastus?).⁴¹ Furthermore, Meggitt's figure is shown to be remarkably *low* when compared with what would have been considered even moderately popular names in Erastus' day. For instance, several of the names invoked alongside Erastus in Romans 16 appear to have been exceedingly more popular than the latter. The *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* lists only 32 distinct individuals named Ἐραστός over the course of approximately five hundred years (ca. 300 B.C.- A.D. 200), but of individuals named Τιμόθεος, 285; Ἀριστόβουλος, 292; Ἀνδρόνικος, 299; and Ἐρμῆς/Ἐρμᾶς, 315. Στεφανᾶ, mentioned in 1 Corinthians (cf. 1:16; 6:15, 17), has 303 entries. More popular still are Greek names that we have attested closer to a thousand times—e.g., Ἀρτεμίδωρος, 642; Διογένης, 670; Ἡρακλείδης, 773; and Φίλιππος, 941. Then there are names for which we have one to several thousand distinct individuals attested—e.g., Ἀρίστων, 1063; Ἀλεξάνδρος, 1443; Ἀπολλώνιος, 1774; Δημήτριος, 1838; and Διονύσιος, 3024. The figures are much larger when we count, not simply the number of distinct individuals attested, but the aggregate number of epigraphical and literary witnesses that attest to them.

Moreover, Meggitt's inscriptions do not actually refer to 78 different Erasti, for many of them prove to be same person. In several cases, we can establish this on the basis of location and onomastics. For instance, *SEG* 11:622; *IG* V 69; 70; 71; and *CIG* 1241 all refer to Erastus the father of Apollonius (Ἀπολλώνιος Ἐράστου), from Sparta,

⁴¹ Out of the 38 that I have been able to check, only 6 across the Mediterranean world date to the first century for sure: *CIL* IV 179; X 527; *IG* II² 1945; 1968; 1985; 1990.

and date to the second century; and *IG II² 2323* and *IG II² 783* both refer to the Erastus who was the eponymous archon of Athens in 163/2 B.C.

In other cases too we have good reason to suspect common identity, though we lack absolute proof from onomastics. For example, four of Meggitt's inscriptions (*IG II² 1945, 1990, 1968, 1985*)⁴² not only date to the very middle years of the first century, and to the city of Athens, but also all pertain to the gymnasium there, an institution of athletics and higher learning for the Greek "elite." The collocation of the evidence renders it highly likely that these four inscriptions refer to a total of only two different people. *IG II² 1945* dates to A.D. 45/6, and names Ἐράστο[υ9....]οῦ Ἀναφλυστίου as a gymnasium official, namely the ὑπηρετής (thus, the genitive absolute, ὑπηρετοῦντος Ἐράστο[υ9....]οῦ Ἀναφλυστίου). Here the personal name, Ἐράστο[υ, is apparently accompanied by the patronymic (indicating the name of the father)—at which point we have a *lucuna* in the inscription—and then by the demotic Ἀναφλυστίου (indicating the deme or place of origin)—which on the other hand is entirely legible. It is the demotic that enables us to distinguish this Erastus from that of *IG II² 1990*, who belonged to the deme of Besa—that is, Ἐραστος Βη<σ>αι<ε>ύς. Moreover, *IG II² 1990* dates to A.D. 61/2 and has Erastus filling the role of παιδεύτης, or literary instructor of the ephebes, an unlikely course of life for one who had risen to the rank of ὑπηρετής some fifteen or sixteen years earlier. In each of the other two inscriptions, *IG II² 1968* and *1985*, the Erastus named is listed among the ephebes, the approximately eighteen-year-old youths who trained in the gymnasium under its affiliated officers and staff. *IG II² 1968* dates to

⁴² Once dated to the middle of the first c. A.D., *IG II² 1973* is now more accurately dated to the middle of the second. For the new dating, see Richard Hitchman and Fabienne Marchand, "Two Ephebic Inscriptions: *IG II² 1973A* and *1973B*," *ZPE* 148 (2004): 165-76.

the reign of Claudius (A.D. 41-54), and lists [ῚΕ]ρα[σ]τος as an ephebe. *IG II² 1985* likewise dates to the middle of the first century, and designates ῚΕραστος as an ephebe. Of course, ordinarily we would not expect the same individual to be attested as an ephebe twice, for ephebic inscriptions were usually undertaken by the state on an annual basis, and training lasted only one year. Thus, these two inscriptions probably refer to two different Erasti, each corresponding with one of the two men from *IG II² 1945* and *IG II² 1990*: each was attested first as an ephebe, and then later as a gymnasium officer (ὕπηρετής) or affiliate (παιδευτής). On the other hand, the lack of patryonomic and demotic with the personal name reveals that *IG II² 1968* and *IG II² 1985* were not officially sanctioned inscriptions, but were rather informal honorary monuments likely funded by the ephebes themselves.⁴³ As such, both ephebic inscriptions *could* refer to the same man, and we could have *three* inscriptions referring to the same Erastus, and only *one* to the other. Unfortunately, since both texts are fragmentary, we cannot make an exhaustive comparison between the ephebic lists.

The collocation of the evidence therefore commends the conclusion that we have only two different Erasti attested in these four Athenian inscriptions. First of all, the name is extremely rare in the first century—outside the NT (Acts 19:22; Rom 16:23; 2 Tim 4:20), we have *not a single* reference to an Erastus in the papyri or in any literature that dates to the first century, whether Greek *or* Latin. Moreover, since multiple Erasti are attested in inscriptions in every century from 300 B.C.- A.D. 200, it would be strange indeed to have no Erastus at all, in *any* city in Greece, from A.D. 1-41 and 61-99, but to have four concentrated in the *same* city within the span of only 20 years. The only other

⁴³ Hitchman and Marchand (“Two Ephebic Inscriptions,” 170) note that these were common in the Roman era.

inscription possibly mentioning an Erastus at all in first century Greece would be *Corinth VIII 232*, the controversial Erastus inscription mentioning the *aedile*. But if Friesen's new dating obtains, then we seem to be left only with these two Erasti, the first of them a young man active in elite circles a few miles from Corinth in the years just prior to the Corinthian correspondence (*IG II² 1945, 1985?, 1965?*) and the second at least a gymnasium affiliate some fifteen years later (*IG II² 1990, 1985?, 1965?*).⁴⁴

To summarize the evidence, then, we know for sure of only two Erasti in first-century Greece, both of whom were affiliated with "elite" circles in the gymnasium in the very middle years of that century:

Erastus #1:

[*IG II² 1968* – Athenian ephebe, A.D. 41-54]

[*IG II² 1985* – Athenian ephebe, mid first c. A.D.]

IG II² 1945 – ὑπηρετής in the Athenian gymnasium, A.D. 45/6

Erastus #2:

[*IG II² 1968* – Athenian ephebe, A.D. 41-54]

[*IG II² 1985* – Athenian ephebe, mid first c. A.D.]

IG II² 1990 – παιδευτής in the Athenian gymnasium, A.D. 61/2

Could one of these two Athenian ephebes—or more likely, the first one—have gone on to become οἰκόνομος in Corinth and a convert to Christianity by the time Paul wrote Romans in A.D. 56/7? It cannot be proved, but it is a tantalizing possibility, and one that is lent especial credence by an otherwise unlikely convergence of circumstances: a rare

⁴⁴ Conversely, if the *traditional* dating for *Corinth VIII 232* remains valid, it could be noted that the Erastus named would hold a lot in common with the two men from the gymnasium, and the possibility of common identity with one of the others could not be easily dismissed.

name, unattested in first-century Greece outside this dense cluster of attestations in the very middle years of the century, and in every case connected with the Athenian gymnasium, that elite institution which promised to prepare its members for a career in politics.⁴⁵

What then of Paul's Erastus? Debate clamors on regarding the date of *Corinth VIII* 232, the nature of the office of οἰκόνομος, and the frequency of the name. At stake is the question of Erastus' socio-economic position and our understanding of early church, and particularly Corinthian, stratification. From Theissen until Friesen's article in 2010, a consensus had been maintained: since *Corinth VIII* 232 was agreed to date from the middle of the first century, since οἰκόνομος *could* refer to the office of *quaestor* or *aedile*, since the name Erastus occurred infrequently, and since no other Erastus of Corinth was known around Paul's day,⁴⁶ most⁴⁷ were compelled to conclude that the Erastus of the inscription and the "Erastus, οἰκόνομος τῆς πόλεως" mentioned by Paul were one and the same. With the release of Friesen's new article, however, the question now hangs in the balance. Though, ultimately further confirmation of his insights may decisively shift the weight of opinion.

⁴⁵ The possibility that one of the Erasti of *IG II*² 1945, 1968, 1985, 1990 might have gone on to be οἰκόνομος in Corinth would, however, depend on the fulfillment of at least one of the following conditions: (1) the οἰκόνομος in Corinth was not a member of the city's *decurial* board, as Roman citizenship (a status which the names in the inscriptions belie) was required for membership; or (2) one of these men (more likely the second, given the dates) was granted Roman citizenship some time subsequent to these inscriptions but prior to filling the office.

⁴⁶ An Erastus is mentioned three times in the NT (Acts 19:22; Rom 16:23; 2 Tim 4:20), and, as Goodrich ("Erastus of Corinth [Romans 16.23]," 591n38) notes, each time in connection with Corinth/Achaea, Paul, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila, and perhaps Ephesus. See citation in Goodrich for further bibliography on the issue.

⁴⁷ Meggitt (*Paul, Poverty, and Survival*, 137) states that "few, if any, resist assuming an association between the two characters"; Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 11) says that "Most assume that he was the same Erastus who paid for paving the plaza..."; and Thiselton (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 9) cites several recent studies that have made the case for common identity between the two Erasti.

Several points can be made in closing. First, while Friesen has cast doubt upon the traditional, first-century dating of *Corinth VIII 232*, we may retain it as a strong possibility until more complete archaeological support for his alternative dating might be confirmed. Second, studies have continued to affirm that the term οἰκόνομος designated a wide range of officers, from relatively menial functionaries to high-level municipal bureaucrats. Until a *substantial* sample size of the occurrences of this term has been examined, however, we must resist making simple declarations of the term's "usual" meaning and of the holder's precise social status. As of yet we have been shown exceedingly little proof that it "usually" referred to a slave (Friesen offers only a single inscription and no assessment of potential counter examples). In any case, one who filled even a relatively menial office (if that is the correct referent in the case of Paul's Erastus) would probably have stood above the majority of society on the socio-economic scale, as we shall see below. Finally, regarding the frequency of the name Erastus, I have reaffirmed the old conclusion that the name was indeed rare, having added also that it was almost entirely unknown in the first century aside from a few Athenian inscriptions which seem to refer to only *two* separate individuals.

Chloe. Far less can be said regarding the remaining figures. It is not certain that Chloe was part of the Corinthian church. Murphy-O'Connor tenders the hypothesis that her "people" (1:11) had brought news from Corinth (whither they had gone on some sort of business trip) back to Paul in Ephesus (where they permanently resided). Her delegation then reported on items not mentioned in the Corinthians' letter to Paul, divulging just the sorts of gossipy trifles that *outsiders* would—how the Corinthians are or are not covering their heads, who is speaking out in church, and so forth. Paul in turn

respects the confidentiality of his sources, thinking it would be malapropos to name his informants. Apart from speculation on silent matters, however, the text gives us no reason to believe that Chloe was not a Corinthian, and there are reasons besides to think otherwise. In the first place, Chloe seems to require no introduction; Paul simply assumes the Corinthians know her.⁴⁸ Conversely, if Paul's salutations are any indication, Chloe does *not* belong in Ephesus, for he does not mention her in his greetings from the church there.⁴⁹

Achaicus and Fortunatus. Achaicus and Fortunatus were also a part of the travelling delegation of Stephanus (16:17). Murphy-O'Connor argues that, though both have slave names, in all likelihood they have now obtained their freedom.⁵⁰ *Perhaps* freedom can be extrapolated from their ability to travel, but then, slaves could travel on behalf of their masters as well. Travel by itself is no positive proof that these individuals were either freedmen or at all wealthy. Thus, while the possibility that these two men had some measure of wealth cannot be entirely ruled out, neither can it be confidently established.

Tertius. To these nine persons we should also add Tertius, the Corinthian who "wrote" (ὁ γράψας) Paul's epistle to the Romans (16:22). But while secretaries were often people of high birth, they could also be freedmen, and occasionally even slaves.

⁴⁸ So Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthians Correspondence*, 98.

⁴⁹ So Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 92-93.

⁵⁰ Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 272.

Literacy is no guarantee that he possessed significant wealth, even if it is suggestive. In the end, little can be said of Tertius.

Economy Scales

A few recent studies have continued to sift the above data, hoping to refine the binary poor-elite model apparently employed in Theissen and Meeks' earlier work.⁵¹ In the search for a more sophisticated economy scale, Steven Friesen's 2004 article "Poverty and Paul: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus" deserves credit as a major galvanizing force.⁵² Friesen constructs a seven-tiered "poverty scale" (PS) for the urban Roman Empire (table 6), where each tier is defined relative to human subsistence level and wealth is made the dominant status variable.⁵³ Friesen then proposes descriptions of the various socio-economic groups that would have filled each level, and a population percentage for each.⁵⁴

Using the available NT evidence, Friesen is then able to locate Pauline church members on the scale. He concludes (ostensibly against Theissen and the "new consensus") that Pauline communities included "no wealthy saints," only a majority of

⁵¹ Though Theissen's later work ("The Social Structure of Pauline Communities," 74) expressly applies Alföldy's multi-tiered model.

⁵² Steven Friesen, "Poverty and Paul: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26 (2004): 323-61.

⁵³ As he states ("Poverty and Paul," 343), "'subsistence level' is here defined as the resources needed to procure enough calories in food to maintain the human body. The calorific needs of humans are gauged in various ways by scholars, but they usually range from 1,500 to 3,000 calories per day, depending on gender, age, physical energy required for occupation, pregnancy, lactation and so on."

⁵⁴ Friesen, "Poverty and Paul," 347.

slaves, peasants, and poor artisans larded with a few stand-out individuals of moderate but nonetheless sub-elite means.⁵⁵

Table 6. Friesen’s (2004) poverty scale

Scale	Description	%
PS1-3	imperial, regional, and municipal elites, respectively	< 3%
PS4	moderate surplus resources	7%
PS5	stable near subsistence level	22%
PS6	at subsistence level	40%
PS7	below subsistence level	28%

Following Friesen’s article, a rapid succession of developments ensued. In 2009 Bruce Longenecker developed his own “economy scale” (ES), using Friesen’s “poverty scale” (PS) as a point of departure.⁵⁶ Based chiefly on the insights of Walter Scheidel,⁵⁷ Longenecker argued that Friesen’s percentages needed to be adjusted in order to “allow more ‘exposure’ to the ‘middling groups.’”⁵⁸ Consequently, he raised Friesen’s “PS4” group percentage from 7% to 17%.

Longenecker’s revisions were short-lived, however. Later that year, Friesen and Scheidel joined efforts to publish an article entitled “The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire,” in which they proposed a highly refined economy scale which took into account the GDP of the entire Roman Empire and the

⁵⁵ Friesen, “Poverty and Paul,” 348.

⁵⁶ Bruce Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle: A Revised Economy Scale for the Study of Early Christianity,” *JSNT* 31 (2009): 243-78.

⁵⁷ Walter Scheidel, “Stratification, Deprivation and Quality of Life,” in *Poverty in the Roman World* (eds. M. Atkins and R. Osborne; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 40-59.

⁵⁸ Longenecker, “Exposing the Economic Middle,” 46.

overall distribution of its wealth.⁵⁹ The article adduced a range of estimates for the size of the economy, so that the upper middling group (basically equivalent to Longenecker's ES4 and Friesen's old PS4) could have comprised as little as 6% and as much as 12% of the *overall* population (i.e., not of urban areas alone, but of both urban and rural together).⁶⁰ Longenecker has taken these developments into account in his 2010 monograph (*Remember the Poor*), where, for a variety of reasons, he again adjusts the percentages.⁶¹

Shortly before Longenecker's monograph came off the presses, Peter Oakes was issuing a related work.⁶² Based on archaeological excavations at Pompeii, Oakes devised an economy scale based, not on subsistence level or quantity of income, but on domestic space occupied. With figures startlingly close to those of Friesen and Longenecker, Oakes estimated that elite householders would have comprised about 2.5% of first-century Pompeian society, the destitute about 67%, and the rest the middle 30.5%.⁶³ The relatively sizeable percentage of people in the middle range reveals that significant social

⁵⁹ Steven Friesen and Walter Scheidel, "The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire," *JRS* 99 (2009): 61-91.

⁶⁰ Friesen and Scheidel, "The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire," 83-84.

⁶¹ Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 44-53. He lists the following reasons for adjusting Friesen and Scheidel's percentages: "(1) an 'optimistic' interpretation of the middling groups in the Roman economy is to be preferred over a 'pessimistic' one (see Appendix 1 below); (2) the income of the *Augustales* needs to be attributed primarily to the middling groups rather than the elites (see Appendix 1 below); and; (3) the urban environment had more attraction to the middling group members than rural environments" (p. 53).

⁶² Peter Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii: Paul's Letter at Ground Level* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

⁶³ See Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii*, 61, figure 2.2.

stratification was indeed possible within the limits of those who were neither elite nor destitute.

There are of course complications with any of these scaling approaches, owing, for one thing, to the nature of the Greco-Roman household (e.g., slaves in the household could be well above subsistence level), and figures in all models obviously generalize across diverse geographic and demographic contexts. These points, however, need not undermine the scales' heuristic value. Moreover, that there is some fluctuation in values from one study to the next (see table 7 for a summary) proves immaterial to our aim here.

Table 7. Elite and middling group percentages

Socio-economic level	Friesen's 2004 Percentages	Longenecker's 2009 Percentages	Friesen and Scheidel's 2009 Percentages	Longenecker's 2010 Percentages
upper elite	3%	3%	~1%	3%
middling group	7%	17%	6-12%	15%

More important is the fact that these developments have advanced us beyond the rhetorically useful but historically inaccurate construct of “wealthy/elite” versus “poor/non-elite.”⁶⁴ Longenecker's ES4 and ES5 groups could only qualify as poor in a very relative sense. In fact, the sizeable ES4 group would have contained some who approached elite status (ES4a), with those at the lower end still fortunate enough to have maintained a moderate surplus of income (ES4b).⁶⁵ Without downplaying the gravity of the fact that the vast majority of the empire floundered near or below subsistence level,

⁶⁴ For more refined differentiation of economic levels, I hereafter employ Longenecker's “ES” language (though without necessarily committing to all his exact figures).

⁶⁵ Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 55.

that perhaps some 13-18% of the population had *at least* a moderate surplus of funds has some significance for how we should view the social position of some Pauline church members.

Based on these advancements, Friesen and Longenecker have conducted prosopographic analyses of Pauline Christians for whom we have relevant data. Given the paucity of evidence afforded us by the biblical text, little can be said here beyond what these scholars have already done. It has in fact been pointed out that their results hardly differ from those of the “new consensus”;⁶⁶ they offer further economic precision rather than anything radically different. Table 8 summarizes their analyses of Corinthian church members.⁶⁷

Table 8. Corinthian church members of the middling group⁶⁸

Corinthian	Friesen’s PS (2004)	Longenecker’s ES (2010)
Erastus	PS4 or 5	ES4 (probably ES4a)
Gaius	PS4	ES4 (maybe ES4a)
Priscilla and Aquilla	PS4 or 5	ES5
Stephanus	PS5 (or PS6)	ES4 (or ES5)
Crispus	–	ES4 (or ES5)
Phoebe	PS5 (or PS4)	ES4
Chloe	PS4	–

⁶⁶ As Longenecker (*Remember the Poor*, 252) notes, prosopographic analyses have remained stable “even across the ‘consensus’ divide.” Furthermore, Theissen himself (“The Social Structure of Pauline Communities [2001], 66) anticipated Friesen (“Paul and Poverty,” 325) in saying, “The ‘new consensus’ is neither new nor is it a consensus.” Accordingly both John Barclay (“Poverty in Pauline Studies: A Response to Stephen Friesen,” *JSNT* 26 [2004]: 363-66) and Peter Oakes (“Constructing Poverty Scales for Graeco-Roman Society: A Response to Steven Friesen’s ‘Poverty in Pauline Studies,’” *JSNT* 26 [2004]: 367-71) have suggested that Friesen’s contribution was far less revolutionary than he let on.

⁶⁷ From Friesen, “Poverty and Paul,” 348-58; and Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 220-58.

⁶⁸ Since the Friesen and Scheidel (2009) percentages for the middling group hardly differ from those of Friesen (2004)—6-12% in 2009 as compared with 7% in 2004—we can assume that Friesen’s 2004 analysis is still more or less representative of where he stands. That is, “PS4” status would still place the individual within the top 10% or so of society and, accordingly, within the economic “middle.”

As is evident, the two analyses tally closely with each other. Friesen disregards Crispus and seems to rank Stephanus and Phoebe lower than most do.⁶⁹ Nonetheless, regardless which analysis we prefer, we can see that several known members of the church appear to qualify as possessing at least “moderate surplus resources” (ES4). In addition, most of these individuals are almost certainly heads of their households, perhaps with further children at or beyond maturity. At any rate, in general we are dealing with *termini a quibus* as regards their economic level—the evidence prevents that these individuals be put any *lower* on the scale, while only silence prevents their being put any *higher*.

In sum, it is significant that, even among those Corinthians who are named and to some extent described in the NT, we are able to identify with some confidence ES4-level people in the Corinthian church. We *might* even conclude that there were still others, both within and without the households of those named above. If this high number of prominent people in this fledgling church seems surprising, we should not forget the general prosperity of Roman Corinth at large. Moreover, it is entirely conceivable that Paul had targeted prominent people as an evangelistic strategy,⁷⁰ or—perhaps more likely—that such converts are simply mentioned more frequently on account of their greater influence within the church. This latter observation dovetails well with the

⁶⁹ For which Oakes (“Constructing Poverty Scales for Graeco-Roman Society,” 367) calls Friesen “unduly pessimistic.”

⁷⁰ Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 75; Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 102; Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul*, 265-73.

apparent situation: a small, wealthy minority is exerting disproportionate influence in the church community.⁷¹

Religio-Cultural Considerations

Before exploring further implications of the Corinthian church's socio-economic profile, we shall need to address some religio-cultural considerations. In this regard, two issues continue to surface: the religious orientation of the church and the cultural orientation of the city. I shall treat these in order.

Jewish or Gentile Church?

Considerable agreement surrounds the question of the church's religious background. Claudius' expulsion of the Jews from Rome in A.D. 49 (Suetonius, *Claud.* 25.4) was bound to have relocated many of the city's Jews to Corinth. Corinth certainly contained a Jewish community (Philo, *Legat.* 281; Pliny, *Ep.* 5.8), and most probably also a synagogue (Acts 18:8).⁷² Accordingly eight known members of the Corinthian church are said to be of Jewish origin (Aquila, Priscilla, Crispus, Sosthenes, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, and Apollos), and an occasional remark in 1 Corinthians seems to imply a Jewish presence in the church (e.g., 7:18, NRSV – "Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision"). On the other hand, we also know that at least two prominent church members were of Gentile

⁷¹ A view widely attested in the literature: e.g., Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*, 72; Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 69, 73, 95-96; Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 271; Theissen, "Social Conflicts in the Corinthian Correspondence," 377.

⁷² The synagogue inscription often cited is subject to doubt; see James Wiseman, "Corinth and Rome I: 228 B.C.-A.D. 267," *ANRW* 7.1:503; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 22; Fitzmyer, *1 Corinthians*, 31.

background (Erastus, Titius Justus), and six other individuals have distinctive Greek (Stephanas) or Roman (Achaichus, Fortunatus, Gaius, Tertius, and Quartus) names. Moreover, Paul is explicit that the divisions are grounded in Greek rather than Jewish thought (1:22), and most if not all of the problems in the letter are best explained in terms of a pagan background (i.e., appeal to pagan courts, 6:1-11; sexual immorality, 6:12-20; marriage and sex, ch. 7; pagan temple meals, chs. 8-10; former idolatry, 8:7; 12:2). Fee summarizes the situation best when he says that “[n]othing in the letter cannot be explained in light of its Greco-Roman origins; whereas several items are extremely difficult to explain on the hypothesis of Hellenistic Jewish origins.”⁷³ All said, there can be no doubt that, while the Corinthian church did contain Jews, in orientation it was predominantly a Gentile church.⁷⁴

“Greek” or “Roman” Corinth?

How much the Corinth of Paul’s day reflected continuity with the earlier Greek city has been a matter of some debate. The Hellenistic city had been ravaged by Mummius in 146 B.C., and lay all but vacant until it was refounded as a Roman colony over a century later (44 B.C.).⁷⁵ Despite almost complete devastation of the population and total dissolution of civic administration, older studies tended to emphasize cultural continuity between old, Greek Corinth and the new, Roman colony. In 1940, A. H. M.

⁷³ Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 14.

⁷⁴ As all have agreed—e.g., Baird, ““One against the Other,”” 120; Clarke, *Secular Leadership and Christian Leadership in Corinth*, 101n66; Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 6; Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul*, 273; Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence*, 91-92; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 18; Adams and Horrell, “Introduction,” in *Christianity at Corinth*, 10.

⁷⁵ Reference to its colonization under Caesar can be found in Appian, *Punica* 136; Strabo, *Geogr.* 8.6.23; 17.3.15; Plutarch, *Caes.* 52, 57; Pausanias, *Descr.* 2.1.2; Dio Cassius 43.50.3-5; Diodorus 32.327.3.

Jones stated flatly that the Roman emperors “made no attempt to Romanize the Greek-speaking provinces”; their motives “were strictly practical”—alleviating an overcrowded Rome and rewarding war veterans with land.⁷⁶ This view remained the consensus position for several more decades, so that in 1965 G. W. Bowersock could still write that Romanization was “hardly the reason for colonial foundations” in the east; Caesar, as he said, cannot have had this aim in mind when he “sent so many Greeks back to their old environment.”⁷⁷ Only in the last third of the twentieth century did the scene begin to change. According to E. T. Salmon, Roman colonies (though particularly in the west) were indeed intended to act as “centres of Roman influence,” centers serving to introduce the Latin language, to help promote the imperial cult, and to familiarize the indigenous peoples with Roman institutions.⁷⁸ In recent decades, the view that Romanization was among the chief purposes of imperial colonization has become a sort of new consensus. Now it is believed that colonization in the east was undertaken as part of a wider imperial strategy to unite the Greek east with Rome. As the capital of the province of Achaëa (possibly)⁷⁹ and home to the biennial Isthmian games, Corinth in particular acted as a “pro-Roman focal point” in Achaean life.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ A. H. M. Jones, *The Greek City: From Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1940), 60-62.

⁷⁷ G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 66-67.

⁷⁸ E. T. Salmon, *Roman Colonization under the Republic* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1970), 148.

⁷⁹ The evidence is not entirely clear: cf. Appian, *Hist. rom.* 2.1; Florus, *Epitome of Rom. Hist.* 2.32; Apuleius, *Metam.* 10.18. For a discussion, see Wiseman, “Corinth and Rome I,” 501.

⁸⁰ Alcock, *Graecia Capta*, 169.

Biblical scholars have applied these new insights to the Corinthian letters, but with an unfortunate lack of restraint. On the one hand, they have in many respects been right to note that, according to Aulus Gellius (*Noct. att.* 16.13), Roman colonies were “little effigies” of Rome, or Rome in miniature; that Roman Corinth was intentionally designed with Italic rather than Greek architecture; that it had a strong imperial cult; and that Latin was the official language of the colony until A.D. 69, dominating in inscriptions and on coinage.⁸¹ Many have also done well to heed *Pseudo-Julian*, the official petition sent from Corinth’s neighbors in the mid first century condemning the city for, allegedly, abandoning its Greek heritage and selling out to *Romanitas*.⁸² In spite of it all, it is surely going beyond the evidence to say, as Bruce Winter has, that Corinth was a “*thoroughly* Roman colony” and “*invariably* took its cue from Roman and *not* Greek culture” (my italics).⁸³ For Winter, this is not just rhetoric; he does mean *invariably*: “whether rich or poor, bond or free, the cultural milieu which impacted life in the city of Corinth was *Romanitas*.”⁸⁴ In short, so Roman was Paul’s Corinth that, in dealing with the Corinthian correspondence, “it would be *inappropriate* to search for ethics, customs, etc. [a tantalizing omission!] in ancient classical Greek or Hellenistic eras rather than the late Republic and early Roman period” (my italics).

Winter of course *is* extreme, but he is not alone in his basic judgment. “Roman rather than Greek,” “geographically in Greece, culturally in Rome”—frequent statements

⁸¹ For such an argument, see for instance David W. J. Gill, “Corinth: A Roman Colony in Achaia,” *BZ* 37 (1993): 259-64; and “In Search of the Social Elite in Corinth,” *TynBul* 44 (1993): 323-37.

⁸² Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 5, 20; Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2002), 96.

⁸³ Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 12.

⁸⁴ Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 120, 122.

such as these encapsulate the popular impression given among biblical scholars that, when Mummius marched through in 146 B.C., *Romanitas* swept Corinth all but clean of Hellenism.⁸⁵

But seldom are such stark contrasts accurate. Without doubt the public face of new Corinth looked recognizably “Roman,” but this fact need not lead us to the above conclusions. We must consider not only the differences between public and private, “elite” and “poor,” in way of life (contra Winter), but also the ways in which “Greek” and “Roman” culture, for all their differences, in fact blended into one another. The complexity of this relationship has not been fully appreciated in recent biblical scholarship. Whether in the realm of architecture, religion, or language, Roman Corinth was clearly not culturally homogeneous, as several classical studies written since 2010 have agreed.

Margaret Laird, for instance, has shown that the new city’s *Augustales* monument was deliberately built on an old religious site (as were other religious monuments),⁸⁶ and with a Greek appearance. Both of these facts suggest that the monument was aimed to elicit a sense of continuity with the city’s Greek heritage. And although imperial aims were surely mixed in, Laird argues that we cannot assume that the city founders’ intentions for this monument necessarily reflected—or would later reflect—the

⁸⁵ For the quotations see Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 6 (cf. 3-4); and Garland, *I Corinthians*, 3; cf. also Gill, “Corinth,” 264; “In Search of the Social Elite in Corinth,” 328; Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth*, 6; V. Nguyen, *Christian Identity in Corinth*, 122-3; Robert M. Grant, *Paul in the Roman World: The Conflict at Corinth* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 19.

⁸⁶ Margaret L. Laird, “The Emperor in a Roman Town: The Base of the *Augustales* in the Forum at Corinth,” in *Corinth in Contrast* (eds. Friesen, Steven J. and Daniel N. Schowalter, and James C. Walters; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 67-116; in this regard, see also Christine M. Thomas, “Greek Heritage in Roman Corinth and Ephesos: Hybrid Identities and Strategies of Display in the Material Record of Traditional Mediterranean Religions,” in *Corinth in Contrast*, 117-49.

perspective of the populace. More important was how the monument was actually *perceived* during each phase of its history—and perception would have become increasingly “Greek” as time went on. As she puts it, “With each passing year, the distinction between Roman commission and Greek form would blur, rooting the monument more firmly in the ancient past.”⁸⁷

Bronwen Wickkiser attests that Corinthian religion was equally convoluted. For instance, while it is true that the Asklepius cult was adapted so as to forge parallels between the cult’s namesake and the emperor Augustus, in many respects the cult continued to bear the impress of the Greek version. In this regard, Wickkiser concludes that the Asklepius of Roman Corinth was “neither a static artifact from the Greek period of the city nor a mere copy of the Roman god, much as the colonists themselves were *neither strictly Greek nor Roman* but were *carving out new cultural identities* for themselves”⁸⁸ (my italics).

The situation is no less complicated when it comes to language in the colony, despite biblical scholars’ frequent declarations of the predominance of Latin. Simply counting the Latin inscriptions and setting the total next to those in Greek hardly adds up to the view that Corinth was “thoroughly Roman.” Rather, as Ben Millis argues, it is imperative to consider the *context* of the inscriptions:

Greek texts indicate quite clearly that the choice of language used in an inscription of the early colony had little to do with the ethnic or social origins of the colonists and everything to do with the context of the inscription itself One would no more erect an inscription in Latin detailing the officials or victors

⁸⁷ Laird, “The Emperor in a Roman Town,” 67-116, esp. 110.

