"2 Corinthians 11:22: Historical context, rhetoric, and ethnicity"

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Abstract

In this article historical criticism, rhetorical criticism and ethnicity theory are combined to interpret Paul's boasting about his ethnicity in 2 Corinthians 11:22. Partition theory helps to establish the historical/social context that 2 Corinthians 10-13 is a fragment of the "tearful letter," which represented the low point (high conflict) of Paul's relations with the Corinthians. Rhetoric – the theatrical "Fool's Speech," which contains irony, self-praise, and comparison – helps to understand Paul's boastful argumentation in his self-defence; and ethnicity theory helps to interpret Paul's construction of his ethnic identity. Paul boasted of his ethnicity by taking up rhetorical comparison and self-praise. But he did so in the so-called "Fool's Speech", which is full of irony: his ethnic heritage was part of his argument that he was equal to that of his opponents, but – here is the chief irony – his ethnicity "in the flesh" ultimately meant nothing to him.

1. INTRODUCTION

To outsider observers "ethnic cleansing" is one of the horrors of the modern world. From nineteenth-century Native American death marches to more recent atrocities in places such as Cambodia, Kosovo, and Rwanda, sensitive people are stunned by the shocking violence human beings can commit against other human beings. Ethnic conflict is not just a modern phenomenon, however; it is also ancient. It is wed with ethnocentrism (Craffert 1996:449-468), sometimes in the form of religiocentrism and, as Jan Assmann has reminded us, exclusivist monotheism in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, has been a major contributor to ethnocentrism among Jews, Christians, and Muslims down through the centuries. "Monotheistic religions structure the relationship between the old the new in terms not of evolution but of

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revolution, and reject all older and other religions as 'paganism' or 'idolatry.' Monotheism always appears as a counter-religion" (Assman 1997:7).

The purpose of this article is to examine an ancient statement about ethnicity, Paul's reference in 2 Corinthians 11:22. In its immediate context it reads:

> [21b]But whatever any one dares to boast of – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast of that. [22]*Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.* [23a] Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one ....

In this passage Paul boasts of his ethnicity. My procedure in this study will be, first, to note Paul's conflicts with the Corinthians from two perspectives: historical criticism and rhetorical criticism. Then I look at Paul's rhetorical strategy in 2 Corinthians 10-13 as a context for 2 Corinthians 11:22. I add social-scientific perspectives, especially ethnicity theory, as a way to understand his ethnicity comment from a broader perspective. Finally, I weave together these historical, literary, rhetorical, and social-scientific threads to illumine more precisely how Paul uses his ethnicity as a support for his self-defence in conflict with his opponents at Corinth.

2. HISTORICAL CRITICISM: THE COMPOSITE LETTER APPROACH

Historical critics have attempted to interpret Paul's conflicts with the Corinthians by seeing 2 Corinthians as composite. They isolate letter fragments, determine their logical and chronological sequence, and then correlate them with Paul's statements about his movements and comparable statements in Acts.

A widely accepted historical reconstruction is based on the partition theory of Günther Bornkamm (1971:76-77). After establishing the Corinthian church (Ac 18:1-18a) and returning to Antioch (Ac 18:18b-22), Paul went to Ephesus (Ac 19:1-20:1) where he wrote the earliest Corinthian letters (1 Cor 16:8). He composed a "Previous Letter" that did not survive (1 Cor 5:9), received oral and written communications from the Corinthians about problems at Corinth (1 Cor 1:11; 1 Cor 7:1), and responded with his advice in 1 Corinthians, delivered by Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; cf Ac 19:22). Most scholars view 1 Corinthians as a unity, a single letter (Mitchell 1991).

2 Corinthians, however, has usually been seen to contain letter fragments because it contains certain grammatical breaks and content shifts. Firstly, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 does not fit its context well and has very un-Pauline-sounding dualistic themes similar to ideas found in the Dead Sea

Scrolls (Bornkamm 1971:76-77; Fitzmyer 1961:271-280). When 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 is removed from its context, the previous verse, 6:13, continues smoothly at 7:2. 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 must therefore be a non-Pauline fragment.[2] Secondly, there are also noticeable grammatical and content shifts at 2 Cor 2:14 (a thanksgiving) and at 2 Corinthians 7:5 (a Macedonian itinerary; cf 2 Cor 2:13), suggesting that 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 (excluding the non-Pauline 2 Cor 6:14-7:1) is unit. In this section Paul portrays himself as an advance processional herald;[3] his statements reveal his developing conflict with the Corinthians. In the surrounding passages (2 Cor 1:1-2:13; 7:5-16 [see also 2 Cor 13:11-13]), however, Paul's tone is conciliatory. Then, in chapter 8, Paul shifts to discussion of the collection of money for the poor at Jerusalem and in chapter 9 he suddenly talks about it again as though it had never been mentioned in chapter 8. This duplication suggests two more separate letters (Betz 1985). Finally, chapter 10 launches into Paul's angry self-defence, which continues through chapter 13. These observations lead to the isolation of six letter fragments, five from Paul himself:

(1) 1:1-2:13&7:5-16 (13:11-13)	Paul attempts reconciliation
(2) 2:14-6:13&7:2-4	developing conflict
(3) 6:14-7:1	*non-Pauline-sounding dualism*
(4) 8	the collection
(5) 9	the collection again
(6) 10-13	high conflict

The most important sequential question is this: why would Paul attempt reconciliation (no 1) before the conflict develops (no 2) and reaches a boiling point (no 6)? Historical critical scholars have commonly responded by rearranging the order of the five Pauline fragments:

(1) 2:14-6:13&7:2-4	developing conflict
(2) 10-13	high conflict
(3) 1:1-2:13&7:5-16 (13:11-13)	Paul attempts reconciliation
(4) 8	the collection
(5) 9	the collection again

[2] More detailed arguments are in Duff (1993:161). Hester (2002:276) notes scholars of introductions who have accepted this view: Koester, Davies, Duling & Perrin, Barr, Freed, Ehrman, and Harris (n 1); among other scholars he cites Furnish, Schmithals, Bornkamm, Hurd, and Barrett. Betz (1973) holds that it is an anti-Pauline fragment.

[3] Duff (1993:165) cites a number of scholars who think that Paul considered himself to be an advance herald of the epiphany procession in 2 Corinthians 2:14-7:4 (see 2 Cor 2:14-16; 4:6; 4:10; 5:14ff; 6:13; 7:2); thus, Paul cries "open up," "make way" (2 Cor 6:13; 7:2a) to separate the unbelievers from the "the temple of the living God", the true Christian believers.

This revised sequence allows for further literary and historical reconstruction. Titus, having urged the Corinthians to hurry up the collection for the poor at Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:5-6; 9:2; 12:18; cf Gl 2:10), informed Paul at Ephesus that Paul's authority was being challenged by rival missionaries, whom Paul called "superapostles" (2 Cor 3:1; 11:4-5, 13, 22; 12:11). Paul made a "painful visit" to Corinth (2 Cor 2:1; 12:14, 21; 13:1), which included an attack on him by some unnamed Corinthian, mentioned in the reconciliation fragment (2 Cor 1:1-2:13 & 7:5-16 [13:11-13]). He referred in particular to "the one to whom the wrong was done (*tou adikēthentos*)", that is, Paul himself, and "the one who did the wrong (*tou* adik*ēsantos*)", that is, an unnamed offender (2 Cor 7:12). He returned to Ephesus and wrote what he called a "letter of tears" (2 Cor 2:3-4; 7:8) at the height of the conflict, perhaps delivered by Titus (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-7). Part of this letter is Paul's angry self-defence in 2 Corinthians 10-13.[4] Paul was imprisoned in Ephesus (2 Cor 1:8-11), wrote Philippians and Philemon, and after being released, rejoined Titus at Troas and learned from him that the conflict at Corinth had subsided (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:5-16). Paul now wrote a "letter of reconciliation" (2 Cor 1:1-2:13 & 7:5-17) offering instructions about disciplining the person who had offended him (2 Cor 2:5-8). He then wrote two separate letters about the collection from Macedonia (2 Cor 8 & 9), went to Corinth a third time (cf Ac 20:2-3), and gathered the collection to take to Jerusalem.

In this reconstruction Paul's statement about his ethnicity in 2 Cor 11:22 is located in the midst of Paul's "tearful letter." Historically it is a statement supporting his self-defence against the "superapostles" and their challenge to his authority at Corinth when the conflict had developed and reached its height.

3. RHETORICAL CRITICISM: THE UNIFIED LETTER APPROACH

Especially since Hans Dieter Betz's Galatians commentary (Betz 1979), Paul's letters have been analyzed increasingly from the perspective of ancient Hellenistic rhetoric (Fiore 1992:715-719), which Aristotle sub-divided into three types: judicial rhetoric (courtroom), deliberative rhetoric (political assembly debate), and epideictic rhetoric (praise and blame).[5] This exegetical approach requires accepting the view that although Paul was an artisan, he had acquired a Greek education at least up to the secondary school level, and

[4] Duff (1993:160-163) lists some scholars who have held this passage as non-Pauline; they include Fitzmyer, Bornkamm, Gnilka, Bultmann, Koester, Bornkamm, Betz, and Hurd. Betz (1973) thinks that it is anti-Pauline. Other defenders of the "tearful letter" theory are Francis Watson (1984) and more recently, Welborn (1995). Duff thinks that either Paul, or a later editor added the passage to interpret Paul's own self-portrait in 2:14-7:4.