⁸⁸ Bronwen L. Wickkiser, “Asklepios in Greek and Roman Corinth,” in *Corinth in Contrast*, 37-66, esp. 66.

of the Isthmian games than one would dedicate a building or monument in the forum using an inscription in Greek.⁸⁹

Besides inscriptions, Millis also investigates other forms of epigraphy: the overwhelming preponderance of graffiti and all the other markings he examines are written in Greek.⁹⁰

In the light of Millis' analysis, it is little wonder that Greek was the language of the Corinthian correspondence as well.

We may add that Aulus Gellius' oft-cited remark (*Noct. att.* 16.13)—that whereas *municipia* were allowed to retain the laws and customs of the original inhabitants, Roman colonies were made to represent “Rome in miniature”—cannot automatically be presumed accurate with respect to Paul's Corinth. Leaving aside the fact that Gellius' remark was penned a century later than the Corinthian letters, we have plentiful evidence that his characterization of colonies and *municipia* and the differences between them admitted of exceptions.⁹¹ Sometimes there seemed no difference at all.⁹² We cannot therefore deduce from his remark the conclusion that Corinth, as a colony, was “entirely” Roman; this must be established by point by point comparison, which those citing Gellius have evidently failed to undertake.

Moreover, extant data reveals that Roman Corinth traveled a decided Hellenizing trajectory. It is no good to point out that Hellenization began to receive *imperial* endorsement only in Nero's day, in the mid 60s (cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 19ff), and publically

⁸⁹ Benjamin Millis, “The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists,” in *Corinth in Context*, 13-36, esp. 24.

⁹⁰ Millis, “The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists,” 26-29.

⁹¹ See Kathryn Lomas, *Roman Italy, 338 B.C.- A.D. 200: A Sourcebook* (Psychology Press, 1996), 88.

⁹² Salmon, *Roman Colonization under the Republic*, 155.

to win over the elite still years later, in the time of Hadrian (cf. Dio, *Or.* 37.26). Clearly, if we take seriously what has been said, it is apparent that a Hellenistic undercurrent had been moving in Corinth *ab initio*—as it did generally in Roman colonies established on Greek soil. That the population of old, Greek Corinth was left entirely desolate between its ruination in 146 B.C. and its colonization in 44 B.C. is now known to be a gross overstatement,⁹³ and most of the colonizers of the new city were freedmen of Rome, and themselves Greeks.⁹⁴ In short, Corinth was loaded for re-hellenization from the start, despite certain public efforts to the contrary.

Besides these issues, we would be remiss to ignore the Romans' debt to the Greeks within the realm of education. Roman education was of course bilingual (taught in both Greek and Latin), and had been taken over from a Greek model in both its form and its essential content.⁹⁵ Philosophy, which was taught at the higher levels of education, had gone across to the Romans almost entirely intact. In the third and second centuries B.C., it had arrived in Rome as a “Greek importation,” its teachers almost invariably of Greek or eastern provenience.⁹⁶ By the first century B.C., Cicero and Lucretius could still

⁹³ For a discussion of the primary sources, see Wiseman, “Corinth and Rome I,” 493-6.

⁹⁴ Millis (“The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists”) argues that they were freedmen and “entirely Greek in origin” (31). The group did not, as has sometimes been said (e.g., J. Walters, “Civic Identity in Roman Corinth and Its Impact on Early Christians,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches* [eds. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen; HTS; Cambridge: Harvard Theological Studies, 2005], 402), consist of both freedmen *and* veterans.

⁹⁵ Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 33; Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 242-54; Mark Joyal, Iain McDougall, and J.C. Yardley, eds., *Greek and Roman Education: A Sourcebook* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, N.Y. : Routledge, 2009), 166.

⁹⁶ A. A. Long, “Roman Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (ed. David N. Sedley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 184.

speak of the “poverty” of the Latin language as a conduit of philosophy.⁹⁷ Accordingly, as a general rule, philosophy was discussed and taught in Greek, rarely if ever in Latin. In fact, A. A. Long notes that “there were no exclusively Roman schools of philosophy, as distinct from the long-established Academics, Peripatetics, Epicureans, and Stoics.”⁹⁸ To be sure, we know a couple of philosophers who wrote in Latin, such as Seneca and Apuleius, but then they had received their training in Greek.⁹⁹ (Moreover, neither of these can rightly be called “teachers” of philosophy, since neither ever stood at the head of a school).¹⁰⁰ In short, though studied and practiced by Romans, philosophy remained essentially a Greek enterprise throughout the Hellenistic and Roman eras. Most taught or wrote in Greek, even “Roman Stoics” like Epictetus, Musonius Rufus, and indeed the Roman emperor himself, Marcus Aurelius. Thus, if philosophy constituted a significant force in first-century Corinth—and, as we shall see below, it surely did—it would have added significant “Greek” color to the city, especially (though not solely) in elite circles.

In concluding this section, I should like to make clear that I am not pushing the pendulum once again to the Greek side. Rather, I aim to steer between what the most recent and thoroughgoing studies have revealed to be two wrong tendencies. On the one hand, Winter’s position that Paul’s Corinth was “invariably Roman,” irrespective of social circle or standing, must surely be rejected. However, neither can we say that the city was “publically Roman” and otherwise Greek,¹⁰¹ as if Paul’s Corinth was a sort of

⁹⁷ Long, “Roman Philosophy,” 185.

⁹⁸ Long, “Roman Philosophy,” 184.

⁹⁹ Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 254.

¹⁰⁰ Long, “Roman Philosophy,” 193.

¹⁰¹ This is the conclusion of Wendel Willis, “Corinthusne deletus est?” *BZ* 35 (1991): 233-41.

Greek city liveried over with a purple-hemmed toga. Indeed, the situation was much more complicated than either of these positions lets on. In this regard, we should probably distinguish, as Millis does, between Corinth's public or higher strata character on the one hand, and its private or lower strata character on the other, though with the realization that *these will not fall neatly into separate "Roman" and "Greek" compartments*. Millis rather proposes that, although people of the lower strata were "more solidly Greek in outlook," those of the higher strata were also willing to "straddle the cultural divide," and as a result exhibited traits of both Greek and Roman culture;¹⁰² bilingualism was only one example. Thus, as a "hybrid" city, Corinth could show "different faces in different circumstances and contexts."¹⁰³ Christine Thomas has agreed. With respect to religion, "there was no single position even among the privileged classes; the levels of discourse were complex and context-specific. Depending on the audience envisaged by the cultural text, elites could appear either more or less Greek."¹⁰⁴ Jorunn Økland has come to the same conclusion. Because the city was a "multifaceted, multilayered society," it is impossible to say whether the religion of Roman Corinth was marked more by continuity or more by discontinuity with the earlier Greek city—probably this is not even a helpful distinction. Again, when it comes to religion, we are instead compelled to ask *who* was worshipping particular deities, in *what language* they were doing so, and *what evidence* different groups have left for us to examine.¹⁰⁵ In this whole discussion, then, *context and particularity remain paramount*.

¹⁰² Millis, "The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists," 32.

¹⁰³ Millis, "The Social and Ethnic Origins of the Colonists," 34.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas, "Greek Heritage in Roman Corinth and Ephesos," in *Corinth in Contrast*, 146.

¹⁰⁵ Økland, Jorunn, "Ceres, Koph, and Cultural Complexity," in *Corinth in Contrast*, 229.

So was Paul's Corinth mostly "Greek" or mostly "Roman"? Clearly that depends on *who* and *what* is under consideration. If we are talking about the Corinthian "elite," that *may* on *some* issues incline us more toward the "Roman" side. However, we would need to make several qualifications. As for the Corinthian church, we have seen that, barring the question of Erastus, there were probably no upper elites; below that level, the church contained perhaps only a handful of prosperous up-and-comers. Moreover, if Corinthian elites tended to "straddle" the Greek-Roman divide, even a *few* Erasti would not constitute proof that, as one writer has said, "the Corinthian church had a *distinctly* 'Roman' character" (my italics);¹⁰⁶ it would indicate only a mixed-culture character at best. And then what of the middling and lower class majority? Finally, there is the question of what issue we are talking about—are we talking, for example, about the Corinthians' embrace of society's patronage system, or about their philosophical perspectives? The former would fall more under the category of things "Roman," but the latter almost definitely under that of things "Greek." At all events, we shall not resolve the (apparently misguided) Greek-versus-Roman Corinth question here. Suffice it to say that the divisions in the Corinthian church, to whatever extent they may have been engendered by secular "Roman" values, were surely influenced by "Greek" ones as well, not least if philosophy played a part.

An Educated "Elite"?

We now return to the question of social status in the Corinthian church. We have identified eight Corinthians who likely belonged to the economic middling group of their social milieu. Longenecker places five of these in what he calls the "ES4" bracket, the

¹⁰⁶ Adams and Horrell. *Christianity at Corinth*, 6.

socio-economic tier consisting of those possessing a moderate (ES4b) to high (ES4a) surplus of funds. These included Erastus, Gaius, Stephanus, Crispus, and Phoebe, with Erastus falling on the higher end, at ES4a. Friesen, in his early analysis (2004), had placed Gaius and Erastus at his basically equivalent PS4 level, though he also identified Chloe, Priscilla, and Aquila as potential candidates.

Since wealth and education usually went hand in hand, we are bound to ask what implications the socio-economic level of these individuals might have had for their exposure to philosophy, a pervasive if less popular focus of learning in Greco-Roman education. To this end, we look next at issues related to wealth and literacy in the ancient world, before moving on to an examination of the contexts in which philosophy itself was encountered, and of what level of acquaintance each of these contexts might have afforded.

Literate Education

Apart from adaptations demanded by the context, available resources, and needs of the students, education across the Greco-Roman world followed a remarkably uniform progression. At the primary level, the student learned to copy and read letters, syllables, and words. At the next level, he (rarely she) progressed to technical analysis of “canonical” authors. Finally, the best, and most fortunate, students culminated their training by studying in a school of rhetoric, and if they were inclined, in the school of a philosopher.

In mid-sized cities, teachers were available at both the primary and secondary levels. Primary instruction could be acquired through a public school, through tutors outside the home (Suetonius, *Gramm.* 17; Pliny, *Ep.* 3.3.3; Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.2), or—in

elite households—from the parents themselves.¹⁰⁷ For advanced education, one would have needed to travel to one of the great urban centers, such as Rome, Alexandria, or Athens.

Despite the wide availability of primary instruction, the vast majority of the population lacked even basic skills in literacy. Of those who did receive instruction, attrition was high as students progressed through the primary and secondary levels, and only a miniscule proportion reached the rhetorical stage.¹⁰⁸ Peasants were seldom among the literate, and still less slaves. Poorer artisans fared no better, though some artisans seemed to have been prosperous enough to have received at least basic training in literacy; sometimes they are even found among the “gymnasial” class (discussed below).¹⁰⁹ In Rome we still have traces of graffiti written by artisans of various kinds, including fullers, weavers, pastry-cooks, perfumers, and even the repairer of a shoemakers’ tools.¹¹⁰ As for women, a fair number achieved a high level of mastery in written composition, but these were the exceptions. Women rarely received a basic literary education, and never had access to higher, rhetorical training.¹¹¹ All said, the total percentage of literate individuals in the Greco-Roman world is unlikely to have exceeded 15%, even if, in urban centers such as Rome, that percentage would have been

¹⁰⁷ William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 233; Raffaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 105.

¹⁰⁸ A conclusion Morgan (*Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, 69, 201) deduces from the comparatively low number of papyri including rhetorical exercises.

¹⁰⁹ Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 277, 330.

¹¹⁰ Harris (*Ancient Literacy*, 264), citing *CIL* IV 1711; 1768-69, 2184, 4100, 4102-04, 4106-07, 4109, 4112-13, 4115, 4117-18, 4120; and 8258-59.

¹¹¹ On women in education according to the papyri, see Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 180-6.

substantially higher.¹¹² This group was confined mostly to men of the upper and middle classes, though it would have included some women and the occasional poor artisan, peasant, or slave. As such, literacy would have been achieved by most within Longenecker's ES1 to ES4 categories, some within ES5, but very few at the lower end of the scale.

The Conduits of Philosophy

At the primary and secondary levels of education, philosophy received little attention.¹¹³ Occasionally students encountered the philosophers in their interaction with gnomic sayings (*γνώμαί/sententiae*), which they regularly copied and paraphrased in school exercises, but even here non-philosophical authors were more prevalent by far.¹¹⁴ Despite a de-emphasis on philosophy at the lower levels of education, however, philosophy remained a powerful force in first-century society, not only guiding politics and ethics among elites, but also shaping the everyday outlook of ordinary citizens. Its influence was everywhere. Grammatical theory, encountered beginning at the lower levels of education, imitated Stoic cosmology: as a linguistic microcosm of the universe, words had to be ordered in a way that reflected "conformity with nature"; there was a natural or "right" way of adjoining words just as there was a natural order to the

¹¹² Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 175-84.

¹¹³ See Morgan's analysis (*Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, 50, 312-18) based on the papyri.

¹¹⁴ Though, Diogenes the Cynic appears with some frequency. For a tabulation of authors cited in gnomic sayings, see Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic Worlds*, 122-3. On the other hand, ancient literary tractates on education often cite Cicero's philosophical prose (e.g., Quintilian, *Inst.* 1.8.6; Macrobius, *Sat.* 3.14; Pliny, *Ep.* 2.14.2; Suetonius, *Gramm.* 16), and various literary sources include philosophy in their lists of recommended reading (e.g., Cicero, *De or.* 1.52ff; 3.39; Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.27ff).

universe.¹¹⁵ Moreover, training in Epicurean philosophy could be undertaken at quite an early age, by those without even a secondary education. Apart from school contexts, philosophy was disseminated to the masses in a number of ways. We have inscriptions placarding lengthy philosophical messages, obviously aimed at reaching as many people as possible with their salutary messages;¹¹⁶ though these would have spoken only to literates, or to illiterates to whom someone had been kind enough to relay the message. Most conspicuous of all were the wandering “street preachers,” who were ready to chasten whatever passersby would welcome their reproaches. Such were typically of the Cynic variety, austere vagabonds who eschewed conventional education and institutions.¹¹⁷ But probably there were peddlers of all the philosophies. In major centers such as Athens, itinerants were constantly coming and going, and philosophers of all stripes were prepared to discuss their ideas in the open marketplace or on the Acropolis, as they were doing upon Paul’s visit to the city (Acts 17:16-33).

For philosophy to have had a conscious, far-reaching, and coherent impact on the individual, however, one would most probably have needed more formal exposure. A person with basic literacy, and enough leisure, might have devoted himself (or herself) to independent study by taking in hand one of the handbooks, or “epitomes,” of philosophy, which summarized the key doctrines of the various philosophical schools. Extant examples include those of Arius Didymus, Stobaeus, and Diogenes Laertius.

¹¹⁵ For a discussion of Stoic influence on grammar, see Long, “Roman Philosophy,” 191-2; and Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, 169-74; on Stoic influence on Theon’s *progymnasmata*, see Georg Reichel, *Quaestiones Progymnasmaticae* (Leipzig, 1909), 23-30; on Stoic adaptations to earlier rhetorical theory, see James R. Butts, “The Progymnasmata of Theon: A New Text with Translation and Commentary” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1986), 6-7.

¹¹⁶ Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 219-20.

¹¹⁷ For such individuals, see Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 32, Lucian’s *Peregrinus*, and the Cynic Epistles.

But the most exhaustive exposure to philosophy came through studying in the school of a philosopher after completion of secondary school or higher rhetorical education.¹¹⁸ In earlier days, all the philosophical schools were stationed in Athens, each with its own *σχόλαρχος* or “head.” The havoc Sulla wreaked on Athens in the Mithridatic Wars of 88-86 B.C., however, precipitated the end of Athens’ tenure at the center of the philosophical world. From that point, philosophy became decentralized, and fairly small, local philosophical groups representing respective schools began to crop up throughout the Greco-Roman world.¹¹⁹ In such contexts, students typically began by learning a few general ideas about the history of philosophy and an outline of the beliefs of the schools, and then moved on to general reading of their doctrines, and finally to studying and analyzing a particular school’s classic or “canonical” writings.¹²⁰

It could be expected that any male member of the elite would have had a basic acquaintance with the major schools. But the Stoic perspective dominated. Indeed, Roman patricians were naturally drawn to the Stoic system, for it envisaged the world as governed by a universal “natural law” and humanity as comprising a single “world community,” an ideal thought to have been fulfilled in the empire. Stoic ideas permeated the writings of the late republic and early empire, even the writings of non-philosophical writers like Vergil and Horace.¹²¹ Many of the most distinguished Roman statesmen of

¹¹⁸ F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker (*Philo, in Ten Volumes* [LCL; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 4:452) note that Philo provides extensive discussion of the Stoic view that the Encyclia (the liberal arts and sciences encountered at the early stages of education) was merely preparation for study in philosophy.

¹¹⁹ David Sedley, “The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus,” in *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 24-28.

¹²⁰ Marrou, *A History of Ancient Education*, 208.

¹²¹ Gill, “The School in the Roman Imperial Period,” in *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, 56.

this period were Stoics: Cato and Seneca the Younger, Helvidius Priscus, Arulenus Rusticus, even the emperor Marcus Aurelius.¹²² Frequently, Greek Stoics rose to eminence in the government: both Athenodorus and Arius Didymus were appointed governors under Augustus; further examples abound.

From ancient literature and epigraphy we have evidence of established philosophical schools and teachers all over the Mediterranean world. Occasionally permanent schools were set up in gymnasia, as was the school of Zenodotus the Stoic (*IG* II² 1006). Several ancient inscriptions refer to the “successors of the doctrines of Zeno,” the founding Stoic, or else plainly designate teachers as Stoics.¹²³ An inscription of particular interest to us honors a *Corinthian* Stoic named Lucius Peticius Propas (Λούκιον Πετίκιον Πρόπαντα, φιλόσοφον Στωϊκὸν Κορίνθιον), and dates between 50 and 100 A.D. (*IvO* 453). This perhaps places Lucius as head of a Stoic school in Corinth at precisely the time of the Corinthian correspondence.

A less rigorous but almost equally selective alternative to studying in an established philosophical school was to study in a gymnasium, a Greek-based institution of higher learning (mentioned in connection with the Erastus inscriptions above) in which students received a formal, if somewhat superficial, acquaintance with the major philosophies of the day. For several reasons, this venue deserves more extensive treatment.

¹²² P. A. Brunt, “Stoicism and the Principate,” *Papers of the British School at Rome* 43 (1975): 7-35.

¹²³ Marcus N. Tod (“Sidelights on Greek Philosophers,” *JHS* 77 [1957]: 132-41) lists several.

Gymnasium Education

Development of the gymnasium. Although rhetoric dominated instruction at most levels of Greco-Roman education, subsequent to “secondary” or “tertiary” training many also went on to receive instruction in philosophy. Privileged Greeks undertook training in the gymnasium. This institution had arisen in the Classical period primarily for purposes of military training. In Athens, all male citizens in their eighteenth year—the so-called ἔφηβοι (“pubescent boys,” “ephebes”)—registered in the gymnasium ἐφηβεία (“ephebate”) for a two-year period of military and physical training. With the rise of the Greek philosophical schools in the fourth century B.C., however, training became more intellectually focused, and study in rhetoric and philosophy ultimately supplanted physical training in importance.¹²⁴ The Hellenistic period concretized the form of instruction, and rhetoric and philosophy becoming the chief ingredients of training.¹²⁵ From the beginning of the third century B.C. every major philosophical school could be found in the gymnasium.¹²⁶ By 119/118 B.C., ephebic training in Athens had ceased to be compulsory for citizens, and foreigners were admitted to join.¹²⁷ From the second century B.C. on, the practice of using itinerant lecturers rather than permanent professors became

¹²⁴ Nigel M. Kennell (“The Greek Ephebate in the Roman Period,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* [2009]: 332; cf. 333-4) observes that during the Roman period military training in the gymnasium was almost unknown, save in the gymnasium at Athens.

¹²⁵ On philosophers in the gymnasium, see Clarence Allen Forbes, “Expanded Uses of the Greek Gymnasium,” *CP* 40 (1945): 34-36; O. Tzachou-Alexandri, “The Gymnasium: An Institution for Athletics and Education,” in *Mind and Body* (Athens: Greek Ministry of Culture, 1989), 37; Robert Dutch, *The Educated Elite in I Corinthians: Education and Community Conflict in Graeco-Roman Context* (JSNTSup 271; London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 301, 302; and *IG II²* 1006,19,64; Quintilian, *Inst.* 12.2.8; and Cicero, *De or.* 2.21.

¹²⁶ Forbes, “Expanded Uses of the Greek Gymnasium,” 32-42.

¹²⁷ O. W. Reinmuth “The Ephebate and Citizenship in Attica,” *TAPA* 79 (1948): 211-31.

conventional, probably for reasons of both economy and convenience.¹²⁸ These lecturers might have been any of the itinerant philosophers, rhetors, or other experts who happened to be in the city at the time.¹²⁹

The virtual disappearance of the gymnasium's military purpose coincided with several other important changes in the character of the institution. Socially speaking, from the early third century B.C. on the gymnasium took on great significance as a definer of status. It became essentially an association for the "budding elite."¹³⁰ Membership was selective, and in some places depended upon Greek hereditary requirements on both sides of the family.¹³¹ Still, strong evidence exists that some Jews also received an education in gymnasia; Philo of Alexandria is a well-known example.¹³² Members who had completed ephebic training formed similar, equally selective associations, which enjoyed the same benefits as the ephebes. Among these associations were the νεοί ("young men"), the γερόντες ("old men"), and the so-called "old boys from the gymnasium" (ἀπὸ γυμνασίου, ἐκ τοῦ γυμνασίου), the last of which were probably simply alumni.¹³³

¹²⁸ We have only one philosopher on record as a permanent professor; on this score, see Tzachou-Alexandri ("The Gymnasium: An Institution for Athletics and Education," 37), who cites *IG*² II 1006, lines 19, 64.

¹²⁹ Forbes ("Expanded Uses of the Greek Gymnasium," 35) observes that these lecturers were "as varied as those of the modern lecture platform."

¹³⁰ J. T. Townsend, "Ancient Education in the Time of the Early Roman Empire," in *The Catacombs and the Colosseum* (eds. S. Benko and J. J. O'Rourke; Valley Forge: Judson, 1971), 150.

¹³¹ For evidence of hereditary requirements in Roman Egypt, see J. Whitehorne, "The Ephebate and the Gymnasial Class in Roman Egypt," in *Status Declarations in Roman Egypt* 19 (New Haven: The American Society, 1982), 171-84.

¹³² Scholarship is virtually unanimous in the case of Philo; on his education, see especially David Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 32-36; for other Jews, see Dutch, *The Educated Elite*, 147-64; and especially A. Kerkeslager, "Maintaining Jewish Identity in the Greek Gymnasium: A Jewish 'Load' in CPJ 3.519," *JSJ* 28 (1997), 12-33.

¹³³ So Joyal (*Greek and Roman Education*, 143), citing *SEG* 8.694. Graduates tended to keep up with each other for life; so Nigel M. Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue: Education & Culture in Ancient*

Moreover, members were usually expected to foot their own expenses, which could include the cost of lectures, uniforms, oil (for exercise), and other accoutrements¹³⁴—expenses beyond the means of most people, but probably affordable to those with a moderate surplus of funds.

Along with a reduction of the length of ephebic training from two years to one came a reduction in the seriousness of the institution's intellectual component. With only a year of exposure one can imagine that the general cultural level was “not very high.”¹³⁵ Even apart from the brevity of the program, its members seem not always to have taken the intellectual element altogether too seriously, as we find attested in Cicero, among others:

Even in the present day, although the sages may be in occupation of all the gymnastic schools, yet their audiences would rather listen to the discuss than to the Master, and the moment its clink is heard, *they all desert the lecturer, in the middle of an oration upon the most sublime and weighty topics, in order to anoint themselves for athletic exercises; so definitely do they place the most trifling amusement before that which the philosophers describe as the most solid advantage.* (Cicero, *De or.* 2.21 [Sutton and Rackham, LCL]; my italics; cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.16.26-39, esp. 29)

In short, ephebic training had become relatively superficial.

Finally, it should be said that the ephebate of the Hellenistic period showed a steady decline in numbers, ultimately leveling off at only a fraction of what it had been during the Classical period. In Athens, for instance, the nearly 600 ephebes on the

Sparta (Studies in the History of Greece and Rome; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 43.

¹³⁴ So Jones (*The Greek City*, 150), who cites inscriptional evidence.

¹³⁵ Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 189; though as he points out (186-8), the training was not exactly “popular”-level either.

register in the late fourth century B.C. dwindled within the next two centuries to about 150, where it more or less remained throughout the next few centuries.

All the same, the gymnasium continued well into the Roman period, even in Roman *municipia* and colonies. As already discussed, although Corinth had been re-established as a Roman colony in the first century B.C., this ultimately did little to forestall continuing Greek influence, particularly within the realm of education. We have firm archaeological evidence that there was a “new gymnasium” in Roman Corinth, constructed as early as the middle of the first century A.D.¹³⁶ This dating is corroborated by an inscription referring to “gymnasium victories,” which can be dated to A.D. 55 on the basis of the ἀγωνοθήτης named in the same inscription.¹³⁷ We even have an inscription referring to a “gymnasiarch” official (γυμνασίαρχος), apparently also dating to the second half of the first century.¹³⁸ And it is just *possible*—if Epictetus’ passing remark (*Diatr.* 3.1.34) is any indication—that by the close of the first century Corinth had an official ephebate as well (which not every gymnasium had).¹³⁹

¹³⁶ For the evidence, see James Wiseman, “Excavations at Corinth, The Gymnasium Area, 1965,” *Hesperia* 36 (1967): 13-41; “Excavations at Corinth, The Gymnasium Area, 1966,” *Hesp* 36 (1967): 402-28; “Excavations at Corinth, The Gymnasium Area, 1967-1968,” *Hesperia* 38 (1969): 64-106; “The Gymnasium Area at Corinth, 1969-1970,” *Hesperia* 41 (1972): 1-42. For its location, see Wiseman, “Corinth and Rome I,” 442fig11.

¹³⁷ See discussion in Dutch, *The Educated Elite in 1 Corinthians*, 133.

¹³⁸ Wiseman, “The Gymnasium Area at Corinth, 1969-1970,” 20.

¹³⁹ A possibility to which Nigel M. Kennell gives credence, in *Ephebeia: A Register of Greek Cities with Citizen Training Systems in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Nikephoros Beihefte 12; Hildesheim, Weidmann, 2006), 42.

Moreover, while it is true that Corinth's political institutions took Roman form (i.e., administration by *aediles* and *duoviri*),¹⁴⁰ such a structure was not, in the Roman period, intrinsically incompatible with a functional gymnasium. Under Roman rule the gymnasium became increasingly severed from state oversight, so that it became a largely private institution.¹⁴¹ Indeed, Corinth was not the only "Roman" city to continue using gymnasia and electing related officials subsequent to Roman colonization or enfranchisement. This was also the case in Sinope and Pisidian Antioch in Asia Minor, and Naples and Tarentum in southern Italy. In fact, Pisidian Antioch could claim a gymnasiarch, and Naples an official ephebate.¹⁴² Even in Rome itself, Greek athletics and the gymnasium were embraced far earlier than has usually been appreciated.¹⁴³ In sum, while it is possible that the Corinthian gymnasium had not been constructed by the time of the Corinthian correspondence, neither can its existence at that time be entirely

¹⁴⁰ For the inscriptional evidence, see Allen West, *Corinth*, Vol. VIII, part II, *Latin Inscriptions, 1896-1926* (Harvard University Press, 1931); and J. H. Kent, *Corinth*, Vol. VIII, part III, *The Inscriptions 1926-1950* (Princeton, N.J.: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1966).

¹⁴¹ See A. H. M. Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Provinces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1937), 312; Marrou, *A History of Ancient Education*, 388n25; Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period* (London: SCM, 1974), 1:66n63; Kennell, *Ephebeia*, xiv; Kennell, "The Greek Ephebate in the Roman Period," 325, 326.

¹⁴² Sinope: Strabo, *Geogr.* 12.3.11—Pisidian Antioch: *JRS* 1916: 106.6; 1924:198.32—Naples: Strabo, *Geogr.* 5.4.7; *INapoli* I.33; *SEG* 33.755; *IvO* 56; Suetonius, *Aug.* 98.3; cf. 92.2—Tarentum: Strabo, *Geogr.* 6.3.1; cf. 6.1.2. Possibly Rhegium's earlier gymnasium continued to function as well: cf. *IG XIV* 616 and *CIL X* 16. And we should not forget "Nero's gymnasium" in Rome, although there is some discrepancy in the primary sources as to the name: some refer to it as a *thermae* (Jerome, *Chron.* 63), some as a γυμνάσιον/*gymnasium* (Dio, *Or.* 61.21.1; Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.47.3; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll.* 4.42), others as both (Suetonius, *Nero* 12.3). For an overview of the secondary literature related to Nero's gymnasium, see G. G. Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* (University of Michigan Press, 2002), 110n21.

¹⁴³ In spite of the squeamishness toward Greek athletics expressed in some literary sources (e.g., Plautus, *Amph.* 1011; *Epid.* 197-98; *Bacch.* 66-67; Varro, *Rust.* 2.pref.2). On this see especially Zahra Newby, *Greek Athletics in the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 21-44, 229-71; and Fagan, *Bathing in Public in the Roman World*, 214-215n80.

ruled out.¹⁴⁴ Regardless, several other cities within just a few miles of Corinth contained gymnasia as well, including Argos, Epidauros, Megara, Sicyon, and most famously of all, Athens (in whose gymnasium we found the two Erasti discussed above).¹⁴⁵ The Athenian ephebate will be considered at some length below.

The Gymnasium and 1 Corinthians. A recent study by Robert Dutch has identified several passages in 1 Corinthians in which Paul's language echoes gymnasium instruction, most of them involving either athletic images or reference to gymnasium personnel.¹⁴⁶ These include: a possible reference to a gymnasium instructor (1:20), language of nursing and nature (3:1-4), certain agricultural metaphors (3:5-9), Paul as "father" (4:6, 21), removing the marks of circumcision (7:18-24), and boxing imagery (9:24-27). Based on this evidence, in conjunction with archaeological and literary hints of a gymnasium in Corinth, Dutch infers that the Corinthian church must have included

¹⁴⁴Murphy O'Connor (*St. Paul's Corinth*, 96) notes that, according to *Pseudo-Julian*, Roman Corinth was using its taxes "not to furnish gymnastic or musical contests" but "to buy bears and panthers for hunting shows which they often exhibit in their theaters" (*Pseudo-Julian, On Behalf of the Argives* 408a-409d; translated in Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 96). From this, he concludes that Corinth "did not continue the tradition of 'gymnastic contests or musical contests' but opted for 'a foreign spectacle' (409b)." To the contrary, however, the document does *not* say that the city no longer held gymnastic contests, only that this is not what the preponderance of public funds were being used for. In any case, we have evidence that in the Roman period gymnasium activities were substantially defrayed by the gymnasiarch himself (e.g., Jones, *Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, 312, 328n38; cf. Marrou, *A History of Ancient Education*, 388n25; Hengel, *Hellenism and Judaism*, 1:66n63; Kennell, *Ephebeia*, xiv; Kennell, "The Greek Ephebate in the Roman Period," 325, 326). Moreover, these two types of events were certainly not mutually exclusive (e.g., Plutarch, *Pomp.* 52.5).

¹⁴⁵ By the early Roman era, gymnasia had been established in some 200 cities across the Mediterranean world. See for an exhaustive overview of the spread of gymnasia between the fifth and first centuries B.C., J. Delorme, *Gymnasion: Etude sur les monuments consacrés à l'éducation en grèce* (Bibliothèque des écoles Françaises d'Athènes et de Rome; Paris: Editions E. de Boccard, 1960). For the Hellenistic and Roman periods, see Nigel M. Kennell, *Ephebeia: A Register of Greek Cities with Citizen Training Systems in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Nikephoros Beihefte 12; Hildesheim, Weidmann, 2006).

¹⁴⁶ Robert Dutch, *The Educated Elite in 1 Corinthians: Education and Community Conflict in Graeco-Roman Context* (JSNTSup 271; London: T & T Clark International, 2005).

some among what he calls the gymnasium-educated “elite.” As such, Paul is found correcting the Corinthians by fashioning his discourse in the familiar speech of the gymnasium. Dutch is successful in demonstrating that many of these references have school-related connotations, though it must be said that few of them really evoke a *distinctive* gymnasium context. He is most convincing in his interpretation of 7:18-24, where Paul speaks of removing the marks of circumcision. As Dutch points out, the gymnasium, with its regular display of nude athletes, provides the most plausible context in which such a practice would have been an issue. It is documented that Jews sometimes braved reversal of their circumcision (i.e., epispasm) in order to compete there.¹⁴⁷

Here, I have agreed that Corinth indeed *could* have contained a gymnasium by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians (A.D. 56/57?), but given the fact that most of our evidence falls squarely in the latter half of the first century, I have less confidence about this possibility than Dutch has shown. Nonetheless, gymnasia were ubiquitous, and in Paul’s day several cities near Corinth could claim them. In that regard, Dutch’s insight into the relevance of the gymnasium may still be valuable. However, we shall have to move beyond his work in at least two important ways: (1) by employing our more recent insights on ancient economy, which will in turn allow further precision as regards the meaning and identity of the “elite”; and (2) by considering the possibility that the gymnasium was an important source of *philosophical* knowledge for certain Corinthian church members.

¹⁴⁷ Dutch, *The Educated Elite in 1 Corinthians*, 295-7. Cf. 1 Macc 1:15; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.5.1; *Apion* 2.13.137; Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1.2; Martial, *Epigrams* 7.82.

Social status and gymnasium education. We have already noted that the Corinthian church may not have included anyone from the highest echelons of society—or levels ES1-3. But might people *below* this level have studied in the “elite” gymnasium? If one considers ephebic class sizes in relation to overall city population, we can be certain that a great number in fact did. Athens affords us with enough information to formulate the basis for a calculation. Moreover, the Athenian ephebate is thought to have been almost undoubtedly “the model for that of the other Hellenistic cities,” and therefore “typical” of the ephebate in other cities.¹⁴⁸ To be sure, we shall have to work with ballpark figures. Yet, as we shall see, these figures will be well sufficient for my point to stand, even on a conservative estimate.

Though we are left with no census data indicating the population of Athens in the Roman era, estimates based on demographic trends and comparison with analogous cities make it most probable that, in the first century A.D., it contained a total city population (citizens, foreigners, slaves, and all) of no less than 30,000 and no more than 50,000.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ So Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, 105.

¹⁴⁹ In fact, Donald Engels (*Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990] 79) informs us that only *two* classical cities have left us census information providing the city population—Apamea and Alexandria. Although in the fourth century B.C. Athens could have boasted perhaps as many as 20,000 (E. Ruschenbusch, “Doch noch einmal die Bürgerzahl Athens im 4. Jh. v. Chr.,” *ZPE* 72 [1988]: 139-40) or 30,000 citizens (Mogens Herman Hansen, *Three Studies in Athenian Demography* [Kgl. Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 1988]), we know that its population decreased substantially throughout the Hellenistic period (Claude Mosse, *Athens in Decline, 404-86 B.C.* [Boston: Routledge, 1973]; also Efrossini Spentzou, “Athens,” in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece* [ed. Nigel Wilson; New York: Routledge, 2006], 113). Once it leveled off again at the beginning of the first century A.D., it remained stable throughout the next two hundred years (John Day, *An Economic History of Athens under Roman Domination* [New York: Anro, 1973], 279). For lack of census data or other exact measures during this period, some have avoided making numerical judgments (Day, *An Economic History of Athens under Roman Domination*, 271). Others, however, have sought estimates from what is available: e.g., J. C. Russell (*Late Ancient and Medieval Population* [American Philosophical Society, 1958], 77, 78), who estimates a total population of 28,000 in the middle of the third century A.D.—though numbers were still recovering in the wake of the epidemics that had swept through Greece around the turn of the same century; also Rodney Stark (“Christianizing the Urban Empire: An Analysis Based on 22 Greco-Roman Cities,” *Sociological Analysis* 52 [1991]: 77-88, esp. 78), who places the population at 30,000 around A.D. 100. One may also approximate the population of first-century Athens by comparison

For argumentative purposes, we shall choose to err on the higher end, and proffer somewhere between 40,000 and 50,000 people. Out of these, some 1.82%—according to mortality studies—¹⁵⁰would have been eighteen years of age and therefore eligible to enter the gymnasium ephebate. Therefore, at any given time (assuming a stable first-century population), first-century Athens would have contained somewhere between 728 (1.82% of 40,000) and 910 (1.82% of 50,000) individuals of ephebic age.

Now, out of these, what percentage actually *did* receive an ephebic education?

Our extant figures for the Roman period are summarized in table 9. As is evident, numbers shifted slightly from century to century. But the average number of total ephebes per year (Athenians + foreigners) seems to have remained fairly consistent

with Corinth, for which Engels (*Roman Corinth*, 79-84, 179-81) has carried out a more meticulous analysis. Engels notes that when Aristides (*For Poseidon* 23) addressed Corinth around the middle of the second century A.D., he could speak of it as the largest city in Greece, apparently without rousing the contempt of his listeners; and we have no evidence that this was ever said of Roman Athens, nor of any other city in Roman Greece. Based on the probable geographical extent of economic and commercial activity, and the density of the population in Roman Corinth, Engels estimates a second-century population between 52,500 and 87,000, the largest population in the city's ancient history. Furthermore, since the city apparently outgrew its water supply during the reign of Hadrian, and Engels estimates that at least 56,000 could have been supported on the new system consequently constructed, Engels concludes that Corinth's population during the first quarter of the second century A.D. must have increased beyond 56,000. Hence, if the population of Athens remained stable throughout the first and second centuries A.D., and it could not have closely rivaled Corinth in the mid second century, then in the first century it can hardly have had a population larger than about 50,000.

¹⁵⁰ I have used the Coale-Demeny West Model of A. J. Coale, P. G. Demeny, and B. Vaughan, *Regional Model Life Tables and Stable Populations* (New York and London, 1983). Although the model has received some criticism (i.e., Walter Scheidel, "Roman Age Structure: Evidence and Models," *JRS* 91 (2001): 1-26; and *Debating Roman Demography* [Leiden, 2001]), the recent and informative study from Tim H. Parkin, *Old Age in the Roman World: A Cultural and Social History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), has continued to endorse it. Parkin explains that, as a "stationary population model," the Coale-Demeny West Model assumes that birth and death rates remain "constant over an indefinite period and are equal (the growth rate is zero), and the population is closed, that is there is no effect from migration, and any short term fluctuations as a result of such factors as plague, war, and famine are smoothed out over the long term" (48); figures apply equally to either sex (328n46). Parkin affirms that the revisions made to Coale-Demeny in light of the criticisms of Scheidel have made "little difference" in the figures. Thus, Parkin affirms that the present model is sufficiently accurate with regard to generalized population over time; we simply "do not have sufficient evidence to fit any ancient population with more precision" (328n46).

Table 9. The Athenian ephebate, 119 B.C.- A.D. 200

Source	Date	Total # ephebes
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1008	119/8 B.C.	141 (17 foreigners, 124 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1009	117/6 B.C.	174 (12 foreigners, 162 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1011	107/6 B.C.	140 (24 foreigners, 116 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1028	102/1 B.C.	138 (36 foreigners, 102 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1039	83-73 B.C.	110 (5 foreigners, 105 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1043	38/7 B.C.	119 (66 foreigners, 53 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1963	A.D. 13/12	130
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1969, 1970	A.D. 45/6	102
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1973	A.D. 41-54	96
<i>IG, II²</i> , 1996	A.D. 92/3	231 (151 foreigners, 80 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2017	A.D. 97/8	72 (12 foreigners, 60 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2024	A.D. 111/2	100 (79 foreigners, 21 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2026	A.D. 116/7	52 (4 foreigners, 48 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2065	A.D. 150/1	77 (7 foreigners, 70 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2086	A.D. 163/4	136 (41 foreigners, 95 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2097	A.D. 169/70	234 (154 foreigners, 80 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2103	A.D. 172/3	215 (109 foreigners, 106 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2130	A.D. 192/3	124 (39 foreigners, 85 Athenians)
<i>IG, II²</i> , 2128	A.D. 200	198 (104 foreigners, 94 Athenians)

If we separate the data roughly by century, the averages are as follows:

119/8 B.C.-A.D. 1: **137 ephebes**

A.D. 13/12-100: **114 ephebes**

A.D. 101-200: **141 ephebes**

The same can be said for the average number of Athenian ephebes per year (where this information can be determined):

119/8 B.C.- A.D. 1: **95 Athenian ephebes**

A.D. 13/12-100: **70 Athenian ephebes**

A.D. 101-200: **74 Athenian ephebes**

In both the first and third periods, Athenians comprised over half of the ephebes (69% in the first period and over 52% in the third). This means that, even if Athenians were gradually giving way to foreigners in terms of total numbers, we can still assume that Athenians in the second period comprised more than half of the ephebes (about 60%

would be commensurate—68.5 out of 114), as indeed the two figures we do have from the middle period indicate (i.e., at an average of 70 Athenians per class). Therefore, while the number of Athenians in comparison with foreigners does shift some from one period to the next, for our purposes the shift is negligible: we are safe in saying that the Athenian ephebate in the first century averaged about 70 Athenian citizens per entering class.

While “foreign” ephebes were not Athenian citizens, it is generally assumed that Athens was their primary place of residence.¹⁵¹ We may therefore conclude that a fair number of them would have remained in Athens upon completion of the ephebate. Even so, to simplify things (and to make our case still more probable), let us leave foreigners out entirely, and treat only these 70 Athenian citizens who entered the ephebate each year. If the urban center of first-century Athens contained an overall population of 40,000 individuals, and thus 728 of these were of ephebic age, then some 9.6% of Athenian eighteen-year-olds entered the ephebate each year. If it contained a population as large as 50,000 individuals, and thus 910 individuals of ephebic age, then that number would be somewhat lower—7.7%.

Admittedly, it would be too much to assume that every Athenian ephebe remained in Athens for the remainder of his life. But Athenian emigrants would have been offset by those foreigners who decided to remain after completing the ephebate, as well as by the arrival of ephebate-educated immigrants from other cities. We should also bear in mind that our mortality figures do not vary by socio-economic class, and the wealthy are likely to have survived longer than the “average” person. We may therefore safely conclude that ephebate-educated eighteen-year-olds in Athens amounted, at the very least, to 7-8% of

¹⁵¹ M. J. Osborne, and S. G. Byrne, *The Foreign Residents of Athens* (Paris: Peeters, 1996), xxix.

the eighteen-year-old urban population, and may well have comprised as much as 9-10%. Since urban economy, and not that of the surrounding rural areas, has been the concern of Friesen's (2004) poverty scale and of Longenecker's (2009; 2010) economy scales, we can make nearly a direct comparison between these ephebate figures and the PS/ES economy brackets: if 7-10% of eighteen-year-old Athenians entered the ephebate each year, it is apparent that far more than the elite 3% must have received an ephebic education.¹⁵² We are safely spilling over into Longenecker's "ES4" bracket.

Even if we reject the *urban* economy scale of Longenecker (and of Friesen 2004), and rely solely on the Friesen and Scheidel (2009) model, which considers the *overall* distribution of wealth rather than that of urban territory only, still our conclusion obtains. The aggregate population of settlements and towns surrounding Athens cannot have amounted to more than 20,000.¹⁵³ We would then have a total urban-plus-rural population of 60,000-70,000 people and thus an eighteen-year-old population between 1,092 and 1,274, leaving us still with somewhere between 5.5% and 6.4% of eighteen-year-olds in or around Athens who were receiving an ephebic education, and therefore a large number of ephebes who belonged, not to the highest elite group, but to the upper "middling" group of the population (ES4-5). This range of membership is born out by inscriptional

¹⁵² Another way of getting at the figure we are after is to compare the aggregate number of ephebes in the city—i.e., the sum total from all graduating classes—with the overall population. Thus, adjusting for mortality in accordance with the Coale-Demeny West Model, we would have 70 eighteen-year-old ephebes; 69 nineteen-year-olds who *had been* ephebes; 68 twenty-year-olds who *had been* ephebes; and so on. All together, these would amount to 5-6% of the city's population, depending on whether we settle with 40,000 or 50,000 as our starting figure. Of course, this percentage is somewhat lower than the 7-10% figure calculated earlier, because it does not account for those still under the age of eighteen who belong to wealthy households and eventually *will* receive an ephebic education.

¹⁵³ 20,000 is the figure Engels (*Roman Corinth*, 84) gives for the areas surrounding the (larger) city of Corinth.

evidence, for we do find there the occasional artisan attested as a member of the gymnasial class.¹⁵⁴

What might all this mean for potential gymnasium education in Roman Corinth? While we *do* have some evidence of a gymnasium and affiliated officials in Corinth, we have no direct evidence of an official ephebate, at least not beyond a couple of doubtful hints.¹⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the ancient gymnasium is always represented as restrictive and open almost exclusively to the “elite,” official ephebate or not. Therefore, whether one received an official ephebate education in Corinth (less likely), or a gymnasium education apart from an official ephebate in Corinth (possible), or a gymnasium education in either form through a gymnasium nearby (most likely), the implications would have been the same—such a one was among the privileged, generally at least among the top 10% of society. Again the question whether our Erastus was the same as the Athenian ephebe presents itself as a real possibility.

In sum, we have good reason to believe that for cities like Athens upwards of 7-10% of the urban population (or, about 6% of the city’s combined urban and surrounding population), had gone or would go through the gymnasium. Our working figure for the Athenian population would need to be exceedingly higher—indeed, 100,000-150,000—for ephebes to have been drawn only from the top 3% of urban society. Hence, even though we have relied on a rough estimate for our starting Athenian population, without doubt, we easily remain within sufficient range for our case to stand.

¹⁵⁴ Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 276-7.

¹⁵⁵ Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.1.34, mentioned by Kennell, *Ephebeia*, 42; cf. *1 Clem.* 3:1.

Finally, it should be said that, if our 7-10% figure seems high, it is surely because our expectations about gymnasium privileges have been conditioned by the older and rhetorically imprecise “elite” versus “non-elite” way of talking about the ancient economy. It is now apparent that, if a gymnasium education was considered “elite,” this could not have meant that it was limited to the top 1-3% of society. It must have included a large portion of ES4a people, in addition to ES4b and ES5 members who consorted with the right people. All of this confirms the possibility that certain Corinthians were within reach of a credentialed philosophical education. Whether such an education was completed in Corinth, Athens, or elsewhere,¹⁵⁶ this could easily have included individuals like Gaius, Stephanus, or—still most tantalizingly of all—Erastus.¹⁵⁷

Church Relations

Relations with Outsiders

We have seen so far that the denizens of first-century Corinth would have been colored to a considerable extent by Greek culture and philosophical influences (in addition to Roman influences), and that some within the Corinthian church likely had a formal philosophical education within reach. It remains for us to ask how Paul’s converts to Christianity could ever have justified adopting pagan philosophy even where it blatantly contradicted his Christian message.

¹⁵⁶ E.g., Argos, Epidauros, Megara, Sicyon, or Athens, which were all in close vicinity to Corinth.

¹⁵⁷ While there is evidence in Roman Egypt that some girls participated in the gymnasia, they were the exceptions; cf. *P.Corn.* I.18; *P.Oxy.* XLIII.3136; *MDAI* 35 (1910), 436, n. 20; 37 (1912): 277-8; cf. *CIG* 3185; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 55.1. Occasionally we find female gymnasiarchs, though these appear late in the Roman period; so Kennell, “The Greek Ephebate in the Roman Period,” 329. The role of women in church assemblies is a different issue: cf. Margaret Y. Macdonald and Janet H. Tullcok, *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), cf. 1-16, 144-63.

The situation in the Corinthian church seems to have been born out of a dynamic process involving several integrally related factors, including (but not limited to) good relations with outsiders, a lack of deterrents to conversion, and a kind of theological pluralism.¹⁵⁸ It is difficult to say what came first. Probably when Paul first arrived in Corinth, the Corinthians found aspects of his message amenable to their current ways of thinking. Having then interpreted Christianity in terms of mainstream/pagan categories of thought, they went on with business as usual, leaving theological and ethical boundaries insufficiently defined and remaining fully integrated into their old social networks. As a result, connected outsiders would have perceived few deterrents to conversion, and the church in turn would have attracted further individuals who would retain largely (though not entirely) secular thinking after they joined the community. In that way, a basically pluralistic outlook would continue to thrive within the church. That outlook would continue to perpetuate both good relations with outsiders and a deterrent-free invitation to join the community, and the effect would be paid back in turn.

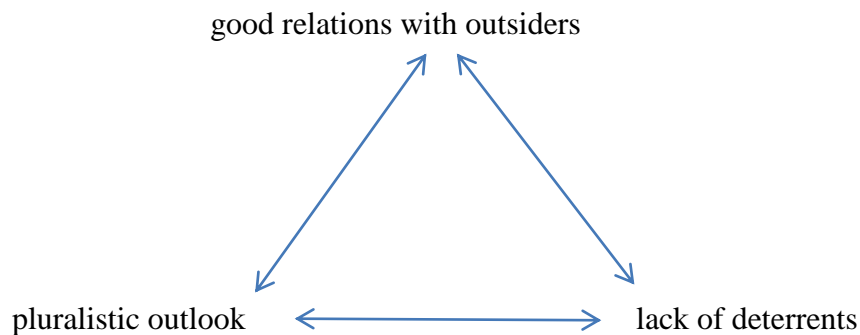


Figure 1. Conversion dynamics in the Corinthian church

¹⁵⁸ For similar discussions, see Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth,” 49-74; and James Walters, “Civic Identity in Roman Corinth and Its Impact on Early Christians,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth*, 415-16.

Apparently one consequence of this outlook was that the Corinthians saw no problem embracing Christianity while also drawing heavily from elements of Greek philosophy.

The Corinthian Assembly

Before concluding the chapter, one more aspect of the Corinthian church's social setting must be addressed—the nature of its assemblies. The issues involved here include the venues used for the church's meetings, the total size of the Corinthian church, and the models upon which its meetings were based.

It has long been thought that church gatherings took place in private homes. In 1983, Jerome Murphy-O'Connor attempted to shed new light on these gatherings with the publication of a short chapter entitled "House-churches and the Eucharist."¹⁵⁹ This essay called attention to a first-century villa discovered near Corinth at Anaploga. As a "typical" house,¹⁶⁰ this villa included (among other rooms) a *triclinium* or "dining room" measuring approximately 5.5 x 7.5 meters and an atrium of approximately 5 x 6 meters. Based on comparisons with similar houses proximate to first-century Corinth, Murphy-O'Connor concluded that an average triclinium in a private villa would have been about 36 sq. meters and an average atrium about 55 sq. meters. Perhaps such was the house of Gaius, presumably one of the wealthier members of the Christian community at Corinth (Rom 16:23)? If so, his home could have accommodated about nine individuals in the triclinium, and some 30 to 40 in the atrium—about 40 to 50 individuals in all.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Good News Studies 6; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983), 153-60; (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2002), 178-85.

¹⁶⁰ Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (1983), 155.

¹⁶¹ Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (1983), 156. This figure was later disputed by Carolyn Osiek and David Balch (*Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997]), who argued for a considerably larger number (pp. 201-2).

But if this was the size of a “typical” Corinthian villa, could it have accommodated the whole Corinthian church? Murphy-O’Connor notes that we can calculate a minimum estimate of the church’s size based on the information afforded from Acts and the Pauline epistles. If we omit Chloe (as Murphy-O’Connor does), sixteen individuals are named.¹⁶² We may then add spouses and baptized household members, including children, servants/slaves, and relations. In all, the church must therefore have contained a bare minimum of 40-50 individuals.¹⁶³ As Murphy-O’Connor observes, the church probably met in different homes, in sub-groups (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; cf. Col 4:15; Phlm 2), and only occasionally came together as a “whole” church (Rom 16:23), at which times a relatively sizeable house would have been necessary to accommodate everyone.¹⁶⁴

More recently, scholars have begun to consider alternative meeting spaces. In 2004, two important articles were published on the issue. David Balch made a case that meetings were more likely held in small apartment blocks.¹⁶⁵ David Horrell, however, was less restrictive, arguing that early churches probably met in a variety of venues, including not only country villas, peasant homes, and smart town apartments, but also

¹⁶² Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2), Titius Justus (Acts 18:7), Crispus (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14), Sosthenes (Acts 18:17), Gaius (1 Cor 1:14; Rom 16:21-24), Stephanus (1 Cor 1:16; 16:17); Apollos (1 Cor 16:12), Fortunatus (1 Cor 16:17), Achaicus (1 Cor 16:17), Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, Erastus (Rom 16:21-24), and Quartus (Rom 16:21-24).

¹⁶³ Murphy-O’Connor. *St. Paul’s Corinth* (1983), 155; (2002), 182.

¹⁶⁴ Murphy-O’Connor, *St. Paul’s Corinth* (1983), 156; (2002), 183. Horsley (*1 Corinthians*, 30) argues from 1 Cor 11:18; 14:23; cf. 10:20; Rom 16:23 that multiple house churches must have existed. On this basis Craig Steven de Vos (*Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities* [Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars, 1999], 203-5) estimates as many as 100 Corinthian Christians; Hays (*1 Corinthians*, 7) estimates 150-200.

¹⁶⁵ David L. Balch, “Rich Pompeiian Houses, Shops for Rent, and the Huge Apartment Building in Herculaneum as Typical Spaces for Pauline House Churches,” *JSNT* 27 (2004): 28.

rooms behind or over shops, and even “ramshackle and temporary dwellings of the destitute.”¹⁶⁶ Helpful as these developments have been, however, Peter Oakes’ 2009 monograph has confirmed that Murphy-O’Connor’s original scenario remains plausible, regarding both the house setting and the number of people which such settings might have accommodated.¹⁶⁷

The meetings themselves have been likened to those of other contemporary groups. Years ago Meeks examined early church assemblies in comparison with four contemporary models: the household, the voluntary association, the synagogue, and (of most interest to us) philosophical schools.¹⁶⁸ He concluded that although all offer close analogies, “none of the four models . . . captures the whole of the Pauline *ekklesia*.”¹⁶⁹ Comparison with philosophical schools has subsequently been taken up by others.¹⁷⁰ Yet Meeks’ conclusion continues to be affirmed: no model offers a perfect analogy to church meetings. In a recent reconsideration of Meeks’ work, Edward Adams has offered a judicious contribution in distinguishing between public *perception* of these meetings by

¹⁶⁶ David Horrell, “Domestic Space and Christian Meetings at Corinth: Imagining New Contexts and the Buildings East of the Theatre,” *NTS* 50 (2004): 366. In any case, it is doubted whether Murphy-O’Connor’s Corinthian villa can be said to be “typical,” for we simply know too little about urban Corinth to make any kind of informed comparison. For this discussion see Daniel N. Schowalter, “Seeking Shelter in Roman Corinth: Archaeology and The Placement of Paul’s Communities,” in *Corinth in Contrast*, 327-41.

¹⁶⁷ See Oakes, *Reading Romans in Pompeii*, 81, where he explores the possibility of house churches of about 40 people.

¹⁶⁸ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 75-84.

¹⁶⁹ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 84.

¹⁷⁰ Loveday Alexander, “Paul and the Hellenistic Schools: The Evidence of Galen,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, 60-83; and “IPSE DIXIT: Citation of Authority in Paul and in the Jewish and Hellenistic Schools,” in *Paul beyond the Judaism-Hellenism Divide* (ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 103-27; Clarence Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1995); Stanley Stowers, “Does Pauline Christianity Resemble a Hellenistic Philosophy?” in *Paul beyond the Judaism-Hellenism Divide*, 81-102.

outside observers, and the meetings as they really were.¹⁷¹ Though, perhaps we should also distinguish between Paul's *ideal*, and the reality that the Corinthians were actually embodying.

In the end, much of what we know about early church assemblies remains speculative. It can however be said, based on our socio-economic data, that five or six individuals of moderate wealth within a church of 50+ members does not sound disproportionate, especially in the wealthy city of Corinth. Moreover, according to our assessment of ancient education, that some of these may have had some formal acquaintance with philosophy appears to be a reasonable possibility. The upshot is that some within their midst may indeed, against Paul's better wishes, have viewed their group as a kind of philosophical school, the gospel as a sort of philosophy, and their teachers as purveyors of its wisdom.

Conclusions

Any reconstruction of 1 Corinthians must be informed by the social circumstances of first-century Corinth. This chapter has addressed several aspects of Corinthian social history with an eye to the present thesis that Stoic philosophy was a major driving force in the church's divisions.

In considering the religio-cultural mores of first-century Corinth, I have agreed with the consensus that the church, while containing a Jewish contingent, was primarily of Gentile orientation and that their problems were essentially of a Gentile nature. Yet I have also attempted to redress misleading cultural characterizations of the city as

¹⁷¹ Edward Adams, "First-Century Models for Paul's Churches: Selected Scholarly Developments since Meeks," in *After the First Urban Christians* (eds. Todd Still and David Horrell; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2009), 77.

“thoroughly” or “invariably” Roman, “Roman rather than Greek,” or “geographically in Greece, culturally in Rome,” and of the church itself as “distinctly Roman.” For too long have these assertions served, intentionally or not, to sideline Greek philosophy from the discussion. Indeed, based on the consistent conclusions of recent classical examinations of the city, we have seen that Paul’s Corinth, although a Roman colony, was not “simply Roman” but was rather a unique Roman-Greek amalgam comprised of a highly Greek populace, and an aristocracy that was quite willing to “straddle the cultural divide.”

The question of social standing in the Corinthian church has also been a major concern in this chapter. Though disagreeing in the exact details, Friesen and Longenecker have both confirmed that the church was plagued to some degree by social stratification, with the majority of its members falling around, at, or below subsistence level, and a minority—though an influential one—perhaps at the PS/ES4 level, possessing a moderate (to high) surplus of funds. It was noted that individuals at the ES4 level of society would usually have been literate and *could* have perused philosophical handbooks on their own; but many of these individuals would also have obtained formal philosophical training in a gymnasium. If Dutch’s conclusions have been valid, that Paul employs gymnasium imagery throughout the letter as a way of chastening those educated there, then the gymnasium may also prove to be a plausible context in which certain Corinthians could have received a philosophical education. Of course, the present thesis does not ultimately *depend* on a gymnasium context, for we have noted several ways in which philosophy diffused itself throughout the various echelons of society—street preachers, books, inscriptions, as well as local schools of philosophy, which we have found even in Corinth itself (cf. *IvO* 453). Even so, as we shall see in the next chapter, the gymnasium would

have provided just the level of philosophical instruction the wise Corinthians seem to have had.

Erastus remains an elusive figure. If, as Friesen argues, he is not to be identified with the *aedile* of *Corinth VIII* 232, still we seem to have good reason to view him as a man of exceptional status among early Christians—after all, even Friesen places him as high as “PS4.” Moreover, leaving the exact social level of οἰκόνομος a question for future studies, I have noted that we have evidence of only *two* Erasti at all in first-century Greece, both of them associated with the Athenian gymnasium and both appearing precisely in the middle years of the first century, just prior to the Corinthian correspondence. The appearance of his name there may only tease us. But it creates no strain on the imagination to suppose that one of these two elite young men, standing on the brink of a political career, might have gone on after his time in the gymnasium in the 40s to be οἰκόνομος in the nearby city of Corinth.

All said, it has become apparent that the social conditions both of first-century Corinth and of the Corinthian church itself provided more than a suitable environment to allow for the infiltration of Stoic philosophy into the church’s midst. Whether that did in fact happen, and Stoic “wisdom” took center stage in the church’s divisions, will be the subject of our next, and final, chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

The “Wise Man” among the Corinthians

With each of the forgoing chapters, we have been pressing towards a reassessment of the Corinthians’ divisive wisdom. Having contended that the regnant, rhetorical thesis provides an inaccurate explanation for the evidence (chapter 2), working from the distillation of Corinthian views identified in chapter 3 and the social-historical data of chapter 4, we can now develop our constructive contribution: the Corinthians’ wisdom is best understood as a *Christian* adaptation of *Stoic* philosophy, and perhaps nothing more.¹

It will be imperative to consider the arguments made here in conjunction with the work undertaken in chapter 2 to isolate the Corinthians’ language and positions. Moreover, I cannot overemphasize that the present thesis, like any other, will rely to some extent on an argument from coherence. Some of the arguments presented can be regarded as secure fixtures, while others will hang together and rest partly on the foundation of the former. But when *all* the data is taken together—a full examination of the evidence from the letter, a responsible consideration of the social context, and a careful treatment of counter theses—it will be evident that Stoicism provides not simply *an* explanation, but consistently the *best*. Indeed, if a Stoic explanation has not yet received the attention it deserves, we shall see that it is not for a want of evidence.

¹ This statement should not be taken out of the context of the whole chapter. How socio-economic considerations and other wisdom traditions might fit with the present thesis will be addressed along the way.

This chapter will proceed as follows. After a brief history of the Stoic school and an overview of its extant literary sources, we shall then move to an analysis of 1 Corinthians and its Corinthian language under the five topics identified in chapter 3: wisdom/the wise man, status distinctions, freedom and indifferents (treated together), and “dualism.” I conclude by addressing how the proposed reconstruction relates with the other reconstructions that have dominated in the history of interpretation.

Because of the potential problems that arise—and have recently arisen—from selective treatment of the letter, this chapter will have to take a more comprehensive approach. Accordingly I will run essentially all of the letter’s material—every major section—through the Stoic test as we move through our five topics. The goal is not to be reductive. Stoic connections will not *always* leap off the page. Some material may reveal that Stoic connections are merely possible, or that Stoicism provides only some supporting justification for the Corinthians’ behavior or views without necessarily constituting the chief driving force. For the greater part of the material, however, Stoic connections will prove to be more central, and highly probable. More importantly, it will be shown that the Stoic explanation cuts across the *whole* of the letter, providing a unifying, and quite a compelling, explanation for all the letter’s dominating topics, as well as for the Corinthian language and slogans that appear in connection with them.

Stoicism

History of the School

Already in Paul’s day Stoicism had persisted for several hundred years. Its roots reached back across the Roman and Hellenistic periods, through Cynicism in the late

classical period, all the way to the feet of Socrates.² Moving in the other direction, Socrates' pupil Antisthenes had taught Crates of Thebes, who had in turn taught the famous Cynic Diogenes of Sinope, master of the founding Stoic Zeno (335-263 B.C.).³ With its common debt to Socrates, Stoicism naturally drew from a variety of the schools he had inspired. It drew heavily from Cynicism and Platonism, and to a lesser extent from Aristotle.⁴ Subsequent to Zeno and his immediate successor, Cleanthes, these various streams of influence were synthesized under the school's third scholarch, Chrysippus. Stoicism as it was formulated under Chrysippus became the authoritative and "more or less standard" version of Zeno's philosophy.⁵ Although Cynic influence did not disappear,⁶ its ethical extremism and raffish defiance of conventional values did become appreciably muted.

In Stoicism, school loyalty therefore meant loyalty to Zeno, or rather, Zeno as filtered through Chrysippus. For several generations after Chrysippus, Zeno's authority was upheld by an unbroken succession of scholarchs: Diogenes of Babylon, Antipater, and at last Panaetius, who in 88/89 B.C. witnessed the demise of Athens under the

² For the history of the school, see A. A. Long and David N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1:1-9; David Sedley, "The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus," in *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7-32; David Sedley, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-19; Jacques Brunschwig and David Sedley, "Hellenistic Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 151-83; Christopher Gill, "The School in the Roman Imperial Period," in *Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, 33-58; Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson, *The Stoics Reader: Selected Writings and Testimonia* (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett, 2008), x-xv.

³ Antisthenes (ca. mid 5th–mid 4th c. B.C.); Crates of Thebes (ca. 368/365–288/285 B.C.); Diogenes of Sinope (ca. 412/403–ca. 324/321 B.C.).

⁴ So Inwood and Gerson, *The Stoics Reader*, xi.

⁵ As Inwood (*The Stoics Reader*, xii) puts it.