[5] Aristotle, *Rhet* I.3.3-5.

probably higher. Some rhetorical critics argue that the abrupt shifts in grammar, tone, and content in 2 Corinthians should be interpreted not as signs of letter fragments, but as indicators of rhetorical strategies. Certainly 1 Corinthians, Philippians, and Romans, can be seen as a unity (Osiek 2000; Mitchell 1991; Pogoloff 1992; Litfin 1995; Witherington & Hyatt 2004). While scholars have been slower to take up 2 Corinthians from this perspective – the atypical, dualistic fragment in 6:14-7:1 is especially testy and Betz himself argued that it, as well as 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, are separate letter sections – a few recent scholars have now begun to interpret 2 Corinthians as a unity (Murphy-O'Connor 1987; Young & Ford 1987; Danker 1991; Witherington 1995; Amador 2000; Matera 2003; Long 2004). J David Hester Amador's general observation illustrates the point (Hester 2002:93-94):

> … the many argumentative shifts [in 2 Corinthians] need not at all represent independent sources. To the contrary, they display a complex web of modalities, deictic relations, and argumentative strategies that build upon one another, presage, fulfill, and develop threads according to the presumed and anticipated reception of the letter.

Concretely, some rhetorical critics note that there is no evidence for letter fragments in the ancient manuscripts of 2 Corinthians. They also observe that the putative "letter of tears" (2 Cor 10-13) focuses on the opponents' challenge to Paul's apostolic authority, but never mentions the person who offended him in the supposed reconciliation fragment (2 Cor 7:12; 2:5-8). Most typical are specific rhetorical critical arguments, such as:

- The Dead Sea Scrolls-sounding dualistic passage 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 can be seen to fit its context if one takes account of Paul's rhetorical flexibility (*inventio*), his use of insider-outsider contrasts elsewhere (1 Th; Rm 1-2; Gl), and his framing techniques (e.g. Rm 5:18-21 [6-7] 8:1-2; Gl 5:1 [5:2-12] 5:13-15) (Amador 2000:101-102).

- The putative letter of reconciliation (2 Cor 1:1-2:13 & 7:5-16 [13:11-13]) and the presumed letter of growing conflict (2 Cor 2:14-6:13 & 7:2-4) are not separate letter fragments, either. The shift between 2 Corinthians 2:13 and 2 Corinthians 2:14 is not sharp (Murphy-O'Connor 1985), and 2:14 is not a separate thanksgiving introducing the growing conflict letter, but rather an introduction of an *argumentative strategy* based on the "triumphal procession."[6] Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 2:14-

[6] The "epiphany procession" above, number 7.

7:4 contains anticipations (*insinuatio*) of what is rhetorically the climactic chapter, 2 Corinthians 10-13.[7]

- Chapters 8 and 9 are not independent units, but an example of *paralepsis*, that is, a covert reminder that repeats a theme while claiming paradoxically that repetition is unnecessary (Amador 2000:107)

- The shift in content and tone in chapters 10-13 is related to views already hinted at (*insinuatio*) in scattered verses in chapters 1-9,[8] not to a separate letter fragment with a different message. Indeed, the "tearful letter" is probably lost forever (Witherington 1995:329-30; For a resurrection of the nineteenth century argument that the "tearful letter" is 1 Corinthians, see Hall 2003).

Rhetorical critics claim that if Paul's rhetorical strategies in 2 Corinthians are taken into account, letter fragments disappear. Indeed, chapters 1-9 prepare for the harsh rhetorical shift in 10-13, which is the climax, the natural conclusion of the former. In this interpretation, one would have to look for the meaning of Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 11:22 in relation to the *narratio* of 2 Corinthians as a whole.

4. A COMPROMISE: BOTH HISTORICAL AND RHETORICALAPPROACHES

These two approaches represent different temperaments, as well as methods. Some rhetorical critics claim that rhetorical criticism is the "new wave" and that they understand ancient rhetorical conventions and letter writing better than historical critics do. They say that their view offers integrity to Paul's letters as they now stand in the canon. Yet, historical critics remain tenacious about interpreting certain radical grammatical and content issues and attempting to understand Paul's reconstructed historical and social context. Challenges from other methods in recent decades – one thinks of structuralists,

[7] Witherington (1995:229-31) notes as examples 2:17, "peddlers of God's word"; 3:1, letters of recommendation mentioned; 4:2, Paul denounces cunning rhetoric; 5:12, an apology for self-praise; 5:21 & 6:3, Paul is not an obstacle to reconciliation; 6:4-5, negative *peristasis* catalogue; 7:2: Paul does not take advantage.

[8] Amador (2000:99) notes: "confidence" (1:23-2:11; 3:1-4:6); boasting (1:12-14; 7:6-16), "obedience" in connection with "testing" (1:23-2:11, see also 1:9; 6:11; 9:13); "building up"/"tearing down" (4:7-6:10); *peristasis* catalogue (1:3-11; 4:8-11; 5-6; 7:5; 8:2); being "beside oneself" (5:13); and the argumentative Satan (2:11; cf 6:15); the total human versus divine narrative; and the Macedonia-Titus-"brother" *narratio*.

Aristotelian literary critics, narrative critics, and linguistic analysts – have not totally destroyed historical criticism, despite certain of its positivist and Modernist presuppositions.

In my view, the composite theory should not be dismissed simply as outdated Modernism. To dispense with the historical critical view runs the risk of falling prey to a "ruling hypothesis", that is, what is to be proven, namely, Paul's literary/rhetorical strategy and the "integrity" of Paul's letters, is already assumed. Of course, the same ruling hypothesis criticism could be made from the literary critical side. The point is that both approaches have important hermeneutical presuppositions and both are useful interpretative tools. Both can be used together.

To illustrate the possibilities, consider the problem that 2 Cor 10-13 – what historical critics' call Paul's letter of angry self-defence – does not mention the person whom Paul says offended him, a point stressed by literary/rhetorical critics. As Laurence Welborn (1995) argued, this historical problem can be solved by means understanding a rhetorical convention:

> One who wished to defend what was said or done in a manner that restored relations, avoided insofar as possible discussion of the source of strife. Only so much is said of the cause of conflict as is necessary in order to explain that it was not the author's purpose to give offence. This simple principle is observed whenever the aim of a writing is conciliatory, whatever the rhetorical species. It is the response appropriate to the situation.
>
> The convention is in keeping with the understanding of reconciliation in the Greco-Roman world: reconciliation was held to consist in an act of *deliberate forgetfulness* (my emphasis).

Just as Betz considered chapters 8 and 9 as discrete letter fragments but interpreted them with ancient rhetoric, in what follows I shall consider 10-13 as part of the "tearful letter," but draw on ancient rhetoric to interpret it as a context for 11:22 (see Welborn 1995). Thus, 2 Corinthians 10-13 as part of Paul's "tearful letter" represents carefully formulated rhetorical responses at the height of Paul's conflict with the Corinthians. It is filled with especially judicial and epideictic rhetoric. Paul *accuses* his opponents, *defends* himself, and *boasts* of his human heritage and qualifications while ironically claiming to boast "only in the Lord". Throughout Paul is defending his honour (Watson 2002). Christopher Forbes states that Paul uses three important rhetorical strategies in his defence: irony, self-praise, and comparison (See Forbes 1986). These will be most helpful for interpreting Paul's ethnic statement in 11:22.

5. IRONY (*EIRŌNEIA*): "THE FOOL" AND HIS SPEECH

The term "irony" (*eirōneia*) was more precise in Hellenistic usage than it is in modern English usage (Forbes 1986:10; Witherington 1995:443). The author of Pseudo-Aristotle's "Rhetoric to Alexander" said, "[i]rony is saying something while pretending not to say it, or calling things by the opposite of their real names" (Forbes 1986: 10).[9] The person using irony (the *eirōn*) might, for example, pretend to be modest, but is actually immodest. Although Plato admired Socrates' pretended humility (Forbes 1986:10),[10] most ancient rhetoricians objected to false modesty, especially because it pointed to avoiding responsibility. Quintilian considered open boasting more tolerable than irony.[11]

Yet, the rhetoricians also recognized that in certain situations irony could be an excellent rhetorical strategy. Pseudo-Aristotle says, "In vituperations also you should employ irony, and ridicule your opponent for the things on which he prides himself."[12] A specific example is that if one had been poorly treated and experienced "indignation" (*barutēs*), irony was a reasonable rhetorical response (Forbes 1986:12-13).[13]

There are excellent analyses of irony in 2 Corinthians 10-13 (see Betz 1970; Judge 1968; Forbes 1986; Welborn 1999; Holland 1993). I shall restrict myself mostly to one of the most distinctive illustrations, namely, Paul's self-portrait as "the fool" and his composition of the "Fool's Speech".

Long ago Hans Windisch suggested that in 2 Corinthians 10-13 Paul was playing the role of the "boaster" or "braggart" (*ho aladzōn*), a fool's role about which Paul had learned from his personal experience of mime in the theatre (Windisch 1924:363-64). Lawrence Welborn has taken Windisch's suggestion seriously and tracked the fool profile in many ancient sources (Welborn 1999; cf Zmijewski 1978). In the theatre the fool appeared barefoot, bald headed, often with exaggerated facial nose and ears, and sometimes with a prominent phallus. He did not usually wear a mask, but donned a short frock and colourful tunic. He became a caricature of ugly, grotesque realism, a role calculated to make Mediterranean audiences laugh. The fool sometimes made his appearance to entertain guests at private banquets. He could also be found at street fairs and in marketplaces. He is portrayed on terra-cotta

[9] Ps Aristotle, *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1434a and 1441b 23.