⁶ See, e.g., Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, §58-59, 67A-H.

onslaught of Sulla's army. In the period that followed, Stoic teachers established schools in various localities, of which the Rhodian school of Posidonius, student of Panaetius, was most notable. It was Posidonius who had taught philosophy to the great Roman orator Cicero (*Nat. d.* 1.6; cf. 2.88; *Fin.* 1.6; *Tusc.* 2.61), who himself committed much of his master's thought to writing. From Posidonius on through the second century A.D., many eminent Stoic teachers left their marks—the Tarsians Zeno and Antipater, as well as Epictetus and others—but none wielding the weight of authority commanded by the early scholarchs.⁷ Chrysippus, without dispute the most important thinker in the history of the school, continued to represent the standard of Stoic orthodoxy. Indeed, centuries later, Epictetus was still able to equate “being a Stoic teacher” with “expounding Chrysippus” (*Diatr.* 1.4.6-9; 1.17.13-18).

Despite the essential stability of the Stoic system, Stoic thinkers were not afraid to add to or even revise the doctrines of their founders. Thus it is important to distinguish several phases in the school's history. The customary divisions are “Early Stoicism” (from Zeno through Chrysippus), “Middle Stoicism” (exemplified by Panaetius and Posidonius), and “Imperial” or “Roman Stoicism” (represented in Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius).⁸ Middle Stoicism marked something of a departure from the early Stoics in the area of psychology, as Panaetius, and perhaps more definitively, Posidonius, sought to integrate Stoic and Platonic ideas on the nature of the soul. The later, Roman Stoics too were willing to depart from tradition. In many places Seneca shows readiness to deviate from Stoic teachings (*Ot.* 3.1), or to criticize (*Ep.* 90.7; *Nat.* 7.22.1) or revise

⁷ See, e.g., Tod, “Sidelights on Greek Philosophers,” 140; Gill, “The School in the Roman Imperial Period,” 34-36; Sedley, “The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus,” 30.

⁸ Though Sedley (“The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus,” 7) divides it into five.

them (*Ep.* 33.7-8; 64.7); admittedly he was also influenced by other philosophical systems (*Ep.* 58.6; 108.13, 22; *Nat.* 3.27.3; 5.20; 7.30.1-2). Nonetheless, Stoics of the “Middle” and “Roman” phases remained staunchly devoted to the essential teachings of their school. Claims of deviation notwithstanding, Posidonius was “invariably reported in the ancient world as a Stoic without qualification,”⁹ identified himself as an interpreter of Stoicism rather than an innovator, and by common consensus remained fundamentally orthodox.¹⁰ What is true of Posidonius was true of “Middle Stoicism” generally—it was marked more by continuity than change.¹¹ So it was also with Roman Stoicism. Seneca, although an occasional dissenter and mildly eclectic, was a self-identified Stoic (*Ep.* 33.4; cf. *Vit. beat.* 3.2) and maintained orthodox Stoic positions on nearly all the major issues. Perhaps the only exception to his orthodoxy was in the area of psychology—where he followed Posidonius.¹² Thus, as in Middle Stoicism, Roman Stoicism did offer partial innovations as well as new ways of expressing old ideas, but on the whole it remained entirely within the early Stoic framework.¹³

Sources

This development in the history of Stoicism has some bearing on our use of the sources. Since Stoicism was by and large conservative, the views of the earliest Stoic

⁹ See Ian G. Kidd, *Posidonius, Volume 3: The Translation of the Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and ancient testimonia cited on p. 61.

¹⁰ Cf. Ian G. Kidd, *Posidonius*, 3:1-29; *OCD* 1232.

¹¹ As stated in Inwood and Gerson, *A Stoic Reader*, vii; see also Sedley, “The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus,” 22-24.

¹² J. M. Rist, “Seneca and Stoic Orthodoxy,” *ANRW* 2.36:3.

¹³ Gill, “The School in the Roman Imperial Period,” 33-58.

thinkers continued to be retained in the school's later phases. In our use of the sources, then, we only need exercise caution in matters where we find later Stoics explicitly parting ways with their predecessors, or where we have substantial evidence for development over time. For our purposes, only one such area proves of much consequence, and that, as suggested above, is in the matter of the relation between body and soul. Beginning with the Middle Stoics, later Stoics in effect abandoned the earlier monistic perspective of Zeno and Chrysippus, and for reasons connected with ethics, substituted something that looked closer to a Platonic dualism.¹⁴ As we shall see, this more dualistic outlook was the consistent perspective of the Roman Stoics, those roughly contemporary with Paul and his Corinthian ministry.

At this point, we must also distinguish between two different kinds of *sources*. There are on the one hand writers such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, who, in addition to preserving memoirs from earlier thinkers, write *as* Stoics and therefore also as representatives of *contemporary* Stoicism. On the other hand, we have writers that aim simply to collect and preserve *earlier* philosophical thought, without necessarily endorsing the views as their own. Such are the “doxographies” instantiated in Cicero and Plutarch, and the so-called “epitomes” of Stobaeus, Arius Didymus, and Diogenes Laertius. Because these preserve almost exclusively earlier views (Diogenes Laertius, for instance, names no Stoic later than the second century), they too serve as useful guides to traditional Stoicism. Besides the doxographies and epitomes, we have also the fragments of the early Stoics preserved in later writers. A wealth of these have been collected in the

¹⁴ See A. A. Long, “Carneades and the Stoic Telos,” *Phronesis* 12 (1967): 59-90; Long, “Roman Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 207.

multi-volume sets *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta (SVF)* and Long and Sedley's *Hellenistic Philosophers (LS)*, to which I make reference throughout.

1 Corinthians and Stoicism

Addressees

Before presenting the evidence that Stoicism had infiltrated the ranks of the Corinthian church, we should first speak to the question of the letter's immediate addressees. It is now clear that Theissen's suggestion that it targeted a small but influential minority¹⁵ from among the "upper classes" has its demerits as well as its merits. On the one hand, we have noted potential problems with such language as "the upper classes." Moreover, it must be noted that Paul *addresses* explicitly the whole community (1:2 – "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours"), as many have been wont to emphasize.¹⁶ Even so, this is not to say that Paul intended to *blame* the whole community—at least not in equal measure. Indeed, it is this that seems to have captured Theissen's attention. "Some" have become arrogant (4:18), "some" have denied the resurrection of the dead (15:12). Likewise *some* think of themselves as "spiritual," "perfect" and "knowledgeable" over against a *separate* class of "unspiritual," "immature," and "weak" (chs. 8, 10; 12-14). Paul himself champions the perspective of the "weak" throughout chapters 8-10, in chapter 10 even implicating the (so-called)

¹⁵ E.g., Gerd Theissen, "Social Stratification in the Corinthian Community," in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 72; and "Social Conflicts in the Corinthian Correspondence," 377.

¹⁶ E.g., Collins (*1 Corinthians*, 16) and Fitzmyer (*1 Corinthians*, 52).

“strong,” and he pleads on behalf of the “have-nots” in 11:17-34. Moreover, most of the problems in the letter seem either to imply or require a more privileged contingent as the culprits (especially 6:1-11; chs. 8, 10; 11:17-34).¹⁷ Thus, since Theissen, interpreters have rightly argued that the culpable “wise men” are to be identified with certain ones among the “wealthier” (though I do not say, “upper class”) members of the church.

Such being the case, we must resist the temptation to swing from the distinct-parties view of Baur and earlier scholarship to the conclusion that the group or groups Paul addressed had *no* cohesiveness whatsoever. If scholars have been right that certain topics extend through all the major issues in the letter, this would imply a relatively consistent perspective from perhaps a single group (which we must avoid multiplying without due cause), however loosely they had united themselves. I should only like to make two caveats. First, if it can be said that the “wise” had adopted a two-tier view of Christians—the wise and the foolish, the perfect and the immature, the knowledgeable and the weak—this is not to say that they thought of the church as comprised of two rival “parties.” Second, the “wisdom” espoused by the dominant minority perhaps also percolated down to some who were not a part of their immediate circle. In short, the “wise” can probably be identified with those among the “wealthier,” but *perhaps* not exclusively.

Analysis

Wisdom and the wise man. Because of the primacy of its position, the length of its treatment, and its intimate connection with the party-slogans of 1:12, scholars have long

¹⁷ For an overview, see Dunn, *1 Corinthians*, 43-65.

recognized that the chief source of the church’s divisions was their alleged “wisdom” (σοφία). Despite the almost endless diversity of interpretations given to this wisdom over the years, the most likely explanation in the light of the first-century milieu, lexicographical data, and supporting features in the context—I aim to show—is the wisdom of Stoicism.

Although lexical usage of σοφία varied widely across antiquity, a clear diachronic trend is visible.¹⁸ Prior to Socrates, the term most typically denoted practical skill, whether in the arts, politics, or other matters of life experience. With Socrates and his earliest followers, however, the term’s semantic center shifted from the realm of the practical to that of the theoretical, so that it came to denote speculative knowledge of things divine more than it did practical knowledge of things mundane.¹⁹ A third stage in the history of the concept was reached with the Hellenistic philosophical schools, which united the practical and the theoretical in their notion of the “wise man” (ὁ σοφός). The Stoic definition of wisdom encapsulated the new ideal: wisdom was “knowledge of things both divine *and* human” (θείων τε καὶ ἀνθρωπίνων ἐπιστήμη, *SVF* 2.35-36; cf. Cicero, *Off.* 1.153).

Some rhetoricians of course continued to lay claim to wisdom. Nonetheless, we have seen that there is exceedingly little evidence that in the first century “wisdom” was primarily a designation for rhetoric or the “wise man” a technical title for the rhetorician or sophist. Actually, in developing the idea of the wise man as a technical class, it was the

¹⁸ For a summary of this movement, see Franco Volpi, “Wisdom,” *Brill’s New Pauly: Antiquity* (electronic version); Ulrich Wilckens, “Σοφία, σοφός, σοφίζω,” *TDNT* 7:467.

¹⁹ As evinced both from literary sources and the papyri; cf. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, 1031; *MM* 582.

Stoics who earned pride of place.²⁰ For the Stoics, the wise man was the one who had both the theoretical knowledge and the practical know-how to exercise consistent virtue (SVF 1.216; 1.235; 1.548; D. L. 7.121-6; Cicero, *Mur.* 29-31), in which consisted happiness (D. L. 7.89/SVF 3.39), the end or τέλος of human existence. Thus, while all had access to wisdom by virtue of their share in the all-infusing divine Logos (Cicero, *Nat. d.* 2.23-25, 28-30; *Off.* 1.107, 110-11, 114-17), only the wise man consistently made use of his reasoning faculties so as actually to attain it. Other people were merely “inferior” (φραῦλοι; SVF 3.657-84).

The apparent technical meaning of σοφός in 1 Corinthians has generally been overlooked. Even where σοφός is clearly substantive and masculine (e.g., 1:19, 20, 27; 3:19, 20; 6:5), modern translations tend to obscure this by translating it either as “the wise” (e.g., NAS, NIV, and NRSV on 1:19; 3:19, 20; cf. 1:26), or with the inelegant expression “the one who is wise” (NRSV on 1:20).²¹

Several pieces of evidence, however, point to the Stoic understanding of the term. To begin, external evidence tempts us to see the Stoic meaning almost as a default. Indeed, not only was Stoicism the most dominant of the philosophies in the first century, especially among the wealthier classes, but the *Stoic* wise man himself was far and away

²⁰ For the various conceptions of the wise man and the Stoics’ important role in their development, see George B. Kerferd, “The Sage in Hellenistic Philosophical Literature,” in *The Sage in Israel and Ancient Near East* (eds. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 320-8; Benjamin Fiore, “The Sage in Select Hellenistic and Roman Literary Genres,” in *The Sage in Israel and Ancient Near East*, 329-42.

²¹ In this case, the attempt to be gender inclusive serves only to obliterate the technical meaning of the word. To be sure, in the ancient world women too could be considered “wise” (See Henriette Harich-Schwarzbauer, “Women Philosophers,” *Brill’s New Pauly: Antiquity* [electronic version]), but σοφός itself, like many attributes that indicated the ideals of human virtue, was gendered in the masculine because it was thought to be a properly masculine trait. To capture this historical sense of the term, classical scholars therefore rightly continue to persist in rendering σοφός “wise man” when it seems to carry the

the most well-known. The Stoics in fact boasted that they had exclusive right to the title (e.g., Cicero, *Fin.* 3.75; Lucian, *Vit. auct.* 20).

Yet the Stoic meaning is also suggested by the evidence of 1 Corinthians itself. On the one hand, we can almost certainly rule out a distinctly Jewish meaning, for we have already noted that Paul explicitly characterizes the Corinthians' wisdom as a Greek and not a Jewish pursuit (1:22), and many of the letter's problems cannot be explained on the hypothesis of Hellenistic-Jewish origins.²² On the other hand, Paul consistently paints the wise in the colors of the Stoic wise man. The Stoics had defined their wise man with a series of statements known as "paradoxes" (παράδοξα), so called because the statements, if taken literally, seemed astonishing or "contrary to belief." These typically followed the form "Only the wise man is *x* . . . , Only the wise man is *y* . . . , etc." Most often they listed a whole series of predicates in a single description. E.g.:

"The *wise man* alone is *ruler*, alone *master*, alone *king*, alone *leader*, alone *free*."
(*SVF* 3.613)

"He [the *wise man*] will most rightly be called *king* . . . *master* . . . *rich*. Rightly will it be said that *all things belong to him* . . . ; rightly will he be called *beautiful* . . . and alone *free* (*Fin.* 3.75).

Commentators have long noted that Paul's language in 4:8 puts the language of the paradoxes in the Corinthians' mouths,²³ when he asks (not without irony), "Are you already *rich* (ἐπλουτήσατε; cf. 1:5)? Are you already *kings* (ἐβασιλεύσατε)?" To take these as sophistic references as Winter does is certainly not the most natural reading, for

philosophical meaning. For one recent scholar who makes this case, see Inwood and Gerson, *A Stoic Reader*, ix.

²² See Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 14.

²³ As far back as Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 200; Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 157-9.

in so doing he is compelled to list “leaders” rather than “kings” as the parallel.²⁴ On the contrary, it was well-known that the *Stoics* had so described their wise man, as we find attested in the fragments:

“only the *wise man* is . . . *rich* (πλούσιος) and *king* (βασιλεύς)” (cf. *SVF* 3.655; cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.75; *Mur.* 61).

Paul continues to strike this Stoic note throughout these chapters, in many cases calling to the fore ideas that also feature prominently throughout the letter. He continues the language of the paradoxes to characterize them in 4:10:

“you are . . . *prudent* (φρόνιμοι) . . . *strong* (ισχυροί) . . . *held in honor* (ἔνδοξοι)” (cf. *SVF* 3.655; *SVF* 1.216; *SVF* 3.603; 3.567)

In 10:15 he repeats φρόνιμος, stating tongue-in-cheek that he speaks “as to prudent men.” He uses still further predicates from the paradoxes in 1:26 (δυνατοί, *SVF* 3.364; εὐγενεῖς, *SVF* 3.594)²⁵ and 2:6 (τέλειοις, *SVF* 1.566; ἀρχόντων, *SVF* 3.364). If 2:1-5 (“not with wisdom of words”) can indeed be taken antithetically to the Corinthians’ own position, it is surely worth noting that the Stoic wise man was also said to be “eloquent” (ῥητορικός)—that is, because he was convincing in argument (D. L. 7.122/*SVF* 3.612). Nearly the whole letter bespeaks an obsession with “freedom,” a noteworthy value in the paradoxes and in Stoic thought generally (e.g., *SVF* 3.599). Finally, Paul’s *repeated* (if theologically qualified) assertion to the Corinthians in 3:21, 22—“all things belong to you”—provides an important Stoic resonance because it corresponds precisely with the Stoic paradox—“all things belong to the wise man”—at the level of syntax as well as

²⁴ Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 138, 187-95, esp. 190, 193, 199.

²⁵ Though 1:26 bears similarities with Jer 9:24 and 1 Kgs 2:10, it matches neither verbatim.

terminology: Corinthian σοφοί as the implied referent, together with a copulative verb εἶναι (or Latin *esse*) and a Greek genitive of possession (or Latin dative of possession):

πάντα ὑμῶν [σοφῶν] ἐστίν (1 Cor 3:21)
πάντα σοφῶν ἐστίν (SVF 3.590)

But this passage is equally important because it distinctly echoes the “party slogans” of 1:12 (“...whether Paul, or Apollos, or Peter, *all things belong to you*”)—perhaps one of our first direct clues that the divisions may have a Stoic connection.²⁶

ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἐγὼ δὲ Ἀπολλῶ, ἐγὼ δὲ Κηφᾶ (1 Cor 1:12)
εἶτε Παῦλος εἶτε Ἀπολλῶς εἶτε Κηφᾶ . . . πάντα ὑμῶν ἐστίν (1 Cor 3:21-22)

When all of these examples are considered together, we can see that it is not just that these various predicates are *present* in these verses—for some are unremarkable in themselves—but that they are so *numerous*, that they are topically if not even verbally *repeated* throughout the letter, that they are *clustered together* in a fashion similar to the Stoic paradoxes (esp. 1:26; 4:8-10), and that they are in every case clustered around *wisdom* language, often even the “*wise man*” explicitly (e.g., 1:26; 3:19-23). If the Corinthians were *not* thinking of themselves as Stoic wise men, we can only conclude that Paul was nonetheless casting them as such:

1. Wise man (σοφός)
2. Of noble birth (εὐγενής)
3. Powerful (δύνατος)
4. Perfect (τέλειος)
5. Ruler (ἄρχων)
6. All things belong to (πάντα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστίν)
7. Rich (πλουτεῖν)
8. King (βασιλεύειν)
9. Prudent (φρόνιμος)
10. Strong (ἰσχυρός)

²⁶ As Lightfoot (*Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 195) and Weiss (*Der erste Korintherbrief*, 89-91) noted long ago.

11. Held in honor (ἔνδοξος)
12. Free/freedom (cf. ἔλευθερος, ἐξουσία)
13. [Persuasive in speech (πειθοῖς σοφίας λόγοις)]

Outside the first four chapters, we find not so much σοφία/σοφός as its companion, γνῶσις. Conceptual overlap between these terms indicates that they should be similarly construed.

Prior to the first century, γνῶσις apparently carried no religious connotations. It meant simply “knowledge,” “recognition,” or “acquaintance” generally (LSJ). For Plato, γνῶσις, in its various forms, involved seeing things “as they really are” (Plato, *Rep.* 5.476Dff; 5.477Aff; 9.581B). To see things as such was to see the “good” (Plato, *Rep.* 5.476C, D), as the φιλόσοφος or “lover of wisdom” saw things. In broader philosophical usage, both σοφία and γνῶσις can be found as the genus beneath which the other types of knowledge fall. Σοφία, for instance, was defined as the highest form of knowledge and that which encompassed knowledge in all its lower forms (e.g., ἐπιστήμη and νοῦς in Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 6.7.3, 5). Aristotle (*An. post.* 2.99b-100b) reveals that γνῶσις can be used similarly, namely as a general term encompassing all specific forms of knowledge, including perception (αἴσθησις), memory (μνήμη), experience (ἐμπειρία), and—in its highest form—scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).²⁷ For the Stoics, lack of knowledge was simply ἀγνοία (*SVF* 3.548), which we find as the antithesis of γνῶσις in 1 Corinthians (cf. 8:1; 10:1; 12:1). Moreover, we have already seen that the Stoics defined *wisdom* as “knowledge of things divine and human” (*SVF* 2.35). This is “knowledge” as ἐπιστήμη, to be sure, but then the Stoics had defined ἐπιστήμη as the “γνῶσις of first principles”

²⁷ For more on Greek usage, see Rudolf Bultmann, “γινώσκω, γνῶσις, ἐπιγινώσκω, ἐπίγνωσις,” *TDNT* 1:689-92.

(SVF 2.949).²⁸ Seneca retains the Greek definition of wisdom, rendering ἐπιστήμη with the Latin *scientia* (Seneca, *Ep.* 89.5), just as, throughout 1 Corinthians, the Vulgate renders γνῶσις: the Corinthians, for instance, “have *scientiam*” (8:1). All of this demonstrates that, in philosophical usage, γνῶσις in its various forms was understood to be *that in which σοφία consisted*. That the Corinthians then elevated γνῶσις to a religious level is almost certain. But this point will be treated in due course.

Related to both σοφία and γνῶσις in 1 Corinthians is λόγος. Among these, λόγος is surely the subordinate term, for it is invariably connected with one of the others (or a cognate) when it means anything more specialized than simply “speech” (cf. with σοφία in 1:17; 2:1, 4, 13; 12:8; in 1:18, in contrast to μωρία; with γνῶσις/γινώσκω in 1:5; 4:19, 20), whereas, these other terms regularly appear alone and occur dozens of times each in their various cognate forms (on the one hand, σοφία, σόφος; on the other hand, γνῶσις, γινώσκω, οἶδα, ἀγνωσία, ἀγνοέω). This observation, together with the Stoic “wise man” connections we have seen so far, points toward a different meaning for λόγος than simply “speech” or even “rhetoric.” If λόγος was indeed a Corinthian catchword as σοφία and γνῶσις were, in all likelihood the Corinthians understood it not as the faculty of speech per se, but as that human capacity in which were combined both “word” *and* its rational content—“reason.” Like Stoics, they see themselves as sharers in divine reason through the Λόγος, which was said to infuse the cosmos (cf. D. L. 7.134; SVF 1.87). It was by virtue of his share in the Λόγος that the Stoic wise man was considered infallible in argument (λόγος; D. L. 7.47). So understood, Paul’s disavowal of σοφία λόγου or

²⁸ And it is worth pointing out that Plato sometimes uses γνῶσις absolutely, in the sense of ἐπιστήμη; e.g., *Rep.* 6.508E.

“wisdom of word” (cf. 1:17; 2:1, 4, 5, 13) would have been heard first and foremost as a repudiation of a certain kind of *rational argumentation*, in favor of a wisdom that relies on the power of the Holy Spirit (“but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God,” 2:4-5). Of course, this is not to say either that the Corinthians had no conception of the Spirit (they did) or that Paul had no use for reason (he did). It is to say that, contrary to their claims, the Corinthians had misunderstood what it meant to be *truly* “spiritual.” But now we have got ahead of ourselves.

Status distinctions. In addition to thinking themselves “wise men,” the culpable Corinthians also employed a number of spiritual status distinctions to set themselves apart from their putative inferiors: they were “knowledgeable” (cf. 8:1-13) over against the “weak” (ἀσθενής), “perfect” (τέλειος) over against the “immature” (νήπιος), and “spiritual” (πνευματικός) over against the “unspiritual” (ψυχικός).

(1) The issue of the so-called “strong” versus the “weak” in 1 Corinthians 8, 10 has received abundant attention since Theissen’s socio-economic explanation nearly forty years ago.²⁹ According to Theissen, the “strong” in these chapters are the wealthy, and the “weak” are the poor. While I would agree that the terms “wealthy” and “poor” could probably be respectively *predicated* of the so-called “strong” and “weak,” however, the text reveals that the latter labels should *not* be taken as socio-economic *references*. First of all, in the context, it is never said that the first group is “strong,” but rather that they claim to have “knowledge” (8:1; cf. 8:7, 10, 11). Second, the “weak” are identified as

²⁹ Gerd Theissen, “Die Starken und Schwachen in Korinth: Soziologische Analyse eines theologischen Streits,” *EvTh* 35 (1975): 155-72.

such not on the basis of any socio-economic data—there is nothing of the kind here—but rather, clearly on the basis of their approach to the *noetic* issue of *conscience* and its predilections in *judgment* (8:7, 9-13). Struggling to encapsulate both dimensions in a single term, Thiselton finds “weak” an inadequate translation for ἀσθενής and settles instead on “insecure,” investing it with double duty as a socio-economic *and* a prudential descriptor.³⁰ This, however, seems to confuse *predication* and *reference*. No doubt, we could also *predicate* of Paul’s “weak” people “political disenfranchisement,” “low repute,” and “feeble bodies,” but we need not grope about to find a word nebulous enough to embrace the term’s full semantic range. To say that theological judgments are often embedded in socio-economic matrices may be true, but that is neither here nor there. No matter how the trait *originates*, only one thing is here being *referred to* by it, and that is that these people are weak in “conscience” (8:7). Thus, we are better advised to construe “weak” and (if we must continue to use the term) “strong” as noetic categories, predicated of certain people who *happen also* to be “wealthier” and “poorer” respectively. But probably we should adhere closer to the text, and label these, not the “strong” and the “weak,” but rather the “*knowledgeable*” and the “weak” (cf. 8:10-11; 1:25, 27). The first group claims, on the basis of its knowledge (8:1), that it has the freedom to eat idol-meat (εἰδωλόθυστα). Those who defect from this knowledge they denigrate as “weak.”

The place of knowledge and weakness in moral judgment plays a major role in Stoic ethics. The Stoics believed that ignorance (ἀγνοία) and consequent poor judgment resulted from “weakness” (ἀσθένεια) in the soul (*SVF* 3.177; 3.473; 3.548). That is, when

³⁰ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 644.

one exercised “weak assent” (ἀσθενῆς συγκατάθεσις) to a sense impression received (Stobaeus 2.111.18-112.8/SVF 3.548; cf. SVF 3.378; 3.473), it led to false judgments (SVF 1.67; 3.177; Plutarch 1122C; Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.15; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.15.20). What one wanted was knowledge that was “secure and unchangeable,” which was achieved by reason (λόγος; Stobaeus 2.73.16-74.3/SVF 3.112). Disobedience to reason—that is, “weakness”—constituted surrender to the “passions” (SVF 3.378, 389; cf. Posidonius, *fr.* 163, 164). The passion of “distress” (λύπη), for instance, was considered “an irrational contraction, or a fresh opinion that something bad is present” (LS 65B [Long and Sedley 411]) or, alternatively defined, “a shrinking at what is thought to be something to avoid” (LS 65D [Long and Sedley 412]). “Fear” (φόβος) they defined as “an irrational shrinking [aversion] or avoidance of an expected danger” (LS 65B [Long and Sedley, 412]), or, the regarding a thing “that need not be shunned as though it ought to be shunned” (Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.26 [King, LCL]). Since fear was usually experienced by those of weak mind (Seneca, *Ep.* 50.9), the Stoics advised people not to expose themselves to things by which they were easily seduced (Seneca, *Ep.* 116.5).

It is in this light that we can understand the Corinthian contrast.³¹ The wise have distinguished between (1) the person who was “weak,” because of improper use of reason, and (2) the person who was *knowledgeable* and therefore capable of appropriately discerning what to choose and avoid. The “knowledgeable” ostensibly obeyed reason in recognizing that idol-meat presented no grounds for fear or distress. Thus they unwaveringly assented to the impulse to eat. The “weak,” on the other hand, have wrongly shrunk from what seemed to them necessary to avoid. In this regard, the

³¹ Malherbe too understands the problem in this way, in “Determinism and Free Will in Paul: The Argument of 1 Cor 8 and 9,” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, 231-55.

Corinthian slogan in 8:1 sets the knowledgeable apart from the weak—however the slogan is to be construed—that is, whether (1) the culpable Corinthians assert, “We know that *we* all have knowledge, (but the *weak* do not)”³²; or (2) they have said, “We know that *we* have knowledge,” and Paul has qualified the assertion by adding “all” to their “we.”³² At all events, the context does lend further support to a Stoic interpretation, for Paul here tempers their perspective with Stoic considerations: all things may be “permissible,” but all *good* things should also be, as the Stoics say, “beneficial” (συμφέρει, 10:23a; cf. Arius Didymus 5d/SVF 3.86; 11h/SVF 3.208; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.22.27; cf. 1.28.5; 2.26.2; 2.22.19; 4.7.9).³³ Thus for the sake of one’s brethren, one need, like the Stoic, exercise “self-control” (ἐγκρατεύω, 1 Cor 9:25; cf. SVF 3.274-5).

Of course, non-Stoics talked about “weakness” as well. Stanley Stowers notes, after copious examples from the Stoics, two further texts in which weakness is discussed. *On Frank Criticism*, an Epicurean text composed by Philodemus of Gadara in the first century B.C., maintains that constructive criticism is insufficient to heal the “weak” of their erroneous beliefs and practices (59.1-11). In the same vein, Plutarch makes mention of those who abandon philosophy on account of their weakness, exhibiting as they do no firmness in the face of reproof (*Mor.* 46E-F). From these texts, Stowers concludes that “‘The weak’ and ‘weakness’” were “‘established concepts in Greco-Roman society.’”³⁴

³² With the first option, preferred by Conzelmann (*1 Corinthians*, 140), πάντες must be understood as being qualified by verb’s embedded subject, “we.” The second option is preferred by Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 366). Both interpretations, however, understand the situation in precisely the same way: those who possess knowledge believe that others in the church—viz., the “weak”—do not.

³³ It was Stoic philosophy that had lent the term to the art of rhetoric, where it is often found in deliberative speeches.

³⁴ Stowers, “Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason,” in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians*, 282.

Be that as it may, it should be noted that these non-Stoic texts in no measure approximate the notion of “weakness” found in the Stoics, whether in number, importance, or technical meaning. It is the Stoic system in which we find the most abundant evidence, in which the notion carried the most ethical gravitas, and (most importantly) in which we find a formulation corresponding precisely with what we find in 1 Corinthians 8: from the perspective of the “knowledgeable,” the “weak” have assented to false judgment by shunning what they need not shun.³⁵

(2) At several points in the letter a related distinction is made—that between the τέλειος and the νήπιος (cf. 2:6-16; 3:1-3; 13:10-11; cf. 14:20). We have already noted how Paul appropriates these among other Corinthian terms in 2:6-16; 3:1-3. Paul plays on the distinction again in 14:20 (and also 13:10-11), retaining the contrast but reversing the Corinthians’ status claim: “do not be children [νηπιάζετε] in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults [τέλειοι]” (NRSV).³⁶

Analogous to the distinction made between the “wise” and the “inferior” person, νήπιος-τέλειος is a specifically Stoic contrast. Since Lightfoot, commentators have asserted that Pythagoras had made this distinction, though none of them cite any ancient sources. Moffatt merely states that “the metaphor was common among the Stoics ever since the days of Pythagoras”—apparently (if surprisingly) unaware that Pythagoras predated the Stoics by some two hundred years.³⁷ Prior to the Corinthian correspondence,

³⁵ This is one area in which the Stoics seem to have drawn from Aristotle; see, e.g., Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 7.7.8.

³⁶ Cf. 13:10-11 – “¹⁰ but when the perfect [τέλειον] comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child [νήπιος], I thought like a child [νήπιος], I reasoned like a child [νήπιος]; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways [τὰ τοῦ νηπίου]” (NRSV).

³⁷ Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 28, 36; cf. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 173; Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 36.

this metaphorical distinction is limited entirely to philosophical writers.³⁸ We find it among the old Stoics, and otherwise only in Philo of Alexandria, who had no doubt carried it over from the former. In the Stoic fragments, we find the characteristic Stoic opposition between the “excellent” (σπουδαῖος) and “inferior” (φαῦλος) person, and then, in parallel terms, the contrast between the “perfect” (τέλειος) and the “immature” (νήπιος) person (*SVF* 3.519), precisely as we have it in 1 Corinthians.

For the philosophers, the τέλειος or “perfect” person was the one who had attained the τέλος of human existence. The Stoic wise man was said to be “perfect” in judgment because of his unerring use of reason (Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 7.151-7). Thus, it was said: “The wise man (ὁ σοφός) does everything well In their [the Stoics’] opinion the doctrine that the wise man does everything well is a consequence of accomplishing everything in accordance with right reason and in accordance with virtue” (Stobaeus 2.66/*SVF* 3.560 [Long and Sedley 380]). By contrast, the νήπιος was the “immature” person, the one who had perhaps made headway but still fell short of the goal (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.24.53; cf. 1.4.18-32; *Ench.* 51).

The Corinthian wise apparently believed they had reached the superior state. Paul repeats their τέλειος language several times (2:6-16; 3:1-3; 13:10-11; cf. 14:20), in each case either upbraiding them that they are *not* in fact perfect, or else listing “knowledge” as one of those things that comes short of the actual quality of perfection. We find a striking case in point in 8:2, where after quoting the Corinthian claim that they “have knowledge” (8:1), he rejoins that they “do not yet know in the way they ought to.” To

³⁸ Aristotle, *Probl.* 901b, 25; Philo, *Migr.* 1.46; *Agr.* 1.9; 9.6; *Somn.* 2.10; *Post.* 1.152; *Sobr.* 1.9; cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.16.39; Seneca, *Ep.* 4.2. In the NT: Heb 5:11-14. It appears in a literal sense in some medical texts: Hippocrates, *Artic.* 33.9; Plutarch, *fr.* 136.13; Soranus, *Gynaeciorum libri iv* 2.36.1.3; 2.56.2.1.

aspiring philosophers Paul here speaks as one himself—he is Socrates, reminding his students that true wisdom is in knowing that you do not yet know (cf. Plato, *Rep.* 354C; *Charm.* 175A-B; *Lys.* 222D-E; *Prot.* 361A-B; Epictetus, *Ench.* 46.2).

(3) A final distinction drawn by the Corinthians is that of the πνευμάτικος (“spiritual”) versus the ψύχικος (“unspiritual”) person, which first emerges in Paul’s re-appropriation of Corinthian terminology in 2:13-15. Interpretation has been stymied here by the fact that no known literature prior to the Corinthian correspondence bears witness to such a direct contrast.³⁹ Though the exact terminology is absent, Richard Horsley surmises that it could stem from within the Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom tradition epitomized in the Wisdom of Solomon and Philo of Alexandria, where we find frequent distinctions between two types of humanity: the “heavenly” and the “earthly,” the “immortal” and the “mortal,” the “perfect” and the “immature,” etc. Πνευμάτικος and ψύχικος would then draw an analogous distinction, with each term indicating a respective religious status.⁴⁰

While Horsley’s theory offers a plausible contribution to the discussion, we should ask whether he has not looked past what seems to be the more likely explanation: the πνευμάτικος-ψύχικος distinction has not been borrowed wholesale from some contemporary system of thought (hence the reason we do not find the exact contrast in comparative literature), but is a genuinely *new* development. The question, however, is whether this new development issues directly from Philo’s brand of Judaism, or from

³⁹ So Horsley “Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos,” 269-70, 271; “How Can Some of You Say That There Is No Resurrection of the Dead?,” 229.

⁴⁰ Horsley, “Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos,” 280.

elsewhere. I submit that Stoicism provides all the raw elements for the Corinthian distinction, including *even* the terminology for both items in the pair.

Πνευμάτικος itself emerges as a specialized term in Stoic circles. Athenaeus of Attaleia had founded a medical school which went by the name Πνευμάτικοι (LS 55F). Athenaeus had been a disciple of the famous Stoic Posidonius, and his “Pneumatist” school was said to have followed the teachings of the canonical Stoic Chrysippus (Galen, *De differentia pulsuum* 3.641.15-642.7).

The Πνευμάτικοι derived their name from their Stoic cosmology. The Stoics maintained that the cosmos consisted of four elements, two of them active and two passive. The active elements, air and fire, blended with each other through and through to create “(hot) breath” or πνεύμα (LS 47F-I). Πνεύμα acted as the sustaining cause of the universe by pervading the passive elements, earth and water. Πνεύμα, however, passed through objects at varying levels of tension (LS 47M-Q). It passed through lifeless things like logs and stones at the level of “tenor” (ἔξις), providing them merely with material coherence. Through plants it passed as “physical” (φυσικός) breath, nurturing them as living things. Through irrational animals it passed as “psychic” (ψυχικός) breath, giving them the powers of impression and impulse. Only through human beings did it pass at the level of reason or “rational soul” (λόγικη ψυχή or νοῦς). It was this high tension of πνεύμα that gave humans their capacity for *wisdom*.

The Corinthian viewpoint, then, arises not out of thin air, but as a development of the Stoic understanding of “hot air,” so to speak. The wise were πνευμάτικοι, fully “rational” human beings filled with πνεύμα at its highest level. Beneath them were the ψυχικοί, inferior types who thought merely at the level of “psychic” breath, like the

irrational beasts. If 2:15 reflects the Corinthian position—“the spiritual man [πνευμάτικος] judges all things but he himself is judged by no one”—this scheme would fit its meaning well.

The context lends these Stoic associations further credence. As interpreters have widely agreed, vv. 10-16 are rife with Corinthian terminology, though Paul has twisted it to his own ends.⁴¹ Here he makes several statements apparently intended to evoke Stoic cosmology: (1) In a manner of speaking, the Stoics too believed that the “the Spirit searches out all things” (1 Cor 2:10).⁴² In this vein, Seneca remarked that “we should live, . . . and think, . . . as if there were someone who could look into our inmost souls; . . . Nothing is shut off from the sight of God. He is witness of our souls” (*Ep.* 83.1; cf. 41.2). (2) Πνεύμα was said to infuse the entire cosmos, constituting what the Stoics called a “world soul” (LS 44C; 46E-F; 47C.6; 54A, B). Against this view, Paul here reminds the Corinthians that “we have received not the *spirit of the world*, but the *Spirit that is from God*” (2:12). (3) For the Stoic, the νοῦς was the “mind” of the individual infused with divine πνεύμα at the level “reason” (Philo, *Imm.* 35-36/SVF 2.458). Paul, however, rounds off this section with a pithy corrective: “we have the mind (νοῦν) of *Christ*” (2:16).

All said, it would be a mistake to dismiss Stoic resonance in this passage on the basis that Paul might make *conceptually* similar statements elsewhere. We must give weight to the fact that these Stoic resonances occur in strikingly dense configuration,

⁴¹ As he will do again in 15:44-47 (πνευμάτικος-ψυχικός), in his discussion of the resurrection body.

⁴² This is a rather uncommon expression in Paul. Its likeness appears otherwise only in Rom 8:27.

each (for Paul) rare or anomalous in its present form, and in a passage already widely noted for its uncharacteristic vocabulary.⁴³

All of this points to Stoic cosmology as the starting point for the Corinthians' πνευματικός-ψυχικός distinction: it provided them with both the necessary conceptual categories *and* their very terminology. The Corinthian *innovation* was in pitting πνευματικός and ψυχικός against each other as two kinds of *Christians*, possessed of different levels of “spiritual” (or intellectual) achievement. In all likelihood, formulation of this distinction was helped along by the fact that the Corinthians had already adopted two analogous status contrasts, which we have seen *were* made explicitly in Stoicism—that between the “perfect” and “immature” person and that between the “knowledgeable” and the “weak.” This third contrast simply attempts to filter Stoic categories through the sieve of Pauline Christianity.

Freedom and indifferents. The Corinthians perhaps had no watchword more sacred to them than “freedom.” Finding expression in a wide variety of terms,⁴⁴ the topic can be traced through almost every issue in the letter. Appeals to freedom have been made with regard to both sexual misconduct (chs. 5-6, esp. 6:12, 13) and sexual abstinence (ch. 7, esp. 7:4); it lingers behind the issue of eating idol-meat (chs. 8, 10; esp. 8:9) and Paul’s lengthy response on what godly freedom ought to look like (ch. 9); and it arguably underlies the problems of individualism that plague the practice of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-34) and the church’s assemblies for worship (11:2-16; chs. 12, 14).

⁴³ I may also mention Paul’s use of the philosophic principle “like is known by like” in 2:10. On this see B. E. Gärtner, “The Pauline and Johannine Idea of ‘To Know God’ against the Hellenistic Background,” *NTS* 14 (1967/68): 215-21.

⁴⁴ I.e., ἕξειστιν, ἐξουσία, ἐξουσιάζω, ἐλεύθερος, ἐλευθερία.

Always an essential value to the Greek mind,⁴⁵ the notion of freedom had been uniquely developed by the Hellenistic philosophical schools. When Greek democracy crumbled in the wake of Alexander the Great, philosophers turned from the autonomy of the polis to that of the individual. From that point, nowhere was individual freedom heralded more loudly—and in a way, quietly—than it was in Stoicism. Should freedom survive, it would have to assert itself, not out in the public sphere, but from deep within the heart of the individual.

The Stoics maintained that freedom belonged exclusively to the wise man. It was another of their paradoxes that he alone was free, while even kings were “slaves”:

The wise man alone is free (ἐλεύθερον) and bad men are slaves, freedom (ἐλευθερίαν) being power (ἐξουσία) of independent action, whereas slavery is privation of the same . . . Moreover, according to them [the Stoics] not only are the wise (σοφούς) free, they are also kings (βασιλέας); kingship being irresponsible rule [i.e., rule that is answerable to no one], which none but the wise can maintain (D. L. 7.121-2 [Hicks, LCL]; *SVF* 3.544).

In short, the wise man was “his own master” (Seneca, *Vit. brev.* 5.3), and freedom was the “right to live as you wish” (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.1.23; cf. 1.12.9; 17.28; 2.16.37; 4.1.1; Philo, *Prob.* 59-60; Cicero, *Parod.* 5.2). The point for the Stoics, however, was that the wise man was free with regard to *moral judgment*, that his judgment could be compelled to the contrary by no one. Epictetus explains how one could so steel himself even before the might of a tyrant:

Take my paltry body, take my property, take my reputation, take those who are about me. If I persuade any to lay claim to these things, let some man truly accuse me. ‘Yes, but I wish to control your judgments also.’ *And who has given you this authority? How can you have the power to overcome another’s judgment?* (*Diatr.* 1.29.9-10; [Oldfather, LCL]; my italics; cf. 4.1.156-8)

⁴⁵ For an overview from the late classical to the Roman period, see Dmitriev Sviatoslav, *The Greek Slogan of Freedom and Early Roman Politics in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

In part, Stoic freedom was grounded in their understanding of what constituted “good” and “evil.” For the Stoics (as also for the Cynics), these matters were limited to the sphere of “moral choice” (προαίρεσις) and excluded so-called “external” and “physical” goods such as health, wealth, and pleasure, and their opposites disease, poverty, and pain. Epictetus explains: “No man is master of another’s moral purpose; and: In its sphere alone are to be found one’s good and evil. It follows, therefore, that no one has power either to procure me good, or to involve me in evil, but I myself alone have authority over myself in these matters” (*Diatr.* 4.12.8-9 [Oldfather, LCL]).

This class of things that fell “between good and evil” they called “indifferents” (ἀδιάφορα, *SVF* 3.70). Although the Stoics typically distinguished between “preferable” (e.g., health) and “non-preferable” (e.g., sickness) indifferents, this distinction was not always retained. The Stoic Aristo, for example, treated everything that was not virtue or vice with complete indifference, “recognizing no distinction whatsoever in things indifferent” (D. L. 7.160). We have good evidence that Stoic indifferents were commonly understood in this way, even among the educated (Lucian, *Symp.* 47; D. L. 7.36; Cicero, *Fin.* 4.78).

Of course, one *can* find something like “indifferents” apart from the Stoics and Cynics. Aristotle speaks of things that are merely “productive” of good or evil, but not good or evil in themselves (*Top.* 147A34). Plato can speak of health, strength, beauty, and even certain virtues as sometimes profitable (ὠφέλιμα), sometimes harmful (βλάβερα) (Plato, *Meno* 87E-88E). He notes that certain things can be goods if used rightly, evils if used wrongly, but neither good nor evil (οὔτε κακὸν οὔτε ἀγαθόν) if let entirely alone (*Euthyd.* 280E). He also mentions “intermediate things” (τὰ μεταξύ) such

as sitting, walking, running, or inanimate objects like sticks or stones (*Gorg.* 467E-468B). This last example is similar to one way in which the Stoics thought about indifferents: they mention for instance “the number of hairs on one’s head, or stretching or contracting a finger”—things which activate neither impulse nor repulsion of ethical action. But the more common Stoic sense of the term referred to things such as life, health, wealth, and their opposites, which they maintained did not contribute to one’s happiness (D. L. 7.104-5/*SVF* 3.119).

These examples therefore provide poor comparanda for the Stoic doctrine. No doubt, most human beings have a place for things “neither good nor evil”—or indeed, things “amoral.” Nothing we find in Plato or Aristotle approximates the Stoic doctrine of indifferents in technicality or importance, nor do they articulate specialized or standardized vocabulary for this class of things. It was the early Stoic Aristo who had coined the term ἀδιάφορα to denote those things intermediate between good and evil (cf. D. L. 6.105; 7.37), though in this the Cynics followed him as well. As the doctrine was subsequently developed under Chrysippus, it became central to the Stoic ethical system, and a doctrine which the Academics not only did not accept, but to which they were vociferously opposed.⁴⁶ Put simply, when one thought of “indifferents,” one always thought first of the Stoics.

Although we have said that Stoic “freedom” was meant to apply to virtuous living, it is easy to see how the notion might have been abused. People tend to turn

⁴⁶ See Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:401-10.

freedom into license, as the philosophers had long known.⁴⁷ Such seems to have been the case in 1 Corinthians, in which several issues are best explained in terms of a Stoic-like assertion of freedom.

Sexual immorality (5:1-13; 6:12-20). Although Paul leaves us little information regarding the sexually immoral man, who had taken his “father’s wife” as his own (5:1-13), abuse of the Stoic doctrine of freedom would explain the scenario well.⁴⁸ Paul resumes the discussion in 6:12-20, where we find the Corinthian appeal, “all things are permissible for me” (πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν, 6:12a), followed by his Stoic-sounding repartee, “but not all things are *beneficial* [συμφέρει].”

The Corinthian appeal shares obvious connections with what has been sketched above. The assertion “all things are permissible for me” (πάντα μοι ἔξεστιν) finds almost verbatim parallel in the Stoics. In a discourse widely regarded as Stoic in orientation,⁴⁹ Dio Chrysostom defines “freedom” as “the knowledge of what is allowable (ἔξεστιν) and what is forbidden” (*Or.* 14.18). Even closer to our text, however, is the following passage

⁴⁷ The philosophers’ understanding of freedom had a long history of abuse in the broader public; e.g., Aristotle, *Pol.* 1317 11; Plato, *Rep.* 557B (on the “democratic man”); *Areop.* 20; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 14.4-8.

⁴⁸ I should mention that Pascuzzi (*Ethics, Ecclesiology, and Church Discipline*) has made an argument similar to the one made below: 5:1-13 was influenced by the Stoic view that incest was morally indifferent. Hartog’s response (“Not Even Among the Pagans’ [1 Cor. 5:1]: Paul and Seneca on Incest,” in *The New Testament and Early Christian Literature in Greco-Roman Context: Studies in Honor of David E. Aune* [eds. Aune, David E. and John Fotopoulos; NovTSup 122; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006], 51-64) that both Musonius Rufus and Seneca dissented from this view is important, though not at all insurmountable. That there were two known dissenters (as Hartog argues) to this otherwise orthodox Stoic position is hardly enough to undermine the force of Pascuzzi’s argument, which is that orthodox Stoics *did* justify incest on the basis that it was indifferent, and that certain Corinthian Christians seem to have done the same by using a *Stoic* slogan.

⁴⁹ So J. W. Cohoon in *Dio Chrysostom, Orations*, vol. 2 (trans. J. W. Cohoon; LCL 339; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 123.

from Diogenes Laertius, which includes the same terminology, but also in connection with the “wise man”:

all things belong (πάντα εἶναι) to the wise men (τῶν σοφῶν). For the law has given to them all-complete authority (παντελῆ ἐξουσίαν) (D. L. 7.125).

The logic of this saying was that, if the wise man’s use of reason had reached complete “conformity with the law of nature,” or as it were, conformity with the will of God, then all that was God’s was the wise man’s, including complete authority to undertake autonomous action.

Admittedly, we find similar material in the Cynics: “All things belong to the gods. The gods are friends to the wise, and friends share all property in common; therefore all things are the property of the wise” (D. L. 6.72 [Hicks, LCL]; cf. Crates, *Epistle 27*; Diogenes, *Epistle 10*, 2-7). Nonetheless, the Cynic is here making a claim about ownership of the world rather than about autonomous action. We therefore lack any mention of “authority” (i.e., ἐξουσίαν, or related language) as we find in our Stoic passages. Partial parallels can be found elsewhere, though most of these either lack mention of the “wise man” or were themselves obviously influenced by Stoicism.⁵⁰

In 1 Corinthians 6:12a, the man himself had probably made the appeal (“all things are permissible *for me*”). But the community seems to have consented, for Paul indicates that they have *refused to judge* the man and are rather “puffed up.” This is a puzzling

⁵⁰ Winter (*After Paul Left Corinth*, 2001) draws attention to literature involving the coincidence of πάντα and ἔξεστιν, arguing that permissibility in “all things” was “the prerogative of those who possessed power” and was part of the “intellectual intercourse” of “educated people” (pp. 81-82, 85). That is not to say, however, that people did not declare this right on the basis of a specifically Stoic understanding of freedom, as those in many of Winter’s closer examples likely do (e.g., Dio, *Or.* 14). Will Deming (“The Unity of 1 Corinthians 5-6,” *JBL* 119 [1996]: 289-312) focuses on political parallels, though most of these still come from the philosophers. Of course, we cannot ignore that the assertion of 6:12 may partially overlap with several realms of discourse. But in the end it will be important for one’s judgment to be informed by the context of the *whole* letter.

attitude for them to assume given that taking one's father's wife was illegal in both Jewish and Roman law.⁵¹ What could have stimulated such a response—not simply refusing to judge, but actually *boasting* about it? I fail to see how this boasting is accounted for by Chow's explanation, which maintains it was because the man was a patron in the community.⁵² Under Chow's hypothesis, we might expect some conniving from the community—a wink or a turn the head so not to offend one so economically advantageous—and we *might* even expect them to boast *about having a patron*, but why should we expect them to boast (as seems to be the case) either about the man's *behavior itself* or their own *failure to judge*—that is, not *in spite of*, but *because of* the community's moral failure?⁵³ This boasting seems only to be explicable if the community⁵⁴ felt some greater ethical principle had been served by allowing the man to do as he wished. The Stoic slogan therefore deserves a Stoic explanation: the community is proud because they have realized the important Stoic contention that they “do not have power to overcome another's *judgment*” (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.29.9-10). Like the Stoic wise man, who has “all-complete authority” (παντελῆ ἐξουσίαν), some person, or several influential people, within the Corinthian church have boasted that “all things are

⁵¹ So Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 96.

⁵² Chow, *Patronage and Power*, 130-40; cf. Michael Goulder, “Libertines? (1 Cor 5-6),” *NovT* 41 (1999): 347-8; Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 44-57.

⁵³ If they are grieved *in spite of* the man's sin, the parallel in thought is lost:

“You are puffed up (*in spite of* the situation), but you should rather be grieved (*because of* the situation).”

But the alternative translation allows for the parallel to remain in tact:

“You are puffed up (*because of* the situation), but you should rather be grieved (*because of* it).”

⁵⁴ That is not to say that the *whole church* exhibited this attitude, but rather the minority which is thought by most to have been disproportionately influential within the church.

permissible” (πάντα ἔξεστιν) as a way of justifying the the man’s behavior: sleep with his father’s wife if he will, that is a matter for his personal judgment. Paul, however, reminds them what Stoic freedom was always supposed to consider: the act must be “beneficial” (συμφέρει, 6:12b); and here it is clearly not. Ironically, Paul sounds the better Stoic.

It must be confessed that the man’s seemingly indiscriminate sexual behavior does have Cynic affinities,⁵⁵ for a strand of Cynicism tended toward complete indifference in such matters. We should not forget, however, that the earliest Stoics had drawn upon Cynic teaching on this very point, and thereupon incorporated these ideas into their own system. Under Cynic influence Zeno had not only said that it was permissible to lie with a prostitute (*SVF* 3.755-6), but he had also advocated “a community of wives with free choice of partners” (D. L. 7.131 [Hicks, LCL]; cf. 7.33; Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr.* 3.201-9). Likewise, Chrysippus—the Stoic par excellence—is said to have permitted nothing less than “marriage with mothers and daughters and sons [!]” (*SVF* 3.744; cf. 3.743, 745-746, 653). In this regard, it is entirely conceivable that some within the Corinthian church thought of Paul’s Christian community as a realization of Zeno’s community ideal.

Abstinence (7:1-40). It is admittedly difficult to reconcile the apparently “ascetic” sexual views of chapter 7 (“It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” 7:1)⁵⁶ with the apparently dissolute sexual outlook reflected in chapters 5 and 6 (“all things are

⁵⁵ This connection is mentioned by J. Dupont, *Gnosis: la connaissance religieuse dans les epitres de Saint Paul* (Louvain, 1949), 304. Downing (*Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches*) assumes that the Cynic view in particular, and not that of the Stoics or any other group, explains the problem in this passage (pp. 89-93).

⁵⁶ Το “touch a woman” (ἄπτειν) always refers to sexual intercourse in ancient Greek literature; so Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 275.

permissible for me,” 6:12a). But, then, no one has proposed an entirely satisfying answer.⁵⁷ Some scholars have sought to reconcile these passages by suggesting that certain philosophical schools, e.g., Epicureanism⁵⁸ or Cynicism,⁵⁹ left room for both positions. The same could be said for Stoicism, however. On the one hand, marriage and child-bearing were “according to nature” (Stobaeus 2.109.10-110.4/SVF 3.686) and were desirable insofar as they facilitated virtue and service to society (Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 13a; 14; Cicero, *Fin.* 3.62-68).⁶⁰ On the other hand, these things were relegated to the category of things “indifferent,” since they fell outside the realm of moral choice (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.5.6). Some Stoics even advocated a form of abstinence. Musonius Rufus, for instance, believed that sexual intercourse was justified “only when it occurs in marriage and is indulged in for the purpose of begetting children, since that is lawful, but unjust and unlawful when it is mere pleasure-seeking, *even in marriage*” (*Diatr.* 12 [Lutz 87]; my italics; cf. D. L. 7.110-17). Seneca, who followed Panaetius on the matter, saw marriage as a mere distraction:

I think Panaetius [the Stoic] gave a charming answer to the youth who asked whether the wise man would fall in love: ‘As to the wise man, we shall see, What concerns you and me, who are still a great distance from the wise man, is to ensure that we do not fall into a state of affairs which is disturbed, powerless, subservient to another and worthless to oneself’ (*Ep.* 116.5/Panaetius, *fr.* 114 [Long and Sedley 423]).

In the same vein, ἔρωϝ, or erotic love, was classed among the “passions,” those irrational impulses that constituted (or led to) false judgments (Stobaeus 2.90,19-91.9/SVF 3.394;

⁵⁷ For a recent attempt and a history of solutions, see Goulter, “Libertines?,” 334-48.

⁵⁸ Tomlin, “Christians and Epicureans in 1 Corinthians,” 62-64.

⁵⁹ Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches*, 107-13.

⁶⁰ For this reason Will Deming (*Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004]) argues that Paul has taken the Stoic perspective over against the purely ascetic—or “Cynic”—one. As shown here, however, Stoics *could* be equally ascetic.

Arius Didymus 10b/SVF 2.91); the only acceptable form of ἔρωϑ was friendship (LS 67D; Arius Didymus 5b9/SVF 3.717; cf. 1.263). Clearly, any of this is enough to account for ascetic-leaning Stoics.

If the problem reflected in 1 Corinthians 7:1 was in fact grounded in Stoic views, this would make it difficult to see the “wise” in Corinth as a single, clearly defined group, since the slogan of 6:12 reflects a rather different outlook (though this is a difficulty any thesis must reckon with). Perhaps assertion of “freedom” had percolated from the educated down to the lower ranks of the church, where it was seized upon for somewhat different purposes. But then it is equally possible that both positions issued from among the educated: what the “ascetic” and “libertine” positions have in common is that they are both rooted in an appeal to *freedom*, which could be wielded for whatever purposes one wished.

Paul’s rejoinder in 7:4 in fact links the issue with freedom explicitly: “the wife does not have authority (ἐξουσιάζει) over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not have authority (ἐξουσιάζει) over his own body, but the wife does.” His rhetoric here is carefully chosen, for it mimics the Stoic view that spouses should not “deprive each other,” since they hold “everything in common up to their own bodies, or rather even up to their very souls” (Stobaeus, *Anth.* 4.67.24 [Ramelli 77]; cf. Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 13a; D. L. 7.87).⁶¹ Again Paul beats the Corinthians at their own game.⁶²

⁶¹ In the NT, this notion is found otherwise only in Eph 5:28 (though with less striking verbal similarities), a passage long noted for its connections with the *haustafeln* of philosophical literature; for which see James P. Hering, *The Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln in Theological Context* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 9-59.

⁶² Worth mentioning also are the resonances between Paul’s position in 7:7-8, 28-35 and Seneca, *Ep.* 53.9; 72.3-4; 116.5.

Freedom and eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1). Corinthian freedom with respect to sex finds parallel in their outlook on food (chs. 8, 10). Apparently they apply the same slogan to this topic: “all things are permissible” (10:23a). They also claim that “Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do” (8:8), and that “an idol is nothing (οὐδὲν)” (8:4). And of course all of this is grounded in their view that they, unlike the “weak,” “have knowledge” (8:1).

We have already seen how knowledge played a role in the judgment of the Stoic wise man. The two are explicitly connected in the Stoic definition of judgment as “the awareness and recognition (γνώσιν) of right things” (Arius Didymus 11m). No doubt this was also the principle seized upon by the wise Corinthians in their consumption of idol-meat: equipped with knowledge, they have judged it right to eat, again as an explicit exercise of personal “rights”—indeed, Paul calls it “that very ‘freedom’ of yours (ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν αὐτή,” 8:9).

Their judgment, however, is also rooted in a sort of indifference toward food. On this topic the early Stoics had expressed a shockingly liberal perspective. Chrysippus, for instance, had taught, “if the flesh [of one’s dead parents] is edible, people should use it” (Sextus Empiricus, *Pyr.* 3.247-8; cf. *SVF* 3.747-50 [Long and Sedley 431]). He also noted that “eating certain food” had been “discredited without reason” (Plutarch, *Mor.* 1044F/*SVF* 3.753 [Long and Sedley 430]). This freedom stemmed from the fact that dietary matters fell under the category of “things indifferent”: they were outside the realm of moral choice.

The Stoic perspective on the gods—and “idols”—was more complicated. Some said that the Stoic would perform sacrifices and build temples (D. L. 7.119). Many,

however, demurred: “It is a doctrine of Zeno not to build temples of the gods; for a temple not worth much is also not sacred, and nothing made by builders or workmen is worth much” (Plutarch 1034B/*SVF* 1.264 [LS 430]; cf. D. L. 7.33). Seneca expressed an even harsher opinion, as seen in his lost book *Against Superstitions*, fragments of which have been preserved by St. Augustine. In that work, he denounced graven images in a fashion redolent of the Old Testament prophets: “They [people] dedicate images representing sacred, immortal, inviolable beings in base, inert matter; they give them the shapes of men, of wild beasts, or of fishes; . . . And they give the name of divinities to those images, though they would be classed as monsters if they suddenly came to life” (Augustine, *Civ.* 6.10 [Bettenson 248]). Accordingly, he recognized that popular cultic rituals were not acceptable to the gods. If the wise man must conform with them, it was only because they were ordered by law, not because the gods were pleased with them. Indeed, the civil cult was “a matter of custom, having little connection with truth” (Bettenson 250).

Despite their frequent use of the plural “gods,” actually the Stoics were monotheistic at heart. They believed that though he/she/it had many names, there was only one God: “they call him Zeus [*Dia*] as the cause [*di’ hon*] of all things; Zēn in so far as he is responsible for, or pervades, life [*zēn*]; Athena because his commanding-faculty stretches into the aether; Hera because it stretches into the air; . . . [etc.]” (D. L. 7.147/*SVF* 2.1021 [Long and Sedley 323]).⁶³ In this regard, it is interesting to note that the apparent Christian creed of 1 Cor 8:6 owes the greater part of its form to Stoicism, even if the whole has been peculiarly adapted for Christian purposes: “for us there is one

⁶³ See also Cleanthes’ *Hymn to Zeus* (*SVF* 1.537) and D. L. 7.135-6/*SVF* 1.102.

God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (NRSV).⁶⁴ A conception quite similar to this is evident, among other places, in the Diogenes Laertius passage just cited (7.147). Marcus Aurelius, however, makes the resemblance more formally obvious, showing that the “*all things*” as well as the various *prepositional relations* of these things *to God* were Stoic idiosyncracies: “from you [God] are all things, in you are all things, and to you are all things” (*Med.* 4.23). For all that, the wise Corinthians must have seen that Jewish monotheism and Stoic theism were essentially compatible.

Thus, Stoicism again sheds light on the Corinthians’ views: the wise have judged it right to eat *idol-meat* because they were *indifferent* toward both *idols* and *meat*. They claim, with perfectly balanced indifference, “We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do” (8:8)—food was neither advantageous nor disadvantageous. But aside from what food what *was* in itself (i.e., material and indifferent), it also made no difference to them whether it had been *sacrificed* to an idol, for to them “an idol is *nothing* (οὐδὲν)” (8:4). Though a Jew or an Epicurean would have shared this sentiment (e.g., Epistle of Jeremiah; Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.123), we should note the recognizably Stoic way it is expressed here. For the Stoics, all that is outside the realm of moral purpose—everything indifferent—was to be considered “nothing.” Like the slogan of 1 Cor 8:4, the Stoic mantra was typically expressed with the copulative plus οὐδὲν.⁶⁵ Sextus Empiricus

⁶⁴ For a compendium of literature and parallels on this passage, see Stowers, “Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason,” 276; and Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 635.

⁶⁵ As Will Deming points out (“Paul and Indifferent Things,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* [ed. J. Paul Sampley; Continuum, 2003], 384-94), in a couple of places Paul himself draws from Stoicism in using this same formula (cf. 1 Cor 7:19; 13:2; Gal 6:15).

provides one of countless examples: “When parents die, we should use the simplest methods of burial, as though the body, like the nails or teeth or hair, *were nothing* (οὐδὲν)” (*Pyr.* 3.247-8/LS 67G [Long and Sedley 431]; cf. D. L. 10.124-5; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.4.27; 1.9.13; 3.8.2; 3.16.15; *Ench.* 1.5; 32.2).

Paul, however, expostulates with the Corinthians against such an exercise of “freedom.” With it they have served “their own” interest (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ) rather than the “other’s” (τὸ τοῦ ἑτέρου; 10:24, 33; cf. 13:5). Far from being “beneficial” (συμφέρον) to the whole (10:23b), it has precipitated the destruction of the brothers and sisters who are “weak” in conscience, for whom Christ died (8:11).

In contrast to such individualism, Paul lays forth in chapter 9 what he thinks a proper exercise of freedom ought to look like, drawing heavily from Greek philosophical *topoi* in the process.⁶⁶ Admittedly, he speaks of this discourse as a “defense” (ἀπολογία; 9:3); but to see it *primarily* as a “defense of his apostleship,” addressing a major bone of contention in the Corinthian church, seems to miss the point, and as Thiselton has observed, puts overmuch stock in partition theories (which suggest chapter 9 does not belong here) and in *passé* studies on early apostolic conflicts (which suggest Paul was at loggerheads with the Twelve).⁶⁷ That this passage is first and foremost a call to *imitation* is rather explicitly indicated by the coda of 11:1 (“be imitators of me”). As such, Paul presents his own conduct as an *example* of how one’s “rights” (ἐξουσία, 9:4-6, 12) ought to be voluntarily *surrendered* in the interest and service of the Other. Thus, if the Stoics’

⁶⁶ Malherbe, “Determinism and Free Will in Paul,” esp. 243-55.

⁶⁷ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 666-73. As Thiselton convincingly argues, Paul strives to establish his apostolic credentials not because they had been doubted, but because he needs to show, for the sake of his present argument, that he had “rights” to *renounce* in the first place.

paradox was that “only the wise man is free,” for Paul the Christian’s is this: the one who is free in Christ is really a slave, of both Christ and one’s brethren (9:19-23). He illustrates with the image of an athletic ἀγῶν or “contest,” a metaphor commonplace among the philosophers.⁶⁸ Like an athlete in complete “self-control” (ἐγκρατεύειν), he abuses and “enslaves” (δουλαγωγῶ) his body for the sake of a greater prize (9:24-27). Only by limiting his personal rights, he insists, will he become a sharer in the Gospel’s blessings.

Head-covering and gender department (11:2-16; 14:34-36). With the question of head-covering in 11:2-16 again the issue of freedom crops up.⁶⁹ Here social mores have been violated with regard to head-covering in public worship. Paul addresses both men and women, possibly because both had flouted custom. The general motivation seems to be the same as in the preceding chapters: the culprits vaunt the freedom to do as they alone see right. Paul leaves us at least one clue that this is in fact true, when he again calls to the fore the notion of ἐξουσία: whatever is meant when he says that women should have a “sign of authority (ἐξουσία) on their heads” (11:10), he is surely playing on the earlier individualism of 6:12 (ἔξεστιν), chapter 7, (ἐξουσίαζω), and chapters 8 and 10 (ἐξουσία). In this case, freedom relates to the question of conventional gender department, as it seems to also in 14:34-36 (where the issue is whether women should speak out in church). We shall have to revisit both of these issues further below.