[10] Plato, *Republic*, 337a.

[11] Quintilian, *Institutes*, 8.VI.57-59; 11.I.20.

[12] Ps Aristotle, *op cit.*

[13] Hermogenes, *On Rhetorical Forms*, 2.VIII.

statues and on vase paintings. There were even fool subtypes: the leading slave, the braggart warrior, the foolish old man, and the learned impostor. It is possible that these caricatures lay behind Paul's description of the "superapostles" as fools in 2 Corinthians 11:20: "For you bear it if a man makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face." Be that as it may, Welborn thinks it very likely that Paul had learned about the jesting buffoon in comedies he had read at school.

In addition to his comment about the fool Windisch also suggested that 2 Corinthians 11:21b-12:10 was a "Fool's Speech" and that it had a Preface in 11:1-21a (cf Zmijewski 1978). Wherever Paul learned about the fool, there can be no doubt that he is consciously "speaking like a fool" in this section – he says so several times explicitly – and that his rhetorical technique includes irony (Forbes 1986; Lambrecht 2001). Thus, it is possible to analyze the rhetorical strategy of the Fool's Speech further. Several points can be noted.

As advance warning for his Fool's Speech, Paul establishes some ground rules for "boasting" in 2 Corinthians 10. He says that he will not "boast beyond limit" (2 Cor 10:13), that is, of work done by others (2 Cor 10:16b), and, echoing Jeremiah, that his boasting will be only "of the Lord" (2 Cor 10:17; Jr 9:23-24) (Hafemann 1990; Holland 1993:253). His self-imposed limitation will be stated again in the Fool's Speech itself when he says that he does not boast of himself, but only of his weakness (2 Cor 11:23; 12:5) (Long 2004:186-87). This later comment echoes Christ's weakness-as-power (Savage 1996) and, indeed, the paradox that "God's foolishness" in the crucifixion is God's true wisdom (1 Cor 1:18-25). Yet, under the right conditions Paul breaks his rule. Likewise, he says that he will not use comparison, the rhetorical strategy of his opponents (2 Cor 10:12-13). Yet, again, under the right conditions he breaks his rule: he, too, will play the fool – and he also uses comparison!

In the Prologue to the Fool's Speech (2 Cor 11:1-21a) Paul uses the terms "fool" and "foolish" six times.[14] He warns his readers that he will boast like a fool:

> I repeat, let no one think me a fool (*aphrona*, "foolish"); but even if you do, accept me as a fool (*aphrona*, "foolish"), so that I too may boast a little. (What I am saying I say not with the Lord's authority but in foolishness [*en aphrosynē*], in this boastful confidence; …"
>
> (2 Cor 11:16-17; see 11:21)

[14] 2 Corinthians 11:1, 17, 21 (*aphrosynē*, "foolishness"); 11:16 [2x], 19 (*aphrōn*, "foolish").

Yet, in the Fool's Speech proper (2 Cor 11:21b-12:10) Paul says that he will not be a fool because he wants to speak the truth (2 Cor 12:6). Nonetheless, again he proceeds to boast and again he warns the Corinthians about his boasting, this time stating that he has been forced into it (2 Cor 12:11). Holland (1993:256) concludes: "Everything he says then may be expected to be self-contradictory, worldly, self-congratulatory, boastful."

Paul's use of irony can be spotted in several verses. In 2 Corinthians 11:19 Paul says: "For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves!" Most commentators have taken this statement to be ironic, that is, the Corinthians are not wise in bearing with the "superapostles" as fools (Spencer 1981:358; see Holland 1993:256-57).[15] Immediately thereafter, when he claims not to have been a fool who caused them to suffer like the "superapostles", he says, "To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that!" (2 Cor 11:21a). This is a clear case of irony, since elsewhere it is precisely his weakness "in the Lord" that is the occasion for his boasting. This statement immediately precedes Paul's boast about his ethnicity, the focus of attention here.

6. SELF-PRAISE (*PERIAUTOLOGIA*)

In Greco-Roman literature self-praise (*periautologia*, "to speak about oneself") was usually considered offensive, something to be avoided. Lucian, for example, offers a caricature of the popular teacher by having him recommend to his student, "… if anyone accosts you, make marvellous assertions about yourself, be extravagant in your self-praise, and make yourself a nuisance to him …"[16] For Lucian, such boasting was offensive.

Nonetheless, rhetoricians permitted the use of self-praise under certain conditions.[17] These conditions are set out in Plutarch's key document, "*On praising oneself inoffensively*" (Marshall 1987:353-54; Watson 2002:269-73).[18] *One may praise oneself inoffensively*:

[15] Holland is not so certain of the irony in this case, since the wise "suffer fools gladly"; yet, he admits that in their wisdom they may have misunderstood. For his discussion of ironic intention and the difficulty of isolating irony in familiar texts, see Holland (2000).