⁶⁸ For parallels, see Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 434n2; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 712.

⁶⁹ Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 497-8, 510-12, 518; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 829, 839.

Practices surrounding the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). A strong individualism also besets the church in its gatherings for the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). It has been reported that there are "divisions" (σχίσματα; 11:18) in these meetings, and Paul laments that "when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (11:21). Since Weiss' commentary over a century ago, it has been noted that socio-economic causes must have been involved.⁷⁰ Theissen developed the idea by arguing that portion sizes may have been decided on the basis of wealth and social clout, as we find, among other places, in Pliny's *Epistles* (2.6) and Martial's *Epigrams* (3.60).⁷¹ Murphy-O'Connor's contribution in bringing the size of the "typical" villa into the discussion may still be regarded as helpful (though our deepened understanding of early Christian meeting places in recent years makes the thesis more hypothetical than was once thought): only a select few would have been privileged to eat in the triclinium (dining room), given its prohibitively small size.⁷² The rest of the church—those of less consequence in the community—would be forced to dine in the atrium.

Stoic influences in the church, however, *could* shed further light on the underlying causes of these divisions. Despite Stoic concern for a cosmos in which all pieces functioned in perfect concord with one another, Stoicism exhibited a heavy bent toward individualism, most of all in the Roman era. At the heart of it, this was because their wise man was said to be "self-sufficient" (Seneca, *Ep.* 9.13). Epictetus remarks that wise men

⁷⁰ Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 103.

⁷¹ Theissen, "Social Integration and Sacramental Activity, 1 Cor 11:17-34," esp. 153-63.

⁷² Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* (Good News Studies 6; Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1983), 153-60; (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2002), 178-85.

“rely on nothing but themselves” (*Diatr.* 1.9.8-9); rather the wise man “looks for all his help or harm from himself” (*Ench.* 48.1). In the same vein, Musonius Rufus noted that “what one can get from himself it is superfluous and foolish as well to get from someone else” (Musonius Rufus, *fr.* 45 [Lutz 141]; cf. *Diatr.* 11). Seneca stated that the wise man ought to imitate Jupiter, who at the final dissolution of the cosmos will “retire into himself and give himself over to his own thoughts” (Seneca, *Ep.* 9.16). It was told that the Stoic Stilbo had stated, with almost Jupiter-like self-sufficiency, that he had “lost nothing” when his city had burnt to the ground—and his wife and children with it (Seneca, *Ep.* 9.18). When Stoicism did speak of community, it was conceived in highly exclusive terms. They had always said to avoid the influence of the “rabble” (Seneca, *Ep.* 14.9; 18.4; 25.6-7; 29.11; 31.1; 36.2; *Vit. beat.* 1.5; *Tranq.* 7.4). Friendship, rather, existed only between the wise (Arius Didymus 11m/*SVF* 3.630; cf. 11i/*SVF* 3.626; D. L. 7.124). Zeno reportedly stated that “all who are not virtuous are foes, enemies, slaves and estranged from one another (D. L. 7.32-33/LS 67B).⁷³ Of course, traditionally Stoicism had tried to reconcile the exclusivity-cosmopolitanism dialectic with recourse to their (complicated) theory of οἰκειώσις, which maintained that the interests of the individual and the interests of the whole ought to converge,⁷⁴ but this was a theory difficult to sustain beneath the pressures of imperial life. Emphasizing their ethical autonomy against the tyrant’s powers of coercion, Roman Stoics gravitated more heavily to the side of the individual. Perhaps for the self-styled “wise men” in Corinth, this translated into a kind of

⁷³ For development in the Stoic idea of the city, see Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷⁴ For the full theory, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *The Stoic Theory of Oikeiosis: Moral Development and Social Interaction in Early Stoic Philosophy* (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization 2; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1990).

exclusivity. They were the superior inner circle. The rest were second-class Christians—“weak,” “immature,” and “unspiritual.”

Spiritual gifts and the order of worship (chs. 12-14). Chapters 12-14 are integrally connected with the problems that precede. Thiselton observes that the threefold repetition of “knowledge” in 12:1-3 makes it clear that Paul is taking on those πνευματικοί who claim they have γνῶσις.⁷⁵ Now, just as freedom played a role in the issue of “knowledge” in chapters 8, 10, so does it play a role in the issue of spiritual gifts in chapters 12-14. Worship services are roiled by a din of competing tongues-speakers and fusillades of prophecies (14:27-33). This cacophony of “disorder” (14:33) arises from the church’s rampant individualism. Each person is wont to say “I have no need of you” (12:21), not unlike the wise man who “relies on no one but himself.” But Paul again appeals to them in Stoic terms: they are to be driven not by their sense of personal freedom, but by a sense of “benefit” (συμφέρον; 12:7). This benefit must be measured in terms of its consequences on the whole. He illustrates with a metaphor from the human body, a metaphor which, despite adaptations to suit his Christology, is clearly borrowed from the Stoics.⁷⁶ Compare the following passages from Paul and Hierocles, noting especially the use of similes and conditionals:

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we

⁷⁵ Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 916-17.

⁷⁶ Vague similarities in rabbinic literature notwithstanding, Stoic examples are by far the closest in form, as is reflected in the example above. For conceptual parallels in rabbinic literature, see W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1948), 53-57. For other examples in the Pauline corpus: Rom 15:1-6; 1 Cor 1:10-17; Eph 4:1-6; Phil 2:1-4; Phil 4:2-3; though it is fully developed only in Romans and Corinthians. For further comparison between Paul and Stoicism on this score, see Michelle Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ* (SNTSMS 137; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.¹⁵ If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.¹⁶ And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? . . .²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ . . .²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. (1 Cor 12:12-17, 21, 26, NRSV; cf. 10:17)

[O]ne’s brothers are parts of oneself, just as my eyes are parts of me and so too my legs and hands and the rest. . . . Just as eyes and hands, accordingly, if each should obtain its own soul and mind, would respect the other parts in every possible way for the sake of their declared communality, since they are not even able to perform their own function well without the presence of the other parts, so too we, who are human beings and confess to having a soul, should not omit any effort in behaving toward our brothers as one ought . . . (Hierocles/Stobaeus, *Anth.* 4.84.20 [Ramelli 89])

If the Corinthians were *overemphasizing* Stoic individualism, Paul is clever to balance their perspective with the Stoic body metaphor here: with it he affirms that the ambit of one’s concern must stretch beyond the sphere of the self or one’s inner circle to compass the wider community.

“*Dualism*”. The Corinthian attitude of freedom and indifference toward food and sex cannot be divorced from their anthropology and cosmology. Here Stoicism again rears its head.

Although the early Stoics had conceived of the body in monistic terms, we see a gradual shift toward dualism by the time of the Roman Stoics.⁷⁷ The old Stoics had maintained that even the soul is a “body,” for that which is incorporeal “does not even

⁷⁷ For more on dualism and its connection with the views of the wise Corinthians see, e.g., Jeffrey R. Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15: A Study of Metaphysics, Rhetoric and Resurrection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); and Garcilazo, *The Corinthian Dissenters and the Stoics*, 51-63.

make contact with a body”—whereas the soul does (*SVF* 1.518 [Long and Sedley 272]). Posidonius and the Middle Stoics, however, moved Stoic anthropology in a decidedly Platonist direction (to which it was already close),⁷⁸ so that by the time of Seneca and Epictetus it looked more like dualism than like the monism of the early Stoics.⁷⁹

Of course, the old Stoics had left room for the new position: death, Chrysippus had said, is merely “the separation of the soul from the body” (*SVF* 2.790). By the time of Seneca the distance between soul and body simply widened, largely so as to sustain the possibility of ethical autonomy, undetermined by bodily or other external matters.⁸⁰ In that regard, Seneca tells us that the body is a “heavy and earthly prison” (*gravi terrenoque; Ep.* 102.22), or an “inn” (*hospitium; Ep.* 120.14) in which one dwells only for a short time. It is a “chain” that manacles one’s freedom (*Ep.* 65.21). Thus the body was of only the meanest significance. Epictetus regularly refers to it with the pejorative *σωμάτιον*, or “paltry body” (cf. *corpusculum*, Seneca, *Ep.* 41.4), frequently including it in his mantra “My paltry body is nothing to me” (*Diatr.* 3.22.21; cf. 3.22.24, 40-44 [Oldfather, LCL]. Marcus Aurelius reports that Epictetus used to say, “You are a little soul, carrying around a corpse (*νεκρόν*)” (Epictetus, *fr.* 26). For Epictetus, the body was the mere “husk” (*κέλυφος*; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.23.1), the soul was the self (*Diatr.* 1.29.9-10, 18; 2.13.13, 16). He illustrates by way of Socrates, who had said, “Anytus and Meletus can kill me, but they cannot hurt me” (*Diatr.* 1.29.18). He urges others to adopt the same thinking:

⁷⁸ See A. A. Long, “Soul and Body in Stoicism,” *Phronesis* 27 (1982): 34-36.

⁷⁹ See Norman T. Pratt, *Seneca’s Dramas* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 58-61.

⁸⁰ Long spells this out in “Soul and Body in Stoicism.”

When the tyrant threatens and summons me, I answer ‘Whom are you threatening?’ If he says, ‘I will put you in chains,’ I reply, ‘He is threatening my hands and my feet.’ If he says, ‘I will behead you,’ I answer, ‘He is threatening my neck.’ If he says, ‘I will throw you into prison,’ I say, ‘He is threatening my whole paltry body’; . . . Does he, then, threaten *you* (σοὶ) at all?—If I feel that all this is nothing to *me* (ἐμοὶ)—not at all. (*Diatr.* 1.29.5-7 [Oldfather, LCL]; my italics; cf. 4.7.31-32)

The soul, on the other hand, was “sacred and eternal” (Seneca, *Helv.* 11.7). It was the divine part of the person, the “holy spirit” (*sacer spiritus*) of God dwelling within (Seneca, *Ep.* 41.1; cf. *Ep.* 31.11; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.14.6-17; 2.8.9-29). Thus Seneca said that mortal existence was a “prelude to the longer and better life,” and death the termination of the body but not of the soul (*Ep.* 102.23).⁸¹ He also speaks of the soul’s “release” (*emissus*) from the body at death, upon which it looks down on human affairs while enjoying a nearer vision of things divine (*Pol.* 9.2, 3). Accordingly in his *Consolation of Marcia*, he says of the woman’s deceased son:

Only the image of your son—and a very imperfect likeness it was—has perished; he himself is eternal and has reached now a far better state, stripped of all outward encumbrances and left simply himself. This vesture of the body which we see, bones and sinews and the skin that covers us, this face and the hands that serve us and the rest of our human wrapping—these are but chains and darkness to our souls. By these things the soul is crushed and strangled and stained and, imprisoned in error, is kept far from its true and natural sphere. It constantly struggles against this weight of the flesh in the effort to avoid being dragged back and sunk; it ever strives to rise to that place from which it once descended. There eternal peace awaits it when it has passed from earth’s dull motley to the vision of all that is pure and bright (*Cons. Marc.* 25.4 [Basore, LCL]; cf. *Ep.* 79.12; 86.1).

Just as the soul would survive death, so also would it survive the great conflagration at the end of the age (*SVF* 2.809)—though all matter would be destroyed. In the

⁸¹ For Seneca’s views on life after death, see J. N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 224-9.

conflagration, the elements would be resolved into their primordial state: “all things” (πάντα) would be in Zeus, and Zeus in all (*SVF* 2.596-632; cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 9.16).⁸²

Because the body stood outside the sphere of moral choice, the Stoics reckoned its affairs among the indifferents. Musonius Rufus expresses indifference towards sundry matters in this regard—food (*Diatr.* 18-19), clothing (*Diatr.* 20), and shelter (*Diatr.* 19). But death also was included. The Stoics said that it was “no evil [οὐ κακόν]”—and scorned it no less than would an Epicurean. Thus, Epictetus intones: “Are not these things indifferent—indeed, nothing—to us [οὐδὲν πρὸς ἡμᾶς]? And is not death [θάνατος] no evil [οὐ κακόν]?” (*Diatr.* 1.9.13 [Oldfather, LCL]; cf. 3.8.1-2).⁸³ Seneca’s view is comparable: “Death is helpful to many . . . sets many free from tortures, want, ailments, sufferings, and weariness. We are in the power of nothing when once we have death in our power!” (*Ep.* 91.21).

Not unlike the Roman Stoics, the Corinthian wise seem to have relegated dietary and bodily matters to a lower plane of existence. Their denigration of the physical shows through clearly in their justification of lax sexual conduct (5:1-13; 6:12-20); their support of liberal dietary practices (6:13; chs. 8, 10; 11:17-34); possibly in their views on gender and marriage (ch. 7; 11:2-16; 14:34-36); and most definitely in their denial of a bodily resurrection (15:12-58).

Sexual immorality (5:1-13; 6:12-20). As to 5:1-13/6:12-20, it is clear that certain ones had placed too low a premium on the body. “All things are permissible” (including

⁸² Though two or three Stoics along the way are said to have doubted the conflagration: so Philo, *Indestr.* 76-77.

⁸³ “It is nothing to us [οὐδὲν ἔστιν πρὸς ἡμᾶς]” is one of his usual ways of referring to the indifferents, including death (1.4.27; cf. 3.8.2; *Ench.* 1.5).

sex with one's father's wife) because bodily matters are irrelevant. That this is their view is evident from their supporting slogans—"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other" (6:13a), and "every wrong which one commits is outside the body" (6:18)—both declaring the body irrelevant in moral matters. We have already seen the verbal ties connecting 6:12a with Stoicism. But a compelling case can also be made for the other two slogans.

It is a rarely noted point that the terminology used for "sin/wrong" in 6:18 is virtually anomalous in Paul, though standard in the Stoics.⁸⁴ Besides its occurrence here, ἀμάρτημα appears in only *one* other instance in Paul (Rom 3:28), and then in only one further passage in the entire NT (Mark 3:28, 29). By contrast, Paul's usual term for "sin," ἁμαρτία, appears nearly 50 times in his major epistles alone. These numbers mirror the Stoic sources. ἁμαρτία is virtually non-existent in the Stoics. Rather, it is ἀμάρτημα that acts as the technical term for a "wrong act" (cf. verb: ἀμαρτανεῖν), in contrast to κατορθώμα or a "right act" (Arius Didymus 11e/SVF 3.501). A ἀμάρτημα was said to be an act performed "contrary to reason" (Arius Didymus 11a/SVF 3.500). Epictetus describes it as "a kind of ignorance" (ταύτην ἄγνοιαν; *Diatr.* 2.24.20). Thus, it was a blunder committed not in the body, but in the mind.

As in 6:12b, 7:4, and 12:12-30, Paul once again sallies back with countering Stoic responses, first in 6:18b and then again in 6:20. His statement in 6:18b—"he who commits fornication sins against his own body" (6:18b)—is found almost verbatim in

⁸⁴ In my encounters, it has been noted only by Stowers, "Paul on the Use and Abuse of Reason," 60.

SVF 3.289/Plutarch, *Mor.* 1041D: “everyone who sins, sins against himself.”⁸⁵ In 6:20 (cf. 7:23) as well he subverts the Corinthian position with a turn of Stoic doctrine, when he says that the “body is not your own” (οὐκ ἑαυτῶν). This exact expression is found frequently in the Stoics, with slightly different meaning (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.20.1; 3.22.21, 34, 40-44; 4.1.66, 78, 87, 104, 158; 4.7.17, 31-32; *Ench.* 1.1; Seneca, *Ep.* 120.18-19). The Stoics had several closely related reasons for the assertion: because one’s body was merely a mélange of the cosmos’ supply of material elements (LS 62K) and was thus only a part of a larger whole (D. L. 7.87); because the self was located not in the body but in the soul (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.19.9; 1.29.5-7, 22-29); because the body was a sort of temple of God (Seneca, *Ep.* 41.1; *Ep.* 31.11; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.14.6-17; 2.8.9-29); and especially because the body resided outside the individual’s own control, liable as it was to disease, lameness, and most of all the whims of “tyrants” (cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.7.17; *Ench.* 1.9). What *did* belong to the individual was the power of moral judgment. The wise Corinthians, however, have taken this principle to imply that “every wrong committed is outside the body,” meaning that every wrong occurs strictly in the intellectual sphere and bodily matters in effect can be bracketed out of the issue. Paul of course would agree that each individual is part of a larger body, that the soul was almost a “divine” component of the person, and that external goods lie largely outside one’s control. But what he cannot agree with is the conclusion that the body is therefore morally irrelevant. Rather, it is “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (6:19; cf. 3:16; 9:26), bought at a price and defiled at one’s own peril.

⁸⁵ As Robert M. Grant (“Hellenistic Elements in 1 Corinthians,” in *Early Christian Origins* [Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961], 64) observes.

Eating meat sacrificed to idols (8:1-13; 10:1-11:1). A dualistic devaluation of the physical would also help explain indiscriminate consumption of idol-meat (chs. 8, 10). The culprits can say, “We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do” (8:8), because food belongs to a lower plane of existence.

The slogan of 6:13a exudes the same attitude: “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other.” We find a comparable Greek equivalent in Musonius Rufus, where he argues that food is meant for nourishment and nothing more: “the throat was designed to be a passage for food, . . . and the stomach was made for the same purpose as the root was created in plants” (*Diatr.* 18b, 8-10 [Lutz 119]). But we find an even closer parallel in a fragment which Seneca preserves from Posidonius: he notes that while man’s first business is virtue, to this is joined the “useless and fleeting flesh, *fitted only for the reception of food [receptandis tantum cibis habilis]*” (Posidonius, *fr.* 184/Seneca, *Ep.* 92.10). This text lacks the proverbial rhythm of the Corinthian slogan (and Seneca of course paraphrases it in Latin), but it agrees perfectly in sense:

food is for the stomach and the stomach for food
τὰ βρώματα τῇ κοιλίᾳ καὶ ἡ κοιλία τοῖς βρώμασιν (1 Cor 6:13a)

flesh, fitted only for the reception of food
caro, receptandis tantum cibis habilis (Posidonius, *fr.* 184/Seneca, *Ep.* 92.10)

With this, 11:17-34 again comes to mind. Could the wise Corinthians be regarding food—the elements of the Supper—with the “indifference” they think is due merely physical things? To Paul’s dismay, they show no greater discrimination here than they showed toward idol-meat in chapters 8, 10:

²⁹ For all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. ³⁰ For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some

have died.³¹ But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged.³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (11:29-32, NRSV)

Marriage and gender (7:1-40; 11:2-16; 14:34-36). The Corinthians' dualistic mentality may also have led them along to their bizarre views on marriage and gender, as seen in ch. 7; 11:2-16; and 14:34-36. Often these texts have been explained in terms of an exaggerated or "over-realized" eschatology, espoused perhaps by a feminist party in the church.⁸⁶ Whether or not this is the most accurate characterization of the scenario, the suggestion does seem to hit at the truth of the matter: certain Corinthians have focused so narrowly on the "spiritual" dimension that they have forgotten the constraints of ordinary terrestrial existence, and some forego sexual unions (ch. 7), perhaps others conventional gender distinctions (11:2-16; 14:34-36).

These latter two passages recall discussions related to gender in philosophical contexts. Stoicism exhibited a strong egalitarian tendency while at the same time maintaining gender distinctions thought to have been given by "nature" (φύσις), including that of *hair length*. On the one hand, Stoics were therefore among the few who encouraged women as well as men to study philosophy—⁸⁷ since, after all, women too had been endowed with reason (Musonius Rufus, *Diatr.* 3; 4).⁸⁸ The Stoic Cleanthes had written a treatise entitled *On the Thesis That Virtue is the Same in Man and in Woman* (D. L. 7.175). And Zeno, as part of his utopian vision, had even enjoined that "men and

⁸⁶ Cf. Moffatt, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 78; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 270, 290; and the history of scholarship in Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 521-5.

⁸⁷ Cf. Harich-Schwarzbauer, "Women Philosophers," *Brill's New Pauly: Antiquity* (electronic version).

⁸⁸ Though the Cynics did as well: Crates, *Epistle* 28; Crates, *Epistle* 29, 14-17; Crates, *Epistle* 32, 9-11; Diogenes, *Epistle* 3; Diogenes, *Epistle* 43.

women wear the same dress and keep no part of the body entirely covered” (D. L. 7.33). Yet, Stoics also emphasized that “nature” had given clues to the genders as to their differences. Though not unknown among other philosophers (e.g., Heraclitus, *fr.* 1.8, 9; Plato, *Leg.* 10.888E-889C; *Crit.* 389B, C; *Phaedr.* 87E, 270C; cf. D. L. 6.71), the notion of “nature” played a distinctive role in Stoicism in that it was thought to provide the paradigm on which all ethical decisions should be based (LS 58). Indeed, only for Stoics and Cynics was the *telos* of human existence specifically to live “according to nature (κατὰ φύσιν)” (LS 63). As the Stoics maintained, “There is no other or more appropriate way of approaching the theory of good and bad things or the virtues or happiness than from universal nature (φύσεως) and from the administration of the world” (Plutarch, *Mor.* 1035C-D/*SVF* 3.68 [Long and Sedley 368-9]). In this regard, Epictetus remarks:

Can anything be more useless than the hairs on a chin? Well, what then? *Has not nature* (φύσις) used even these in the most suitable way possible? Has she not by these means distinguished between the male and the female? . . . [I]n the case of women, just as nature has mingled in their voice a certain softer note, so likewise she [nature] has taken the hair from their chins” (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.16.9-14; my italics).

Similarly, Musonius Rufus advised that men “cut the hair from the head for the same reason that we prune a vine,” but said to leave the eyebrows, eyelashes, and beard as nature (φύσις) had provided them (*Diatr.* 21.1-7 [Lutz 129]).

It fits the situation to assume that some Stoic-influenced Corinthians had been overdrawn towards a kind of absolute egalitarianism, as seemingly advocated by Zeno, while forgetting their teachers’ qualification regarding what is “according to nature” (κατὰ φύσιν). But Paul has not forgotten it—in 11:14 he quips with the rhetorical question, “Does not even *nature* (φύσις) teach you that any man who wears his hair long dishonors himself?” (cf. Epictetus: “Has not nature [φύσις] used even these [the hairs on

the chin] in the most suitable way possible?) Here the rhetorical-question formulation betrays that φύσις is summoned to meet an audience that Paul obviously expected to have thought in those terms.⁸⁹

Denial of a general resurrection (15:12-58). Since Karl Barth's *Resurrection of the Dead* nearly a century ago interpreters almost without exception have agreed that the denial of the resurrection reflected in 1 Corinthians 15 is the climax of and key to the epistle.⁹⁰ According to Meeks, it is the *communis opinio* that that this chapter bears an integral relation with all the other issues in the letter.⁹¹ It is explicitly anticipated in 6:14, and it is the logical consequence of the bodily devaluation evident from chapters 5 through 14.

It can be no accident that Paul treats last the issue in which the most is at stake. Indeed, for Paul it is one thing to adopt a dualism that sits light to the sacrificial status of meat, one thing to degrade the body with illicit sexual unions, but it is entirely another to deny what he avers is the very core and essence of the Christian hope, that awaiting those who are in Christ is a post-mortem existence that is incorruptible and eternal—and also bodily (15:12-58).

As for what “some” in Corinth meant when they said “there is no resurrection of the dead” (15:12), interpreters have not reached a unanimous consensus. But the possibilities are four: (1) they believe the resurrection has already happened; (2) they

⁸⁹ Which the syntax does not so much demand in Gal 4:7-9; 2:14-16; Rom 2:14-15; 2:27; 11:21, 24.

⁹⁰ See, e.g., Karl Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1933), 6; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 93; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 713, 716; for exceptions, see Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1171.

⁹¹ Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 121.

have denied post-mortem existence of any kind; (3) they have denied a *bodily* resurrection; or (4) they hold to some combination of these.⁹²

The first option is a fading relic of the old Gnostic thesis. After wide acceptance in German scholarship of the mid twentieth century, it had been popularized for the English-speaking world with the translation of Ernst Käsemann's programmatic essay "Zum Thema der urchristlichen Apokalyptik."⁹³ According to Käsemann, "eschatological enthusiasm" (*eschatologischer Enthusiasmus*) is "the root of all that has gone wrong in Corinth." "[T]he dominant group in Corinth believed themselves to have reached the goal of salvation already—in the shape of baptism," and "the earthly body has been degraded to an insubstantial veil."⁹⁴ Accordingly in 4:8 Paul indicates that the Corinthians are "already rich...already kings," as if they *now* reign in the eschatological kingdom that in

⁹² For a summary of these four views and their adherents, see: B. Spörlein, *Die Leugnung der Auferstehung: Eine historisch-kritische Untersuchung zu 1 Kor 15* (Regensburg: Putzner, 1971), 1-19; M. C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5* (JSNTSup 22; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1988), 96-97; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 1:38-63; 2:385-6; Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1172-73, 1216.

⁹³ *ZTK* 59 (1962): 257-84, esp. 272-3; ET, "On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," in *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 108-37. Before Käsemann, the thesis could be found in Rudolph Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1953), 168; H. von Soden, "Sakrament und Ethik bei Paulus: Zur Frage der literarischen und theologischen Einheitlichkeit von 1 Kor 8-10," in *Urchristentum und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze und Vorträge* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1951), 1:259-60—after Käsemann, in Barrett, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 109, 347-8; Lietzmann, *An die Korinther 1 und 2*, 19; Luise Schotroff, *Der Glaubende und die feindliche Welt* (WMANT 37; Neukirchener, 1970), 185-6; Helmut Koester, "Gnomai Diaphoi: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," in *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (ed. Helmut Koester; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 148-52; Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, 49-50; James M. Robinson, "Kerygma and History in the New Testament," in *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, 30-40; Horst Robert Balz, *Christus in Korinth: Eine Einführung in den ersten Korintherbrief* (J. G. Oncken, 1970), 48; Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 88; E. Fasher, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther* (HTKNT 7/1; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1975), 148; Anthony Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *NTS* 24 (1978): 510-26; reaffirmed but qualified in Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, esp. 40; Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 178-9; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians* 12; Senft, *La Premiere Epitre aux Corinthiens*, 67; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 57; Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 139-40; C. M. Tuckett, "The Corinthians Who Say 'There Is No Resurrection of the Dead' (1 Cor 15,12)," in *The Corinthian Correspondence* (ed. R. Bieringer; BETL 125; Leuven, 1996), 247-75; J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," *NIB* 10 (2002): 980-1; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 21.

⁹⁴ *New Testament Questions of Today*, 125-6.

reality still waits in the offing. Because in 2 Tim 2:8 what seems to be a similar expression of “over-realized eschatology” generates a belief that “the resurrection has already happened,” proponents of this view assume that the same situation has obtained in Corinth: when some say “there is no resurrection of the dead,” they mean *not* that there will be no resurrection *after death*, but that it has *happened already* in the present life of the believer.

Studies over the last quarter century, however, have increasingly concluded that this interpretation is flawed—and this conclusion we can now call a consensus.⁹⁵ It has been shown, first, that 4:8 emphasizes not so much eschatology as ethics.⁹⁶ Second, eschatological language throughout the letter is Paul’s own formulation, not that of the Corinthians—for this is how Paul always preaches.⁹⁷ Third, 1 Cor 15:12 itself includes *no temporal reference*. The upshot is that 2 Timothy cannot be retrojected onto the Corinthian controversy. We have no clear evidence that the Corinthians believed the resurrection had “already happened.”

Neither should it be maintained, however, that the Corinthians rejected post-mortem existence altogether, as if they had accepted either a “Cynic” (Downing) or an

⁹⁵ Beginning with Darrell J. Doughty, “The Presence and Future of Salvation in Corinth,” *ZNW* 66 (1975): 61-90; and growing in support from there: Horsley, “How Can Some of you Say That There Is No Resurrection of the Dead? Spiritual Elitism in Corinth,” 204, 222; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 339; Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 201, 217; D. W. Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict: Paul’s Use of Apocalyptic Judgment Language in 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5* (NovTSup 66; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 16-25, 216-19; Paige, “Stoicism, *Eleutheria* and Community at Corinth,” in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church* (Sheffield, Eng: JSOT), 184, 187; Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts,” *JSNT* 47 (1992): 64; Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 169, 222; Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 106; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 8, 70, 71; Tomlin, “Christians and Epicureans in 1 Corinthians,” 57; Hays, “Conversion of the Imagination,” 396, 407, 409; Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15*, 39-41; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 14, 138, 699.

⁹⁶ See especially Doughty, “The Presence and Future of Salvation in Corinth”; and Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict*, 16-25, 216-19.

⁹⁷ See Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth.”

Epicurean (Tomlin) view that the present life was the only one.⁹⁸ In the first place, it should be said that Cynicism had no such thing as an “orthodox” position on such questions; physics, which included matters of “psychology,” was hardly a concern for the Cynics (D. L. 6.103). Moreover, Cynicism was a “way of life,” not so much a distinct school with a canonical set of doctrines safeguarded by successive scholars. Thus, just as philosophers of all stripes could have Cynic leanings, so could self-identified Cynics assume the views of any of the major schools. This is why the Cynic Epistles can depict Heraclitus, Socrates, and Plato all as “Cynic,” and the epistles themselves can affirm the view that death is the “separation of the soul from the body” and “the soul is immortal” (Diogenes, *Epistle* 39, 1-6; *Epistle* 14, 25-27; cf. Socratics, *Epistle* 25).

The Epicurean view has more appeal. Still, some insurmountable obstacles stand against it. First, the Corinthian dissenters do seem to have some notion of post-mortem existence, whereas the Epicureans did not. Though a notoriously difficult text, Paul’s reference to “those baptized on behalf of/for the sake of/over the dead [οἱ βαπτιζόμενοι ὑπὲρ τῶν νεκρῶν]” in 15:29 can be narrowed down to only a handful of plausible interpretations, all of them involving some post-mortem belief on the part of the Corinthians.⁹⁹ Second, the *reductio ad absurdum* mantra of the Corinthian’s position in 15:32—“Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow may die”—need hardly be taken as an indication that they themselves espoused an Epicurean view of the afterlife. This and other such statements of futility (e.g., 15:19 – “If in this life only we have hope in Christ,

⁹⁸ That the Corinthians have taken a distinctively Cynic perspective: Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches*, 105, 246—that their perspective is Epicurean: Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 346; and Tomlin, “Christians and Epicureans in 1 Corinthians.”

⁹⁹ See Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1240ff.

we are to be pitied more than all people”) articulate not the Corinthians’ express position, but rather what Paul says is the *logical consequence* of it—which they seem not to have followed to its end: if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ was not raised, and if Christ was not raised, then one is still dead in sin.¹⁰⁰ Third, the questions of Paul’s interlocutor in v. 35—“*How* are the dead raised? With *what kind* of body do they come?”—reveal that the real issue at stake is how a *bodily* resurrection can be *possible*. Paul then spends some twenty verses making his case (vv. 36-54).¹⁰¹ Therefore, unless the “some” of 15:12 contained a discrete subgroup within it, with a separate list of objections to the resurrection (or, unless we accept the unprovable and unproductive hypothesis that Paul has misunderstood the Corinthians),¹⁰² we can only conclude that the dissenters *did* believe in immortality, only immortality that appertained strictly to the soul.

In recent decades this view has emerged as the dominant one.¹⁰³ In fact, Jeffrey Asher has shown conclusively that the Corinthians of 15:12, like the contemporary philosophical schools, had adopted a cosmology that prohibited the physical from ascending into the higher, and discrete, celestial realm. For the Corinthians, this “cosmic

¹⁰⁰ Asher (*Polarity and Change*, 2, 30-90) has agreed. Moreover, though seemingly consistent with Epicurean sentiment, the slogan itself is a verbatim quotation from LXX Isa 22:13.

¹⁰¹ Answering first with a rebuke which calls to mind his first four chapters: “you fool!” (ἄφρων).

¹⁰² Bultmann (*Theology of the New Testament* [trans. K. Grobel; New York: Scribner, 1951], 1:169) and Schmithals (*Gnosticism in Corinth*, 156) have argued that Paul misunderstood. But as J. Holleman (*Resurrection and Parousia: A Tradition-Historical Study of Paul’s Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15* [NovTSupp 84; Leiden: Brill, 1996], 36) has insightfully responded, “If one supposes that Paul misrepresents the Corinthian opinion it becomes impossible to know the Corinthian point of view at all.”