[16] Lucian, "A Professor of Public Speaking", 13.21.

[17] Witherington's comment that "[s]elf-admiration and self-praise were *de rigeur* in Greco-Roman society, especially for those who wanted to raise their social status and social evaluation in the eyes of others" (p 432) needs to be nuanced in light of Plutarch and his predecessors.

[18] Plutarch, *Moralia*.

- if it promotes a worthy end;
- if one is defending one's good name against slander, or when in peril or on trial;
- if speaking otherwise would have been shameful;
- if one hopes to inspire others to good behaviour when it is for their own good;
- if one needs to curb or humiliate the obstinate and impetuous;
- if it is necessary to intimidate one's enemies and raise the spirits of one's friends; and
- if it is necessary to direct the hearer to a better course of action when (s)he has been led to imitate those who honour good rather than evil.

Should these conditions prevail, several strategies for praising oneself are possible:

- give some of the credit to God and chance;
- stress more moderate virtues such as an honourable character or noble life, rather than wealth, power, and eloquence; and
- moderate self-praise by referring to minor flaws.

Paul could not have known the writings of Plutarch, but earlier rhetoricians made some of the same claims,[19] and Paul could have learned these ideas in his rhetorical education. In any case, from Paul's perspective, such conditions were present. He had been slandered as not being a true apostle, as writing strong letters but lacking oral rhetorical skills, as crafty, weak and lacking in charisma. He was being inconsistent, and perhaps he was being labelled a flatterer (*kolax*).[20] To protect his honour, it was imperative that he defend himself. He was willing – with a certain amount of irony – to use self-praise. Demosthenes claimed that he was forced to speak about himself (see Long 2004:186);[21] similarly, Paul claimed that his opponents forced him into it (12:11). Furthermore, Paul used technical "defence speech" language when he spoke of talking "on behalf (*hyper*) of himself" (11:23; 12:5) (Long 2004:186-87). The hoped-for result was to direct the Corinthians to a better course of action, to good behaviour, and to a worthy end.

[19] Long (2004:91-95) notes "self-adulation" as a common legal defence in writers such as Lysias, Hermagoras, Hyperides, and Antiphon, and in speeches by Demosthenes, Isaeus, and others.

[20] As in Plutarch's *How to tell a friend from a flatterer.*

[21] Demosthenes, *On the crown*, 321.

Clearly, Paul's boast about his ethnicity in 11:22 is an example or rhetorical self-praise.

7. COMPARISON (*SYNKRISIS*)

Aristotle laid the groundwork for understanding *synkrisis* – comparison (and contrast) – in especially two ways: as a tool of defence in forensic rhetoric and especially as a means of amplification (*auxēsis*) in epideictic rhetoric (Forbes 1986:2-3; cf Mack 1989).[22] Although a number of ancient rhetoricians discuss comparison, the following comments in the *Progymnasmata* of Aelius Theon may be taken as representative:

> Comparison (*synkrisis*) is a form of speech which contrasts the better and the worse. Comparisons are drawn between people, and between things …. When one distinguishes between people, one takes into consideration their acts, but if there is anything else of merit about them, then the one method would suffice for both.
>
> Firstly it should be noted that comparisons are not drawn between things which are vastly different from each other ….
>
> In the comparison of people, one firstly juxtaposes their status, education, offspring, positions held, prestige and physique; if there is any other physical matter or external merit, it should be stated beforehand in the material for the *encomia*.
>
> Next one compares actions, preferring the finer ones and those responsible for more numerous and greater benefits.
>
> (Forbes 1986:6)[23]

In short, comparisons of people involve physiognomic stereotypes, ethnicity, and social rank.

As previously noted, Paul says that he will not stoop to make use comparison as his opponent "superapostles" do. Yet, he does precisely that. To illustrate Paul's scattered use of *synkrisis*, consider some of his contrasts between the "superapostles" and himself in 2 Corinthians, both in ideas and actions.

[22] *Rhetorica* 1393b 4, 1419b 35.

[23] Theon, *Progymnasmata*.

Superapostles	Paul
Preach "another Jesus" (11:4)	Preaches Christ crucified
Commend themselves (self-praise) by comparing themselves to each other (10:12-12)	Boasts and compares, but stresses what the Lord commends (praises) counts most.
"their boasted mission" (11:12)	Paul boasts of his authority as a fool, yet of his weakness (10:8; 12;9-10); he boasts "of the Lord" (10:17)
Offer a "different spirit" (11:4)	The Corinthians received the (true) spirit from Paul (11:4)
Offer a "different gospel" (11:4)	The Corinthians accepted Paul's gospel (11:4), the crucified Christ (13:4)
Sufferings (probably in the form of a *peristasis* catalogue)	Sufferings of the servant: *Peristasis* catalogue (11:23-27)
(Apostolic tradition of support? E.g, Q 10; *Didachē*)	Supports self by trade; received support from Macedonia (11:9)
Accusation: They say that Paul writes strong letters, but is rhetorically unskilled in speaking (10:10; ; 11:6)	Defence: "my letters do seem to be frightening you" (10:9); "we do when present what we say when absent" (10:11); "even if unskilled in speaking, not in knowledge" (11:6)
(another Jesus?)	Visions and revelations of the Lord, yet thorn in flesh (12:1-8)
(another spirit?)	Heavenly travel and divine words (12:2-3)
Weak	Power perfect in weakness (12:9-10)
(performed miracles)	Signs of an apostle performed among you: signs, wonders, mighty works (12:12)
Paul is crafty, with guile (12:16)	Titus and I acted in the same spirit in not taking advantage of you (12:17-18); we did not take advantage, put on airs, strike you in the face (11:20)
(They have only recently come)	We were the first to come to you (10:14)

One may also note from the letter of growing conflict (2:14 - 6:13 & 7:2-4):

They have letters of recommendation (3:1-3)	The Corinthians are Paul's letter of recommendation (3:2-3)

These comparisons (contrasts) have become the basis for a plausible historical reconstruction. While Paul was absent from Corinth rival missionaries appeared, opponents who attacked Paul's credentials. They claimed to be of Israelite background (2 Cor 11:22); complimented each other (2 Cor 10:12, 18); carried "letters of recommendation" (2 Cor 3:1-3); performed miracles; attacked Paul for supporting himself by his trade, but at the same time claimed that he took advantage of them by gathering a collection (2 Cor 11:7-9; 12:6,13); attacked Paul by saying "his letters are

weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible" (2 Cor 10:10; cf 11:6). For them, Paul was rhetorically inept, of low social status. He lacked the proper personal and representative authority to be an apostle. Moreover, as Paul says in the letter of reconciliation, someone at Corinth had deeply offended him (2 Cor 1:23; 2:4-5), perhaps by making a report about all his social and personal deficiencies (Betz 1992:1149). Dieter Georgi (1964; cf Welborn 1988; Kolenkow 1994) once argued that these rival "superapostles" viewed Jesus as a charismatic miracle worker, the so-called "Divine Man". Whatever the precise identity of the opponents and their view of Jesus, it is clear that Paul used judicial and epideictic rhetoric to defend himself. Self-praise and comparison/contrast were two of his most important rhetorical tools.

The basis for the above historical reconstruction is comparison. Long (2004:188-90) shows how Paul's rhetorical defence in the Fool's Speech has parallels in other ancient forensic speeches:

- Like Demosthenes, he was forced to speak about himself (2 Cor 12:11).
- He used technical defence language, *hyper*, "about", or "concerning" himself, and especially *hyper egō*, "I am a better one" (2 Cor 11:23).
- He compares himself to his opponents in terms of his "race, heritage, and parentage" (2 Cor 11:22).
- He uses encomiastic conventions, such as the *peristasis* catalogue (2 Cor 11:23b-28).
- He cites his religious experiences (2 Cor 12:1-7a).

The most dramatic illustration of this rhetorical strategy in the immediate context of 2 Corinthians 11:22 is Number 4, Paul's famous *paristasis* catalogue (2 Cor 11:23b-28). John T Fitzgerald's study of Catalogues of Hardships offers the essential background information (Fitzgerald 1988).

In brief, the ancient Greek term *peristasis,* derived from *periistēmi*, "I stand around", "I surround", refers literally to what is simply around one, or "circumstance". Circumstances can be positive, neutral, or negative; when negative, the term *peristasis* means "hardship" or "adversity". External "hardships" beyond one's control are usually attributed to fate or the divine will (Fitzgerald 1988:33-40; 70-87). The ancient philosophers, especially the Stoics, think that one's true character appears in times of adversity (Fitzgerald 1988:42). Indeed, difficult circumstances afford an opportunity to demonstrate one's character, prove one's virtue – in short, reveal one's true "manhood" –

and if successful, to receive one's due honour. Seneca says, "Disaster is Virtue's opportunity" (*Prof* 4.6).

Both Stoic and Cynic philosophers say that hardships are especially characteristic of the life of the wise sage. He is that rare person able to meet adversity with reason and intellect, therefore with perseverance, courage, and happiness, refined by superior training and practice (*askesis*). This attitude is true knowledge, which is the perfection of reason and virtue (Fitzgerald 1988:54). Seneca says that the sage does not retaliate when struck; he "steps back" (*Ira* 2.34.5); he displays "calmness in the midst of provocation" (*Const.* 4.3). He is the ultimate righteous sufferer, the just man unjustly punished (Fitzgerald 1988:47; 100-107). Nonetheless, in contrast to the unjust man, the just man ultimately receives the highest praise, the honour due him.