¹⁰³ E.g., Grosheide, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 363, 380; Allo, *Première Epître aux Corinthiens*, 402; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 715, 741, 775, 779; Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 106, 122; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 678, 699; Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 132; and a host of further literature, cited by Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1174-5.

polarity” rendered a *bodily* resurrection simply impossible.¹⁰⁴ Thus Paul aimed in 1 Corinthians 15 to offer a solution the dissenters could accept without requiring that they abandon their presuppositions: cosmic polarity and bodily resurrection were compatible, so long as the resurrection body was understood to be a *transformed* body.

Needless to say, this would not limit the Corinthian viewpoint to a Stoic one. A body-soul dualism would have been maintained by the Platonist or the Pythagorean, as well as by many who did not subscribe to any one of the major philosophical schools.¹⁰⁵ Even so, Paul appears to give the conversation a Stoic turn. If some in Corinth did in fact take the perspective that only the soul survived death, and that in the final conflagration all would be in Zeus and Zeus in all (*SVF* 2.596-632; 3.302), then Paul’s final words in 15:28 present them with a direct, and momentous, challenge: not *Zeus*, but *God*, will be “all in all” (πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν; cf. *SVF* 2.596-632; 3.302).¹⁰⁶

Litigation (1 Cor 6:1-11). The only issue that has not been discussed yet is the problem of litigation, which appears in 6:1-11. The socio-economic dimension of the issue—who was litigating against whom, whom the justice system was likely to favor, and so forth—has been thoroughly explored in previous studies.¹⁰⁷ While the question of

¹⁰⁴ Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians*, 15.

¹⁰⁵ For more on the philosophers and cosmic polarity, see Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Cor 15*, 119-45.

¹⁰⁶ An expression that appears elsewhere in the NT only in Eph 1:23 and Col 3:11.

¹⁰⁷ Two articles treating the issue include: Bruce Winter, “Civil Litigation in Secular Corinth and the Church: The Forensic Background to 1 Cor 6:1-8,” *NTS* 37 (1991): 559-72; and Alan Mitchell, “Rich and Poor in the Courts of Corinth: Litigiousness and Status in 1 Cor 6:1-11,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 562-86. One can find a good summary of recent scholarship in Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 197-200.

why litigation was going on in the church is perhaps unanswerable, in the light of what we have seen, it may be worth recounting what Stoicism had to say on the issue.

Cleanthes is said to have written a book *On Litigation* (D. L. 7.175), though it is now lost. We find brief treatment of the subject elsewhere. Arius Didymus remarks that “the man with good sense does not forgive anyone. For it is characteristic of the same person both to forgive someone and to believe that he did not do wrong through his own fault, when all do wrong through their own evil. Accordingly it is rightly said that he does not forgive those who are doing wrong” (Arius Didymus 11d/*SVF* 3.640). Arius then applies this principle to the matter of litigation:

They say that the good man is not tolerant, since the tolerant can be begged off the punishment in accord with what is due, and that it is the mark of the same man to be tolerant and to assume that the punishments set out by law for the unjust are too harsh and to consider that the lawmaker apportions punishments contrary to what is due.

This is predicated on the belief that “the law is worthwhile,” since the law is “correct reasoning.” Diogenes Laertius reports a similar view, though he also gives a further clue as to the justification: tolerance is an attribute of the “weak” mind.

[T]hey [wise men] do no hurt to others or to themselves. At the same time they are not pitiful and make no allowance for anyone; *they never relax the penalties fixed by the laws*, since indulgence and pity and even equitable consideration are *marks of a weak mind* (7.123 [Hicks, LCL]; my italics).

None of this requires that we see Stoic teaching as *the* reason why the Corinthians were litigating against each other. But it is evident that their actions could very well have found justification there. As we have seen, the wise in Corinth are certainly loath to be “of a weak mind” (cf. 1 Cor 8), and Arius Didymus and Diogenes Laertius, probably

drawing from Cleanthes, both recommend litigation when laws were broken.¹⁰⁸ Paul, at any rate, twice¹⁰⁹ imports philosophy into the discussion: first by asking, sarcastically, whether there is not some “wise man” in the church who can judge between them (6:5); and secondly with his appeal, “Why not rather be wronged [ἀδικεῖσθε]? Why not rather be defrauded?” (6:7). From the time of Plato, this principle had been a commonplace among the philosophers. It is found, among other places, on the lips of the Stoic Musonius Rufus around the time of Paul: one ought to be disposed “to look upon doing a wrong [τὸ μὲν ἀδικεῖν] as worse than suffering one [τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι] . . . and to regard being worsted as better than gaining an unjust advantage” (*Diatr.* 3; cf. *Diatr.* 10 [Lutz 41]).¹¹⁰ Paul’s choice of language is most stinging, and apt, if we imagine the Corinthians clinging tightly to the philosophical tradition—yet another philosophical *tour de force* against the aspiring Christian philosophers.

The Question of Apollos

Having treated the major issues in the letter, it must now be asked how the present reconstruction dovetails with Paul’s formulation of the church’s “parties” in 1:10-12.

Long ago, Baur had reduced Paul’s four putative parties to two: one of Peter, the other of

¹⁰⁸ Though the Corinthians may have exploited such Stoic ideology to justify their actions, it can probably not have been Stoicism *alone* that generated their lawsuits. After all, they *were* apparently willing to forgive when it came to the adulterous man (5:1-13/6:12-20). Thus social stratification must have played a part as well: they could wink at the sins of their confreres, but when they were wronged by their inferiors—it was off to court.

¹⁰⁹ In addition, the μή πλανᾶσθε (“do not be deceived”) formula in 6:9 is a characteristic of Stoic diatribe (e.g., Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.6.23; cf. 2.20.7). See Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 211) for further literature on this point.

¹¹⁰ This concept is similar to one of the main ideas of Plato’s *Republic*, and is also found, e.g., in Plato, *Gorg.* 469C; 408B; 509C; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 5.11.7-8; *Rhet.* 1.7.22; Philo, *Jos.* 20; Seneca, *Ep.* 95.52; cf. *SVF* 3.567-81.

Paul.¹¹¹ As discussed in chapter 2, however, it is now widely agreed that we have not four, nor even two, distinct “parties,” each with its own champion and unique theology, but rather a rhetorical depiction of a church divided.¹¹² Even so, many continue to literalize Paul’s construct. For proponents of the rhetorical thesis, some are indeed “of Paul” and others “of Apollos,” in accordance as the two have been estimated for their rhetorical success. Though personally the two may have been in harmony, they have become unwitting champions of distinct opposing factions.¹¹³

We have already discussed the extent to which this interpretation depends on information not found in 1 Corinthians: a rhetorical controversy has been imagined largely on the basis of the description of Paul as “contemptible in speech” in 2 Corinthians (10:10) and the description of Apollos as “learned/eloquent” in Acts (18:24). The rest depends upon Paul’s juxtaposition of himself with Apollos in 1 Corinthians 3-4. It must be said that this passage gives no mention of conflict between the two, nor any clue that rhetoric was an issue. But does it support the notion of opposing parties formed in their names?

In assessing 1 Corinthians 3-4 we must be careful not to let the amount of space given to Apollos distract us from the passage’s real purpose. In the first place, Paul gives every indication that he and Apollos had no quarrel with each other: they are “one” (3:8);

¹¹¹ F. C. Baur, “Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom,” *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831): 61-206; and “The Epistles to the Corinthians,” in *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu Christi* (Stuttgart: Becker & Muller, 1866), 268-320.

¹¹² For a summary of the current consensus: Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 50-51.

¹¹³ E.g., Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia*, 196; Litfin, *Paul’s Theology of Proclamation*, 228-9; Witherington, *Conflict and Community at Corinth*, 83, 86-130, 74n9, 124; Kremer, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 32.

they perform complementary tasks (3:6-7), and are “fellow-workers” of God (3:9). In closing the letter, Paul calls Apollos a “brother,” and affirms that he has “begged” him to return to Corinth (16:12), an action difficult to fathom on the hypothesis that Apollos was responsible for the church’s split.

But the real crux of the Apollos material is Paul’s use of μετασχημάτισα in 4:6.¹¹⁴ After laying forth a picture of his relationship with Apollos, largely with agricultural imagery, Paul says, “I have applied (μετεσχημάτισα) all this (ταῦτα) to Apollos and myself for your benefit, brothers and sisters” (NRSV). Elsewhere in the NT this verb means either “to change the form of something,” or “to feign to be what one is not” (BDAG 641).¹¹⁵ The first meaning hardly belongs here. The second meaning would imply that Paul has presented as being about himself and Apollos what is really (or perhaps also) about someone else. This interpretation finds ancient precedent. Chrysostom had said regarding 1:10-12 that “the Corinthians were not actually calling on the name of Paul himself or Peter or Apollos”; rather, Paul was using “hyperbole,” making his words “less offensive by not naming those who were dividing the church but concealing them, as if by masks, under the names of the apostles.” Thus with μετεσχημάτισα in 4:6 Paul makes clear that his presentation had aimed to “mask” the true culprits under the names “Paul” and “Apollos” and thereby to save the trouble-makers their dignity.¹¹⁶ Similar to Chrysostom’s views are those of Ambrosiaster and Photius,

¹¹⁴ See discussions in Thiselton (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 348-51) and Mihaila (*The Paul-Apollos Relationship*, 180-212).

¹¹⁵ BDAG’s third listed meaning, “apply,” is more properly regarded as a subcategory of the second, if we give notice to the literature cited in support.

¹¹⁶ Judith L. Kovacs, *1 Corinthians* (The Church’s Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 19, cf. 74.

and, in more recent times, the views of Raymond Collins and Bruce Winter (both of whom advocate the rhetorical thesis), among others.¹¹⁷

Interpreters may disagree regarding how covert Paul means to be with respect to the culprits' identity, but the allusive function of μετασχημάτισα can hardly be denied: it reveals that there is no personal conflict between Paul and Apollos, but that there *is* conflict among *others* in the community—and that conflict may or may *not* revolve around these two names. Indeed, *apart from* μετασχημάτισα, we would probably have to take Paul's discussion in *direct* application to himself and Apollos, and we could almost certainly conclude that a disagreement had been carried on in their names. *With* μετασχημάτισα, however, we are allowed the conclusion that their names may have had nothing to do with any personal feud at all: rather, Paul has simply set forth himself and Apollos as a picture of perfect concord, a picture that he hopes the Corinthians will emulate. Thus, the emphasis is on Paul and Apollos not as the embodiments of respective parties, but as *examples of Christians in harmony*.

In that regard, the interpretation presented here is in in step with the recent consensus that the church was embroiled in factionalism, and that certain circles or cliques had formed, but it finds no need to see "Paul" and "Apollos" as the real dividing line. *That* line seems to have been drawn, not from the evidence of 1 Corinthians 3-4, but by connecting extraneous points *A* and *B*—2 Corinthians 10:10 and Acts 18:24.

¹¹⁷ Ambrosiaster and Photius in Kovacs, *1 Corinthians*, 21, 75; also Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 176; Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, 196-201; Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 38-39; Talbert, *Reading Corinthians*, 20; Mihaila, *The Paul-Apollos Relationship*, 348-51; cf. Benjamin Fiore, "'Covert Allusion' in 1 Cor 1-4," *CBQ* 47 (1985): 85-102.

The Role of Paul

Apparently eighteen months in Corinth wasn't long enough. No sooner had Paul set sail for Ephesus than problems of "wisdom" began brewing in the new church. Hurd believed it was something he had said—or rather, almost everything he said. It was Paul who had said "all things are permissible," Paul who had said "it is good for a man not to touch a women," Paul who had said that "we all have knowledge," that "food is for the belly, and the belly for food," and all the rest. The Corinthians simply repeated it. While few have been convinced by Hurd's thesis, he did raise a crucial question for reconstruction of Paul's epistles: what responsibility did Paul himself have for the peculiar ways his converts interpreted his message?

We have learned over the years that Paul's thought was not cut from a single cloth.¹¹⁸ It was rather a complex weave of the diverse backdrops that made up his world—those Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Christian. If the majority interpretation is right, probably Paul received a literary education in the Greek schools in Tarsus up through the secondary level (though some think he went higher), before culminating his education in Jerusalem as a Pharisee (cf. Acts 22:3), and then turning to Christ some years later.¹¹⁹ His early schooling would have entailed some formal training in rhetoric,¹²⁰ though little if

¹¹⁸ By the time of W. D. Davies (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*), it was generally accepted that no hard and fast distinction can be made between Judaism and Hellenism. Martin Hengel later provided the definitive word in *Judaism and Hellenism* (SCM, 1974).

¹¹⁹ Raymond E. Brown (*An Introduction to the New Testament* [ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1997], 423-5 [cf. 69, 84, 426]) dubs this the "majority position." For examples of this position, see S. E. Johnson, "Tarsus and the Apostle Paul," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 15 (1980): 105-13; Timothy Lim, "Not in Persuasive Words of Wisdom," 137-49; and Murphy-O'Connor (*Paul*, 46, 48), who says Paul received at least some rhetorical education in Tarsus. Ronald Hock ("Paul and Greco-Roman Education," in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* [ed. J. Paul Sampley; Continuum, 2003]) says Paul received a "full and thorough" Greek education (p. 198).

¹²⁰ On Paul's literary abilities see: Rudolph Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die Kynischstoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1910); Frederik Danker, "Paul's Debt to

any in philosophy. On the other hand, a man of letters such as himself, who may well have spent some time reading philosophy, and who was well-traveled and active on the streets and in the forums of many of the major cities across the Greco-Roman world, can hardly have escaped acquaintance with the major trends. Tarsus, for instance, where he is said to have returned after his conversion (Acts 9:30), was a major ganglion of learning in that day, not least in the area of philosophy.¹²¹

His life experience in the Greco-Roman world shows through clearly in his letters. He was obviously familiar with *topoi* from a number of philosophical traditions—Socratic, Epicurean, Cynic, and Stoic included.¹²² But the Stoic comparison has been the order of the day. Marriage, “freedom,” the “law,” “indifferents,” and more—in all of these things Paul bears some likeness to the Stoics.¹²³ Moreover, his use of “Stoic”

the *De Corona* of Demosthenes: A Study of Rhetorical Techniques in Second Corinthians,” in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric in Honor of George A. Kennedy* (ed. D. F. Watson; JSNTSup 50; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 262-80; Stanley K. Stowers, “Romans 7:7-25 as a Speech-in-Character (προσοποιλία),” in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, 180-202; Glen Holland, “Paul’s Use of Irony as a Rhetorical Technique,” in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture* (JSNTSup 146; eds. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 234-48; Galen Rowe, “Style,” in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997), esp. 124-150; Collins, *1 Corinthians*, 6-8; J. Paul Sampley and Peter Lamp, *Paul and Rhetoric* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010).

¹²¹ We know of several eminent Stoics associated with Tarsus around his day—for instance, Zeno, Antipater, and Athenodorus (so Sedley, “The School, from Zeno to Arius Didymus,” 30-31).

¹²² See for example: Hans D. Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: Eine Exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner Apologie 2 Korinther 10-13* (BHT 45; Tübingen: Möhr, 1972); Malherbe, “Graeco-Roman Religion and Philosophy and the New Testament,” in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. Eldon Jay Epp and George W. McRae; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 8; Abraham Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989); Norman Wentworth de Witt, *St Paul and Epicurus* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1954); R. B. Ward, “Musonius and Paul on Marriage,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 281-9; Clarence E. Glad, *Paul and Philodemus: Adaptability in Epicurean and Early Christian Psychagogy*; Troels Engberg-Pederson, “Paul, Virtues, and Vices,” in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. J. Paul Sampley; Continuum, 2003), 608-34.

¹²³ On marriage: Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy*—freedom: Lincoln E. Galloway, *Freedom in the Gospel: Paul’s Exemplum in 1 Corinthians 9 in Conversation with the Discourses of Epictetus and Philo* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004)—law: Niko Huttunen, “Stoic Law in Paul?” in *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (eds. Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, Ismo Dunderberg; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010), 39-58—indifferents: Deming, “Paul and Indifferent Things”—Engberg-Pedersen has convinced few with his suggestion that Paul was almost every inch the Stoic, whether in his ethics,

rhetoric and metaphors has been the center of attention in several monographs and essays.¹²⁴ No doubt certain studies have pressed the comparison too far, but at least a partial resemblance can now be taken as established.

Our examination of Paul's response in 1 Corinthians has confirmed that he was no stranger to the philosophical traditions, least of all Stoicism. I have shown that he often counters the Corinthians' positions with recognizably Stoic terminology (6:5; 11:14; 15:29) and arguments (6:7; 7:4; 6:12b/10:23b; 6:18b; 6:20; 12:12-30), in many cases by providing the Stoic counterpoint needed to balance otherwise Stoical excesses (e.g., what is "permissible" should also be "beneficial"; freedom has its limitations; the individual must consider also the whole body; etc.). We would be remiss to pass over the significance of this language. Indeed, not only do most of these examples reflect rhetorical oddities in Paul, but they generally also reflect a *verbal form* that is not adequately paralleled in Jewish literature. Within the entire Pauline corpus, we find nothing outside 1 Corinthians formally resembling the statements, "Why not rather be wronged [ἀδικεῖσθε]? Why not rather be defrauded? But you both wrong and defraud" (6:7); "he who commits fornication sins against his own body" (6:18b); "your body is not your own" (6:20); and "the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the

cosmology, or anthropology: see *Paul and the Stoics*; and *Cosmology and the Self in the Apostle Paul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); cf. Runar M. Thorsteinsson, "Stoicism as a Key to Pauline Ethics in Romans," in *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, 15-38. For an older but still definitive comparison between Paul and Seneca, see Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca* (Leiden: Brill, 1961).

¹²⁴ Paul's use of hardship lists: John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence* (SBLDS 99; Atlanta: Scholars, 1988)—use of Stoic metaphors: Roman Garrison, *The Graeco-Roman Context of Early Christian Literature* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997); Michelle V. Lee, *Paul, the Stoics, and the Body of Christ* (SNTSMS 137; Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006)—comparison of various terms and topics: Grant, "Hellenistic Elements in 1 Corinthians"; D. A. de Silva, "Paul and the Stoa: A Comparison," *JETS* 38 (1995): 549-64.

husband does” (7:4). Granted, these examples are not all *conceptually* unique. 6:7 for instance reflects a principle of non-retaliation that is central to the teachings of Jesus (Matt 5:38-42) and not uncommon in Paul (Rom 12:17-21/1 Thess 5:15), and the spirit of 7:4 might be adumbrated to some extent in OT material such as Exod 21:10. It must be admitted, however, that the precise *form* in which these texts are put here is recognizably philosophical.

Other examples commend a philosophical form as well. The Stoic ethical term *συμφέρει* (“beneficial”) is found only in the Corinthian correspondence, twice in direct response to Stoic slogans (e.g., 1 Cor 6:12b/10:23b). The expression “all in all” appears otherwise in the NT only in Eph 1:23 and Col 3:11. The body metaphor (12:12-30) is fully developed elsewhere only in Romans (15:1-6). And uses of *σοφός* (“wise man”) and *φύσις* (“nature”) are not only rare in Paul, but they are here clearly integrated to meet the occasion, as is evident both from his leading rhetorical questions—“is there no *wise man* present to judge among you?” (6:5); “does not *nature* teach you that . . . ?” (11:14)—and by his insinuation of the “wise man” into OT citations, where no text type seems to have actually included it—“He catches the wise man in his craftiness” (3:19/Job 5:13); “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise man, that they are futile” (3:20/Ps 93:11). With all this we have hit only the tip of the iceberg. Further examples abound; though they are not always so unique.¹²⁵ The upshot is that, even if Paul’s “Stoic” rhetoric cannot be limited to 1 Corinthians,¹²⁶ nowhere does he seem to exploit it so heavily, so distinctly, and so

¹²⁵ For a fairly lengthy list of terms and concepts, see Grant, “Hellenistic Elements in 1 Corinthians”; and de Silva, “Paul and the Stoa: A Comparison.”

¹²⁶ See especially Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*.

directly in response to what are clearly the views of his “opponents,” as he does in 1 Corinthians.

I am aware that this claim calls up a vexing set of hermeneutical questions, which we can only begin to answer here. First, it must be asked: is Paul’s audience able to distinguish when he is speaking simply as a Christian Jew who happens to use arguments that are *incidentally* similar to Greek philosophy, from when he is making a conscious *effort* to exploit specifically Greek forms of argumentation so as to be most persuasive to *them*, who are a predominantly Greek-minded audience? Second, are *we ourselves* able to make such distinctions in his speech?

To the first question we shall have to answer, No, in many cases they could not. Judging from the diverse analyses of Pauline thought that have appeared over the decades, it must be confessed that Paul exhibits striking Stoic affinities in many areas of his theology. When we consider his emphasis on an indwelling “Spirit” (πνεῦμα), the “law” (νόμος), “nature” (φύσις), “freedom” (ἐλεύθερος, ἐξουσία), “perfection” (τέλος, τέλειος, τελειόω), the “word” (λόγος), and the intellect (νοῦς, διαλογισμός, φρονέω)—all of which feature prominently both in his other letters and in Stoicism—it is easy to see how a Greek-minded audience, upon first hearing (or hearing of) his message, might have compressed it into Stoic categories.

How then can *we* discern when Paul is “Greek” by *accident* and when he is Greek by *design*, if his first auditors often could not? Of course, in one respect we cannot differentiate these things with *certainty*; there are no “assured results” of critical research. All the same, it can probably be said that we have subjected the letter of 1 Corinthians to greater scrutiny—with greater disinterestedness (in some cases), and in light of a fuller

body of Pauline thought—than the Corinthians might have themselves. In this light, we are provided with two anchors from which to begin making some hermeneutical distinctions. First, we can build on the premise that Paul, though positively *not* a Stoic philosopher, does in many ways *sound* like one. Thus, it would be surprising indeed if some of his first auditors, especially in a city like Corinth, had *not* heard him as such. Our second anchor, which we have been at pains to identify in this study, is the historical situation at the moment just prior to the composition of 1 Corinthians. I have argued, based principally on the material *quoted* from the Corinthians and on the main *topical* components of the letter, that Stoicism was likely the primary irritant of the church's divisions. With these two levels of the correspondence as hermeneutical anchors—Paul's Stoic-sounding message and the Corinthians' Stoic interpretation of it—we are equipped with some baselines for disaggregating the rhetorical layers of the letter. Thus, I imagine the course of events as follows.

(1) First, Paul takes up residence in Corinth, preaching his Gospel of Jesus Christ to open ears. (2) Perhaps only a single soul (we'll say), with Gentile background and some philosophical acquaintance, because of obvious similarities construes Paul's message in Stoic categories, either having first heard him late in his residence, or having been relayed his message just after he had departed. This individual's limited knowledge of Pauline Christianity puts him in mind of the Stoic philosophy with which he is (perhaps) more familiar. (3) An important figure in the community, this person then begins (unsystematically) to develop a kind of Christian philosophy, now Christianizing Stoicism, now Stoicizing Christianity, and from there infecting his circle of intimates and perhaps a few of his protégés with his way of thinking. (4) Paul catches wind of these

perversions and responds in kind, now consciously as a “Stoic” to “Stoics.” Exercising his “all things to all men” principle (1 Cor 9:19-23), he further avails himself of Stoic thought, adding to his stock of Stoic commonplaces fresh terminology (6:5; 15:29) and axioms (6:7; 7:4; 6:12b/10:23b; 6:18b; 6:20)—as needed for the situation—though sublimating the material to accord with his essentially Christian convictions.

The Divisions and 2 Corinthians

How the events following the composition of 1 Corinthians transpired to bring about 2 Corinthians (whether it consists of one letter or two) is a crucial question for the task of reconstructing the history of the Corinthian correspondence. “Sophistic” connections have been said to cut across the two canonical letters, particularly as seen in 1 Corinthians 1-4 and 2 Corinthians 10-13.¹²⁷ Could similar claims be made for the Stoic thesis presented here?

This is a question I have deliberately aimed to avoid—for several reasons. In part these reasons have been methodological. I have made it my goal to follow the principle, widely upheld since Dahl, that we avoid bringing evidence from other NT literature into the discussion until we have first dealt with the evidence of the letter under consideration. As we have seen, failure to do so has markedly distorted interpretations of “wisdom” in 1 Corinthians, imposing on the letter a reconstruction that upon closer investigation must be considered alien to the full breadth of the most pertinent evidence. I have tried to offer a corrective in that regard. Moreover, we should reflect upon whether reconstructions of 2 Corinthians have not sometimes been liable to the same excesses of mirror-reading as those of its earlier counterpart. Admittedly, Paul does seem in 2 Corinthians to take

¹²⁷ This is spelled out most fully in Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*.

precautions to distinguish himself from the “sophists”—as when he says he is not a “peddler of the word of God” (2 Cor 2:17)—but, then, such distancing is not limited to the Corinthian letters. This is an issue to which he seems everywhere to have been sensitive (cf. 1 Thess 1:5; 2:1-12; Gal 1:10). Such denials may therefore have less to do with the precise historical occasion than with a general concern for reputation—perhaps in both canonical letters.

Were we pressed to demonstrate continuity across the Corinthian correspondence, however, we could do so. Lack of Stoic “slogans” notwithstanding, it is noteworthy that much of the peculiar vocabulary of 1 Corinthians resurfaces. 2 Corinthians includes one of only two further instances of σοφία among the major Pauline epistles, and the *only* other instance where he speaks of wisdom negatively (2 Cor 1:12; cf. Rom 11:13); several cognates pertaining to being “rich,” all of them rare or unique for Paul (πλουτίζω appears only in 1 Cor 1:5; 2 Cor 6:10; 9:11; πλουτέω only in 1 Cor 4:8 and 2 Cor 8:9; and πλούσιος, within the major Pauline epistles, only in 2 Cor 8:9); appeal to “benefit” (συμφέρει), a Stoic-oriented word which appears only in the Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23; 12:7; 2 Cor 8:10; 12:1); several further instances of γνώσις (2 Cor 2:14; 4:6; 6:6; 8:7; 10:5; 11:6)—once conjoined with λόγος (11:6); as well as mention of the body as the “temple of God” image (6:16)—used almost strictly in the Corinthian correspondence (cf. Eph 2:19-22); ἐλευθερία (3:17); and—highly rare in the NT—the technical Stoic term φαῦλος (5:10).

All the same, the dominating view over the years has been that the circumstances of 1 Corinthians on the one hand, and those reflected in 2 Corinthians on the other, are *not* essentially the same, and the problems in the latter have been fomented by a new group

which, between letters, has infiltrated the community from the outside.¹²⁸ Winter's attempt to find a common denominator in his suggestion that sophism takes center stage in both 1 Corinthians 1-4, 9 and 2 Corinthians 10-13 can now be doubted, if my earlier assessment has been on target. Otherwise, arguments that 1 and 2 Corinthians share opponents have been largely discredited as the contrivances of Baur-like thinkers who imagine a single group of people hounding Paul and his converts now in one city, now in another.¹²⁹ That being so, the question whether Stoicism makes up the warp and woof of the problems behind *both* 1 and 2 Corinthians—whether the whole or the part—turns out to be largely irrelevant. Whatever the problems are in 2 Corinthians, they still seem *not* to be essentially like those of the previous letter, even if some flotsam may have drifted over. But, as the whole of 1 Corinthians has already been treated, this is an issue the present work will have to defer.

Alternative Theses

Any viable thesis should be able to counter or absorb the claims of its competitors. But the superior thesis will be the one that can provide the *best* explanation for the *greatest part* of the evidence. It thus remains for me to show how the Stoic thesis relates with those other major interpretations that have appeared in the history of

¹²⁸ That the opponents are the same—Judaizers: in Baur, “Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostel Petrus in Rom”; Gnostics: in Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971). That the opponents are different—Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians: A Study of Religious Propaganda in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); C. K. Barrett, “Paul’s Opponents in 2 Corinthians,” *NTS* 17 (1971): 1-54. Winter (*Paul and Paul among the Sophists*, 243) calls the view that the opponents are different the “common view.”

¹²⁹ Murphy-O’Connor’s hypothesis (*Paul*, 302, 303ff; 2004: 176ff) represents a variation: the “spirit people” carry over from 1 to 2 Corinthians, though in the latter they make common cause with a new group from the outside—the Judaizers.

scholarship. Can other theses explain some pieces of the data better than the present one? Could the same be said, *mutatis mutandis*, for the present thesis? Is the Stoic thesis mutually exclusive of the others, or does it have the valence to absorb their explanatory potential without compromising its own distinctiveness? It is to these questions that we now turn.

Over-Realized Eschatology

According to proponents of the “over-realized eschatology” thesis, the Corinthians believed that the eschatological kingdom had already been consummated: on account of baptism, “already” they were “kings” over all, “perfect” in “knowledge,” fully “spiritual,” and in total possession of the resurrection experience. As such, they had developed, not a full-blown, but a sort of “incipient” or “primitive Gnosticism.”

Perhaps this interpretation may still be regarded as viable—as far as it goes. Part of its appeal is that it doesn’t say much. It takes what was true of the Gnostic thesis and frees it from any single system of thought. It is a module that with certain modifications can be fitted with any number of theses, including a Stoic one.

Some of course have argued that the Corinthian perspective, if characterized by a Greek philosophical outlook, did not reflect *over-realized* eschatology really, but rather reflected *no* eschatology whatsoever.¹³⁰ The Corinthians, they say, had no category for future blessings, only for present ones. As an aside, it may be debated whether philosophers generally had no category for future blessings. But the apparent

¹³⁰ Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 201, 217; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 14, 138, 699; Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict*, 16-25, 217-18; Paige, “Stoicism, *Eleutheria* and Community at Corinth,” 184, 187; Barclay, “Thessalonica and Corinth,” 64; Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 106; Hays, “Conversion of the Imagination,” 408-9; Asher, *Polarity and Change in 1 Corinthians 15*, 39-41.

contradiction in terms here has a different source of confusion. The confusion is that the very label, *over-realized* eschatology, is itself paradoxical. It is like an “over-sized small” or an “over-cooked medium-rare.” The moment *eschatology* is *over-realized* it ceases to be *eschatology*. For this reason, even a hair’s breadth of difference between “no eschatology” and “over-realized eschatology” is difficult to put one’s finger on. Probably the contradiction is more in name than in fact: in neither case does the holder take conscious thought of future blessings.

Whatever we label their attitude, the upshot is that the Corinthians exhibit “spiritualizing”¹³¹ tendencies that have manifested themselves in the form of claims to exceptional wisdom, knowledge, perfection, and so forth. As I have understood the evidence, they have thought of themselves as Stoic “wise men,” but as *Christian* ones privileged also to certain level of spiritual achievement. For the wise Corinthians, this combination seemed to present no contradiction.

Hellenistic Judaism

A more substantial thesis is the view that the Corinthians’ wisdom was a form of Philonism, an Alexandrian brand of Hellenistic Judaism that integrated Jewish monotheism and Greek philosophy. Richard Horsley relentlessly pushed this view in a series of articles in the 1970s and 80s, and has continued as its champion in recent years.¹³²

¹³¹ A term Fee (*1 Corinthians*, 790) also prefers.

¹³² Horsley, “Pneumatikos vs. Psychikos”; “Wisdom of Words and Words of Wisdom in Corinth,” *CBQ* 39 (1977): 224-39; “How Can Some of You Say That There Is No Resurrection of the Dead?”; “Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians (1 Cor 8-10),” 574-89; “Gnosis in Corinth,” 32-51; as well as his commentary, *1 Corinthians*, 33-36; and his collection of essays, *Wisdom and Spiritual Transcendence at Corinth*; cf. James A. Davis, *Wisdom and Spirit: An Investigation of 1 Cor 1:18-3:20 against the Background of Jewish Sapiential Traditions in the Greco-Roman Period* (University Press of America, 1984).

Horsley finds in Philo and the Wisdom of Solomon many of the same parallels we have found here: the Corinthians are “wise,” “powerful,” “nobly born,” “wealthy,” and “kings”; through their possession of divine “Sophia,” they are “perfect,” “spiritual,” and “strong,” and thus superior to those whom they call “immature,” “unspiritual,” and “weak”; and their anthropological dualism has caused them to denigrate the body and to deny the possibility of a bodily resurrection. The bearer of these views into the Corinthian church had been none other than the Alexandrian Jew Apollos.

Despite its similarities to the present thesis, Horsley’s view is ultimately spoiled by some insuperable difficulties. First, as should now be apparent, it gives Apollos an unbelievable role in the divisions, making him out to be the knowing conduit of what Paul takes to be an insidious and divisive form of mysticism, even while Paul, rather than *rebuking* Apollos, goes out of his way to demonstrate their concord (3:4-4:6) and even urges him to *return* to Corinth (16:12).¹³³ Second, while we know that the Corinthian church included a substantial population of Jews, Paul seems to characterize the majority as having had a Gentile or pagan background (5:1ff; ch. 10; 12:2). Third—and almost alone sufficient to disqualify Horsley’s thesis—Paul explicitly refers to wisdom, *not* as a Jewish pursuit, but as a Greek one (1:22). This statement cannot be dismissed merely as a piece of “rhetoric.” “Rhetoric” of course may convey falsehoods, but they are either “falsehoods” on the surface only—such as in the case of irony—or they are actual falsehoods that the speaker nonetheless wishes to be *taken as true* by the audience. Fourth, and most important of all, it should be noted that the parallels Horsley adduces—not some, but *all* of them—occur precisely at those points where Hellenistic Judaism had

¹³³ Barclay (“Thessalonica and Corinth,” 65n29) makes the same point.

in fact drawn from *Stoicism*, and this, in most cases, by Horsley's own admission.¹³⁴ Even more, where his parallels are merely conceptual and not terminological—such as with πνευματικός-ψυχικός—we have found these in Stoicism as well, and there also with the terms themselves. With that, it should also be said that Horsley's thesis fails to explain what was *new* in Corinth. The Corinthians have not swallowed Philonism wholesale, but have rather *combined* their Christianity with some sort of philosophy, leaving parts still recognizable from each body of thought, but with the whole looking *exactly* like neither. The resulting body reflected not an entirely unrecognizable animal, but rather something of a chimera—a Christian limb here, a Stoic one there—a hybrid of two known species. Though, with what little information we have, whether that new animal was more parts Stoic or more parts Christian can probably not be answered.

Other Philosophies

Reviving an old, if less popular thesis,¹³⁵ Graham Tomlin has submitted that Epicureanism can elucidate much of the letter. He submits that it explains the libertine slogans of 6:12a/10:23a, on the one hand, and the asceticism of chapter 7, on the other, as well as the Corinthians' derogatory view toward idols (8:4), their exclusiveness (11:17-34), and their denial of a general resurrection (15:12). Again, most of the parallels work conceptually, but the problem is that Tomlin produces nothing like the close *verbal* parallels of Stoicism, either with the clusters of the wise man's paradoxical predicates—almost universally recognized as belonging most nearly to the Stoic—or with the

¹³⁴ E.g., Horsley, "Consciousness and Freedom among the Corinthians (1 Cor 8-10)," 585; Horsley, "How Can Some of You Say That There Is No Resurrection of the Dead?," 206, 210, 226.

¹³⁵ It is mentioned in connection with 1 Cor 15:12 as far back as Robertson and Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 346.

Corinthians' pithy slogans. Moreover, the Epicurean explanation is almost certainly wrong in the case of 15:12. We have already seen that the Corinthians did have some notion of immortality, but that it was simply not bodily. Epicureanism, by contrast, maintained that human beings—indeed, all living things—were entirely material, with body and soul both being composed of “atoms,” which merely dissolved at death.¹³⁶ All said, while Epicureanism does show some *conceptual overlap* with the Corinthians' positions, it fits far less perfectly (and exhaustively) than does Stoicism.

Cynicism offers a more robust explanation. Admittedly, the Cynics had their own “wise man,” who was said to be “free” even if a slave (Anacharsis, *Epistle* 6, 2; Diogenes, *Epistle* 29, 14-17; Heraclitus, *Epistle* 9, 28-30), who possessed everything though nothing (Crates, *Epistle* 7, 8; Socraticus, *Epistle* 22, 105; Crates, *Epistle* 27; Diogenes, *Epistle* 10, 2-7; D. L. 6.37, 72); and believed that virtue was complete for happiness (Crates, *Epistle* 3, 16-17; D. L. 6.10), and everything else was a matter of indifference (Crates, *Epistle* 29, 10-11; D. L. 6.105); that all people were “citizens of the world” (Heraclitus, *Epistle* 9, 20-20; Heraclitus, *Epistle* 9, 10-14); that one should resist the “crowd” and popular “opinion” (Crates, *Epistle* 12, 20-21; Crates, *Epistle* 35, 19-21; Diogenes, *Epistle* 7, 5-7; Diogenes, *Epistle* 10, 28-30) and live “according to nature” (Diogenes, *Epistle* 10, 25; Diogenes, *Epistle* 25, 17-20; Diogenes, *Epistle* 39, 7-8). All of these things they held more or less in common with the Stoics. Thus, we should not be surprised if the Corinthians in many respects exhibited what might be called “Cynic” tendencies.

¹³⁶ See Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 1:25-78.

F. Gerald Downing, however, has gone well beyond the evidence in maintaining that the Corinthians were *not* Stoic but simply Cynic. He argues that no Stoic would ever claim to be “rich” or “king,” for that was a status reserved only for the wise man—and according to the Stoics (says Downing) one has never existed. Cynicism, on the other hand, was a “fast track” to virtue.¹³⁷ Moreover, the slogans of 6:12a/10:23a, Downing states, can be explained only in terms of Cynic indiscrimination in matters of diet and sex.¹³⁸ Finally, in chapter 15, Paul is addressing people “for whom this physical life is the only one (1 Cor 15:19), there is no other to come, whether by resurrection or by immortality (15:12)” —that is, he is addressing Cynics.¹³⁹

While Downing is right to differentiate Cynicism and Stoicism, which have too often been conflated,¹⁴⁰ he overstates the extent to which the Corinthians *themselves*, those probably only moderately advanced in philosophical knowledge, and clearly wont to *minge* their philosophy with their Christianity, would have shown scrupulous concern for the difference between *less* and *more* acceptable Stoic views. In that regard, we have already discussed how deeply indebted Zeno was to his Cynic master and how he had incorporated Cynic indifference on matters of food and sex into early Stoicism, views that were later defended by the canonical Stoic, Chrysippus. All this is evident in the sources (*SVF* 3.743-56). It is true that these unseemly doctrines seem to have been a source of some embarrassment for later Stoics, but that does not mean that they ceased to be read, written, or taught. Rather, as Clement of Alexandria reports, teachers were

¹³⁷ Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches*, 88-89.

¹³⁸ Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches*, 89-93.

¹³⁹ Downing, *Cynics, Paul, and the Pauline Churches*, 105, cf. 246.

¹⁴⁰ As Malherbe laments in *Cynic Epistles*, 2; and *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 5, 11-24.

simply hesitant to teach these doctrines until students had “first proved themselves to be genuine philosophers” (*Strom.* 5.9.59.2/*SVF* 1.43 [Long and Sedley 430]).¹⁴¹ But “genuine philosophers” the Corinthians were not. Why, then, after hearing that one can be made “perfect” through Christ, should they *not* claim to be “wise men,” though it had been debated whether any—or at any rate *many*—had ever existed?¹⁴² (As an aside, we should note that the question whether any wise man had yet existed may be reflected in Paul’s question of 1:20—“where is the wise man?”—a nice barb with which to prick the wise in Corinth.) And yes, Cynicism was considered a “fast track to virtue,”¹⁴³ but that is precisely the reason *Stoics* gave for saying, repeatedly, that the Stoic wise man will “play the Cynic” (D. L. 7.121; Arius Didymus 11s/*SVF* 3.638). Moreover, we have already noted the difficulty with making Cynicism out to be a distinct philosophical “school,” complete with a canon and succession of scholarchs. Adherents of any number of schools could take on a Cynic lifestyle, most of all their cousins, the Stoics. Among other things, this means that a “Cynic”-minded person need not deny an afterlife as Downing suggests.

All of this beckons the question whether the Corinthians have not simply adopted what has been called “popular philosophy.” The answer, however, turns entirely upon how this is defined. Is “popular philosophy” a sort of diluted agglomeration of philosophical commonplaces, now so rarefied that its constituent sources are unrecognizable to its holders? Is it the sort of “average” philosophy of the day, the

¹⁴¹ Admittedly, Athenodorus the Stoic had expunged some passages from Zeno’s *Republic* that were said to be “disapproved,” but they were then summarily replaced (D. L. 7.34).

¹⁴² See *SVF* 3.658; Sextus Empiricus, *Prof.* 9.133-6/LS 54D; Cicero, *Luc.* 145; Seneca, *Ep.* 42.1; Lucian, *Herm.* 76-77.

¹⁴³ See Crates, *Epistle 13*, 10-11; Crates, *Epistle 16*; Crates, *Epistle 21*, 24-26; Diogenes, *Epistle 9*, 9-11; Diogenes, *Epistle 30*; Diogenes, *Epistle 44*, 9-10.

dominant cultural outlook, taken for granted by virtue of its formative influence in lower school curricula and the perspectives of the established elite? Or does it draw nearer to something like formal training, perhaps acquired by the Corinthians through fraternization with local schools of philosophy, gathered in the homes of the well-to-do, as Dale Martin imagines when speaking of “popular philosophy”?¹⁴⁴ The literature has seemed to show no consistency in this regard.

That said, if the Corinthian position can be best characterized as “popular philosophy,” we must be clearer in explaining just what that consists of. To my mind, it requires no arguing that the Corinthian perspective represented *more* than merely the common cultural outlook. Their perspective is remarkably consistent with a Stoic perspective throughout, and is never in essence demonstrably non-Stoic. They boast not simply “freedom,” but freedom as “wise men,” who are “rich,” “kings,” “perfect,” and the rest, for whom “all things are permissible,” in matters both sexual and dietary; those who lack this “knowledge” they denigrate as “immature,” “weak” and “unspiritual”—as if the latter were unreasoning creatures. All the major topics in the letter belong to Stoicism, the majority of them most properly so—the wise man, a strong emphasis on freedom, an appeal to indifference, anthropological and cosmological “dualism,” and several contrasting spiritual or intellectual status indicators. Not only so, but almost all of the major terms and slogans that can be attributed to the Corinthians most closely resemble the *actual language* of Stoicism. Conversely, much about their perspective would seem to *contradict* other philosophies of the day, as their belief in the afterlife did the Epicurean perspective on death; and *none* of their language finds parallel in another

¹⁴⁴ Martin, *Corinthian Body*, 72-73.

philosophy when it does not also in Stoicism. In short, some other philosophy may resemble the Corinthians' views and language on *this point or that*, but only Stoicism provides an explanation *across the board*.

Thus, for all its shortcomings the position of the wise in Corinth is technical and consistent enough to merit asking whether at least one or two of these people had not received *some* measure of formal training. We would be remiss to disregard something like Martin's scenario, in which a few upwardly mobile Christians might have had fringe contact with local philosophical schools. We have already noted evidence of local Stoic teachers (*IvO* 453). But if we also give credence to the possibility that some, or even just *one*, had received a gymnasium education—which indeed seems to have been within reach—this would provide precisely the level of philosophical instruction the Corinthian wise seem to have had. Attending lectures in the gymnasium, perhaps regularly, would certainly have been enough to advance them beyond the philosophical proficiency of the common person. True, they had apparently failed to apprehend what it meant to be a philosophical “wise man,” whom the philosophers held to be the embodiment of virtue; while touting the tags of the philosophers (e.g., 6:12a/10:23a), they failed to grasp the proper meaning. Even so, two points could be made in response. First, in the light of what we have seen about the cursory nature of gymnasium education, the use of itinerant philosophical lecturers in lieu of permanent teachers, and the often flippant attitude of the students, we should hardly be surprised if a gymnasium-educated Corinthian fell short of the philosophical ideal (after all, even the “true philosophers” failed to practice what they preached; e.g., Seneca, *Vit. beat.* 18.1; 20.1). Such a one would have reached a level of philosophical aptitude surpassing a repertoire of a few catch phrases void of any real

meaning, and profound enough to have informed actual behavior and character, but would no doubt have been considered misguided from the perspective of a purist: like a college undergraduate with a “minor” in philosophy, he would have just enough knowledge to be dangerous. But second, we must not forget the Christian ingredient in the Corinthians’ views. In this regard, perhaps their leap to “wise man” status and “perfect” knowledge was less a consequence of an imprecise acquaintance with Stoicism than it was a conscious *adaptation* made in the light of their new status in Christ—indeed, in their minds, not a mistaken aberration from Stoicism, but a deliberate *development* of it?

From this last observation, one final issue emerges. Despite my contention that the Corinthian “wise men” have developed their philosophy in concert with Stoic philosophy, admittedly it is not Stoic philosophy *tout court*. Rather, the wise have filtered Paul’s *Christian message* through *Stoic categories*, whereupon they have developed, informally and unsystematically, what may be called either a “Stoicized Christianity” or a “Christianized Stoicism.” Yet, is this not simply “syncretism,” that meld of Greco-Roman philosophical or religious elements with primitive Christianity to produce what is neither the one thing nor the other? In bygone days one might have said so, but in more recent times syncretism has come to be differently understood. Malherbe explains:

Such an [i.e., the old] understanding of the matter is increasingly seen to be inadequate. . . . For instance, syncretism is no longer regarded as a process of homogenization in which contributing elements lose their individuality. On the contrary, engagement may very well lead to an accentuation of uniqueness.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers*, 5; cf. Malherbe, “Graeco-Roman Religion and Philosophy and the New Testament,” 6.

That is, Corinthian “wisdom” could consist both of recognizably Stoic and recognizably Christian elements without our having to construe it as an *amorphous* kind of “syncretism.” Rather, their Stoicism may still appear plainly Stoic, even if they have modified it to account, for instance, for a somewhat different understanding of Πνεῦμα. But by the same token, their creed must have remained Christian—for after all, Paul could still appeal to them as ἀδελφοί.

Socio-Economic Perspectives

As for socio-economic explanations, these still retain much of their value. However, we have noted the error of seeing these as mutually exclusive alternatives to philosophical explanations. Instead of posing false dichotomies, we ought to ask how the social position of some within the Corinthian church might even have *abetted* them in their attraction to Stoicism. Indeed, it must be reiterated that in the first century Stoicism was one of only two major players in the philosophical game (the second being Epicureanism), and of these, was by far the greater attraction to the upper classes.¹⁴⁶ Elites were drawn to Stoicism because it seemed to articulate a vision that was already being fulfilled in the Roman Empire: a single world community, established by God’s providence and governed by a common law grounded in universal reason. As such, Stoicism provided a worldview that legitimated the established order and the sense of *Romanitas* that was the heartbeat of elite culture in the colonies. For this reason, it would have been almost the *de facto* philosophy for any social up-and-comer and, indeed, the

¹⁴⁶ See Long, “Roman Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*; and Greg Woolf’s notice in LinkedIn’s “The Poor, the Powerful, and Early Christianity” group, contributing to the discussion “Galinsky’s Taxonomy for Ancient Anxiety Relief,” posted on February 2, 2012; consulted on February 2, 2012.

natural choice for anyone with upwardly mobile aspirations. This fits the situation in Paul's church precisely.

Rhetoric

Ample space has already been given to the question of rhetorical "wisdom" in Corinth (chapter 2). I need only reiterate here that the evidence for that thesis is far weaker than has been thought in the past. Methodologically, the rhetorical thesis relies largely (whether knowingly or unknowingly) on a more dangerous form of mirror-reading in assuming that what Paul forswears for himself (1:17; 2:1, 4) must on all counts be accepted by his opponents, and the center of the controversy to boot. Of course, it *may* be that Paul, in condemning the philosophical wisdom of the Corinthians, *also* repudiates the "wisdom" of rhetoric, or eloquence, in the denials of 1:17; 2:1, 4, 13. However, the question comes short of addressing whether rhetorical wisdom actually took front and center among the issues in Corinth. Rather, our examination of the evidence has led us to the conclusion that these denials would betoken, not the main bone of contention, but rather a broadened application of God's condemnation of one sort of human wisdom (the Stoic philosophy at issue on this particular occasion) so as to embrace also dangerous human wisdom in all its forms. Thus, far from being an indication of the central Corinthian issue, these denials would reflect merely a tangential (and, based on other letters, familiar) corollary of *Paul's response*.

Conclusion

In addressing the underlying causes for the church's divisions, we have looked at every major issue in 1 Corinthians, with especial attention to the Corinthians' catchwords

and slogans on the one hand, and the common threads in their problems on the other. This fuller examination of the evidence has led us to a conclusion which, though partially entertained in the past, has (for reasons summarized in this work's final conclusion) never received complete enough treatment to command wide acceptance: the divisive "wisdom" of the Corinthians resembles most nearly, and consistently, the wisdom of Stoicism.

When we began this chapter I noted that the Stoic thesis would be tested on the full range of issues treated in the letter. Having now run the data through, it is evident that, although some observations remain conjectural, a decided majority of the material reveals compelling Stoic connections, at both the verbal and the conceptual levels. Indeed, all of the Corinthians' catchwords are endemic to or distinctive of the Stoic system (σοφός, σοφία, γνῶσις, λόγος, ἐξουσία, τέλειος vs. νήπιος, πνεύματικός vs. ψύχικος, "knowledgeable" vs. ἀσθενῆς); as many as four of their slogans verbally reflect known Stoic sayings (6:12; 6:13; 6:18; 8:4); and the rest convey conceptually ideas that were uniquely emphasized in Stoicism: freedom, "indifferents," and a kind of anthropological or cosmological dualism (7:1; 8:1; 8:8; 15:12). Our thesis is further strengthened by the fact that Paul frequently deploys arguments that are recognizably Stoic in form, anomalous within his known writings, and often peculiarly adapted to meet the occasion. Simply put, the Stoic thesis has the unique advantage of offering a dominant underlying explanation for the problems that appear across the letter—including most of the Corinthian's exact language and all the major topics that cut across the letter's various parts—rather than explaining only the first four chapters or simply a few carefully selected verses.

Objections could be made. Admittedly, the “wise men” of Corinth were not particularly *good* Stoics, as Paul seems to have been aware. If they were aiming at Stoic indifference, egalitarianism, individualism, freedom, and progress toward “perfection,” they had overshot them all. It is perhaps such an observation that has led scholars like Hans Conzelmann to dismiss the Corinthians’ Stoic language merely as a “terminological starting point.”¹⁴⁷ No doubt, this is the same mentality that has led scholars to the repeated conclusion that, though Paul often sounds like a Stoic, he (in so many words) “means something different by it.”¹⁴⁸ True as it may be in part, this sentiment inadequately explains why we have the Stoic terminology to begin with, and—more importantly—in such a dense, and consistent, configuration. In any case, what I have argued here is not that the wise Corinthians were professional Stoic philosophers, committed wholeheartedly to the unadulterated teachings of Chrysippus, but that they were Christians who had taken both the vocabulary *and* ideas of Stoicism as their interpretive point of departure. Much of the Stoic content remained, but it had been joined with and subtly revised in light of Christian additions. As such, their body of thought was not so much a syncretistic *meld*, as it was a chimera, with original parts still discernible.

This construal also obviates any objections related to the fact that the Corinthians used in a religious sense terminology that apparently had no previous religious connotations, i.e., πνευματικός, ψυχικός, or γνῶσις. Though already familiar in Stoicism,

¹⁴⁷ Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 109.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 195, 200; Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 110n53; 602n12; Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, 339.

these concepts were developed by the Corinthians in a way that was partially *new*, and not wholly derivative.

The final objection is likely to be that several systems of thought seem to have co-potential to explain what is going on in Corinth. The terminology is indistinctive and ambiguous, it is said. We must think of the Corinthians' wisdom as non-specific, a mere collection of popular *topoi* blended from any number of systems of thought. This objection, however, turns out to be largely misguided. To be sure, there *is* overlap with various systems of thought. But Gnostic parallels need no longer be brought into the discussion.¹⁴⁹ As I have shown above, Epicureanism provides little verbal parallel to the Corinthians' language and seems blatantly to contradict their view of the immortal soul. Platonism *per se* is a non-starter because of its low contemporary popularity and inferior explanatory power with respect to precise Corinthian language and topics. The over-realized eschatology thesis has been undermined as overstated, misnamed, and notoriously unspecific. To my mind, the Hellenistic-Jewish and Cynic theses continue to be the best alternatives to the one presented here. Yet, the Hellenistic-Jewish thesis surrenders *all* of its explanatory potential to the source from which Hellenistic Judaism had expropriated its parallel language—Stoicism itself. What remains is the Cynic thesis, which, I have argued, need hardly be seen as an *independent* alternative. Indeed, Cynicism was not a unique philosophical *school* as distinct from the others. Malherbe concisely summarizes the Cynic self-definition:

What made a Cynic was his dress and conduct, self-sufficiency, harsh behavior toward what appeared as excesses, and a practical ethical idealism, but not a detailed arrangement of a system resting on Socratic-Antisthenic principles. The result was that Cynicism was compatible with views that shared its ethical

¹⁴⁹ Though some still do, e.g., Fee, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 252.

demands even if they were at cross purposes with its fundamentally different teaching in other matters.

This means, first, that Cynicism *alone*, divorced from the official doctrines of the schools, is probably insufficient to explain something like, say, the Corinthians' views on death or their understanding of "knowledge" and "weakness." In this regard, Malherbe's definition also cautions us against driving a wedge between Cynicism and Stoicism.

Although not identical, the two did share a close genetic relationship, which proves to be of some consequence for the analysis presented here: the sort of Stoicism assumed in the Corinthian church inclined towards some of Stoicism's more Cynic-oriented traditions.

At this juncture, let me offer what I think is a helpful image for explaining how it is that, if so many plausible interpretations of the Corinthians' wisdom have been given over the years, and many of them overlapping, one of them should be preferred. A "gestalt" image is a configuration or pattern of parts which, though independent in themselves, combine to form a unified whole. Any single part may have multiple interpretations. We may decide, for instance, that we have before us, among other things, a leg; yet that leg could belong to any number of animals. Construing several parts together—for example, the leg along with the rump and a flank—may reduce the number of possible interpretations, but perhaps not to only a single possible assemblage. It is only when all of the parts are considered together that ambiguity dissolves and a distinct image is created. So it is also with the debate over Corinthian wisdom. Of the many obstructions that have stood in the way of a trans-generational consensus, one has been the problem of selectivity (with both the internal and external evidence). Though all would reject this approach in theory, many over the years have manipulated the data into their own unique configurations while ignoring the full picture. Others, however, have erred in assuming

that, because selective configuration of the evidence may yield multiple plausible pictures, no single interpretation can be privileged over another; we must now either simply generalize or view the Corinthians' wisdom as an amalgam of countless systems of thought. The challenge presented on the previous pages, however, has been that partial overlap in terms of the parts does *not* obliterate the distinctiveness of the image as a whole: though Stoicism may not be evident in *every* problem in the letter, though it may overlap with other systems of thought in *select places*, and though an element of human *interpretation* remains, I have contended that, when one compares *all* the *dominating* topics and identifiable Corinthian language *across the whole* of the letter, and through the proper lens of social history, we discover an aggregate image that looks more distinctly like a development of Stoic wisdom than anything else.

If this claim sounds too reductive, we must not forget the time-tested adage that, unless traded for something with greater explanatory power, the simpler explanation is always the best. Of course, it *may* be that other philosophical influences were at work, but at this point we must ask whether they are at all necessary (or even equally probative). As has been shown, what we seem to have before us is a sort of wisdom which certain wealthier Corinthians are in fact likely to have been interested in and had access to in first-century Roman Corinth, which fits with the prevailing first-century meaning of the term "wise man" and his Stoic description, which consistently parallels the Corinthians' language and outlook, which explains Paul's often unique choice of counter rhetoric, *and* which provides a unifying explanation for the wisdom of chapters 1-4 on the one hand,

and the topics of 5-15 on the other.¹⁵⁰ In short, if Stoicism provided the terms in which Paul's preaching was understood by some in Corinth, it was then but a short step to *any* of the Corinthians' known language or positions—nothing that cannot be accounted for as innovations made right within this Pauline church.

¹⁵⁰ With the permission of the *Journal of Theological Studies*, this sentence has been revised from my earlier article "The Wise Corinthians: Their Stoic Education and Outlook," *JTS* 62 (2011): 51-76, esp. 52. Where changes have been made, the present form should be preferred.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

Previous examinations of the wisdom in 1 Corinthians have focused sharply on chapters 1-4, and within these chapters, on the unit found in 2:1-5. After the present examination, however, the fruit of wider investigation should now be evident. We have seen from the *pattern* of the Corinthians' language and problems that extend throughout the *whole* of the letter that the "wise man" among the Corinthians is not so much the *sophist* as he is the *Stoic*. The divisions in the church have been fomented primarily by a small group of Stoic-thinking and relatively wealthy Christians, who have translated Paul's gospel message into Stoic categories and denigrated the inferior majority.

Many of the reasons why this thesis has not yet received its due attention have become evident along the way. We have seen that a major reason was the wide disillusionment with literary parallels that overcame the guild in the mid twentieth century. When the bathwater of Gnosticism was, rightly, thrown out, the outlines of a Stoic thesis unfortunately went with it. Of course, there remain those who have compared the Corinthians with Hellenistic-Jewish wise men, Epicureans, Stoics, or Cynics, but these are theses which the dominating discourse of present scholarship has been wont to discard. Particular religious or philosophical systems are said to be too specific. At best we can speak of a popular trend consisting of multiple philosophical influences. As enlightened as such statements are meant to sound, however, we have seen that they reflect only a partial grasp of the evidence. The positions of the Corinthians may seem to reflect "multiple" philosophical influences because there was overlap in the doctrines of

the philosophical schools *themselves*. But *partial* overlap, owing to common philosophical heritage, hardly vitiates *overall* distinctiveness. Stoicism did not cease to be a distinctive school of philosophy because it shared with the Academics similar views on the virtues, and with the Epicureans similar views on the senses, and with both a common stock of language. Likewise, the Corinthian perspective did not cease to be peculiarly Stoic simply because it overlapped to some extent with other systems of thought. The upshot of our examination has been that, while semblances of the other philosophies appear *here or there*, only Stoicism shows itself *from the beginning of the letter to the end*. Unless it can be shown that some other system has the same exhaustive potential to explain the evidence, *and in an equally satisfactory fashion*, the appeal to (limited) overlap must be regarded simply as a red herring.

A second reason for neglect of the Stoic thesis has been an (ironically) untoward shift in methodology. Trading one fallacious method for another, many scholars have moved from focusing almost solely (and often anachronistically) on literary parallels, to mirror-reading from Paul's own rhetoric. Our return to literary parallels here, though now within proper social and chronological context, has led to some startling differences with recent conclusions, because it has meant essentially a paradigm shift in what texts are used as the basis for reconstruction. Indeed, whereas the rhetorical thesis mirror-read its conclusions from Paul's statements in texts like 2:1-5 (his alleged repudiation of rhetoric), 4:5 (his defense against those who have purportedly "judged" his standing as an orator), and chapter 9 (his defense as in 4:5), I have tried to focus on the language and problems more properly imputed to the *Corinthians themselves*. The result has been a total reversal in how the letter is understood: 2:1-5, 4:5, ch. 9, and the like, arguably say

less about the Corinthians than they do about *Paul* (cf. 1 Thess 1:5). Conversely, when we turn our eyes to the texts that actually speak to the Corinthians' views, we see nothing of rhetoric, and everything of philosophy. The rhetorical thesis, it seems, had been built on sand.

A series of false dichotomies has also served the oversight. Recent books have told us—in these exact words—that the Corinthians' wisdom was that of “rhetoric, *not* philosophy,” that their divisions were “social, *not* theological (or philosophical),” and that their city was “Roman, *not* Greek.” All of these dichotomies have been found either ill-defined, overstated, or simply untrue, if not even guilty of foregone conclusions. As we have seen, all have unfortunately *also* served to sideline philosophy from the discussion.

We have further been told that, since ancient students were not introduced to philosophy at the lower stages of literate education, which were focused almost exclusively on rhetoric, Pauline church members would not have had any serious acquaintance with it. However, our present assessment of the Corinthian church in the light of the most recent studies on ancient economy compels us to qualify this conclusion. This church contained several individuals who were higher up on the social ladder, perhaps at the level of Longenecker's “ES4” bracket. These could easily have studied philosophy from the epitomes in circulation, as they almost certainly would have been literate. I have also shown, however, that many at this level, and perhaps even some below, would have had access to a so-called “elite” education in the gymnasium. Following this trail has led us to some tantalizing “Erastus evidence” that has not previously been brought into the discussion: outside the NT, the only two Erasti known at

all in in first-century Greece are attested as gymnasium affiliates. Whether one of these went on to be οἰκόνομος in Paul's Corinth we may never know, but the extreme rarity of the name and the otherwise unlikely coincidence in location and social station make it difficult not to give some credence to the possibility.

Perhaps a less obvious reason for the oversight is the way in which the rhetoric-philosophy dynamic has played out in the history of the Church and in western history generally. The Church quickly took up Plato's mantle in railing against rhetoric as "mere eloquence,"¹ in favor of wisdom's true *content*, philosophy. By St. Augustine's day, and then on through the Medieval tradition, Christianity was in fact a *philosophy* and the Christian believer the true "lover of wisdom," or *philosopher*.² Though Augustine believed that rhetoric too might be pressed into the gospel's service,³ this did not prevent Plato's characterization of rhetoric as flashy in form and vacant in content from enduring throughout most of western history, in ecclesiastical and secular contexts alike.⁴ In that regard, having now looked more carefully (and exhaustively) at the evidence of 1 Corinthians, we might ask whether the rhetorical interpretation has not been influenced more by our deep-rooted suspicion of sophistry and traditional sympathies with philosophy than it has by the actual evidence at hand: the haughty purveyor of claptrap

¹ See for example Theodoret of Cyrus on 1 Cor 1:17: "preaching is a gift given to a few, and it must not be confused with *mere eloquence*, which is purely superficial" (*The Church's Bible*, 12; my italics).

² See *Civ.* 19.

³ On the usefulness of rhetoric, see Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*.

⁴ For a survey on the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy in western history, see Samuel Ijsseling, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Conflict* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976), 41-136.

seems far more deserving of our stones than does our sober, truth-telling ally, the philosopher.

The final reason for the oversight is that most treatments of 1 Corinthians have been deplorably (if understandably) parochial in focus. This has meant not only that the merely *partial* treatment of the evidence from those advocating the rhetorical thesis has been found convincing enough, but also that the Stoic thesis itself has never received a full and detailed exposition. But no longer can we be content to build an entire reconstruction off of the shaky foundation of chapters 1-4, or worse, 2:1-5. Here I have tried to draw all the evidence together for the first time, evincing both the Stoic undercurrents that seem to have been at work in all the letter's dominating topics *and* the plausibility of the Stoic thesis vis-à-vis the social background of the Corinthian church. The cumulative weight of the evidence has mounted a formidable alternative to the previously regnant rhetorical thesis.

In closing, it should be said that several issues we have touched upon command further attention. The question of Stoicism in Paul's thought continues to loom large. The fact that the Corinthians could hear him in Stoic terms is itself evidence of resemblance. And then for him to posture as a Stoic in response—what of this? Is it mere “formal similarity”? Or should this prompt us to jettison the notion that there is any “intrinsic difference” between Paul and the Stoics altogether, as Engberg-Pedersen has challenged?⁵ Probably a more balanced treatment awaits. The present analysis supports the conclusion that Paul was rather a man of many worlds, capable of shifting between

⁵ Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 11.

them at need, but never abandoning his essential, and largely distinctive, Christian convictions.

These conclusions also demand a fresh consideration for the contours of the Corinthian correspondence, and especially the relationship between 1 and 2 Corinthians. If past consensus has been right that the two letters (or three, if 2 Corinthians is composite) are prompted by rather different occasions, the present argument gives us now further reason to rethink the extent to which “sophistic” concerns cut across them: the immediate controversy in which the church was embroiled and Paul’s concern for his own public perception should probably not be collapsed.

For now, I hope only to have set the winds of change in motion regarding the Corinthians’ wisdom. If my examination of the evidence has been accurate, acceptance of the rhetorical thesis should begin to flag and the windfall should go to philosophy. But whether the present thesis in fact sails on smoothly from here—that will depend upon the extent of its acceptance. And that judgment shall have to be left to the wise.

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