It is not surprising that the ancients often developed lists of hardships, or "*peristasis* catalogues". While circumstances can be either "good" or "bad" (Fitzgerald 1988:45) these lists were usually about sufferings. They could be general, that is, of humans *qua* humans, or specific, that is, associated with specific groups, occupations, or persons (Fitzgerald 1988:47-49). Typically mentioned adversities were war, famine, shipwreck, journeys, persecutions, violence, exile, slavery, poverty, destitution, old age, and death.

Paul develops several *peristasis* catalogues,[24] but the most complete example is in the Fool's Speech, 2 Corinthians 11:21b-12:10. It is an extended example of comparison, in this case an attempt to demonstrate Paul's superiority to the "superapostles" as a servant of Christ (2 Cor 11:23a). Its first part reads:

> Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one (*hyper egō*) – I am talking like a madman (*paraphronōn*) – with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety for all the churches.
>
> (2 Cor 11:21b-28)

[24] In the Corinthian correspondence, 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:8-9; 6:4-10; 11:23-28; 12:10.

Here Paul cites his sage-like credentials. He "boasts" of his accomplishments and his rhetorical strategy is – yes! – comparison.

Long's third point showing that Paul's defence is parallel to other ancient defence speeches is that Paul appeals to his "race, heritage, and parentage." This is really a comparison about ethnicity. To that boastful and perhaps ironic comparison I now turn.

8. 2 CORINTHIANS 11:22 IN ITS RHETORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

In 2 Corinthians 11:22 Paul appears to abandon his own rhetorical rules. In his self-defence, and with a touch of irony, he uses self-praise – boasting – and comparison: "Are they Hebrews (*Hebraioi*)? *So am I*. Are they Israelites (*Israēlitai*)? *So am I*. Are they seed of Abraham (*sperma Abraam*)? *So am I*." In his ethnic self-defence he is claiming *equivalence*, that is, in being a Hebrew, an Israelite, and of the seed of Abraham he is *like* the "superapostles". This ethnic statement leads into – sets the stage for – the following *peristasis* catalogue in which Paul's comparison indicates *superiority* – "I am a better one (*hyper egō*)."

Paul's brief construction of his ethnicity is similar to his more expanded self-description in Philippians 3:5, also used to defend himself "in the flesh" against opponents (Duling 2003a; 2008). The Philippians verse contains the following description:

- "the eighth day with respect to circumcision (*peritomē*)";
- "of the 'people' or 'ancestry' (*genous*) of Israel";
- "of the 'tribe' (*phylēs*) of Benjamin";
- "a 'Hebrew' (*Hebraios*) (born) of 'Hebrews' (*Hebraiōn*)";
- "'as to the law' (*kata nomon*) a 'Pharisee' (*Pharisaios*)";
- "as to zeal a persecutor of the 'church' (*ekklēsian*)";
- "as to righteousness under the 'law' (*nomō*) becoming blameless."

In Paul's three statements in 2 Corinthians 11:22 his claim to be a "Hebrew" is like "a Hebrew (*Hebraios*) (born) of Hebrews (*Hebraiōn*)". His claim to be an Israelite is like "of the *genous* of Israel". And his claim to be of the seed of Abraham is similar to "the eighth day with respect to circumcision", that is, the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. Before pursuing their content further, I would like to add a few brief comments about modern ethnicity theory in relation to ancient Mediterraneans.

9. MODERN ETHNICITY THEORY AND ANCIENT MEDITERRANEANS

There are several well known theoretical approaches to the study of ethnicity.[25] "Primordialists", following in the wake of Eduard Shils (1957) and Clifford Geertz (1936), emphasize that ethnicity is based on a group's deep, ineffable, overpowering emotional attachments that are static, unchanging, and involuntary. It is rooted in language, family, territory, custom, and religion.

Following a trail blazed by Fredrik Barth (1969 & 1994), constructionists develope a conscious alternative to primordialism. They say that ethnic identity is not static, but that ethnic groups constantly change their views of their ethnicity. They recognize that there are "cultural stuff" – language, dress, and core values, and the like – but their real interest is in how ethnic groups generate and maintain their group boundaries (Barth 1969:13-14; cf Duling 2003:222-41), that is, "the social organization of cultural difference".[26]

Instrumentalists begin with constructionism, but emphasize that ethnic groups define their ethnicity in rational and self-interested ways in order to further their own political-economic agendas (Varshney 1995; cf Banton 1995).[27]

Two other theoretical approaches come from social psychologists who concentrate on kinship myths, collective honour, and stereotyping (Horowitz 1985), and ethno-symbolists who are most interested in cosmogonic and election myths, golden age memories, and symbols of ethnicity.

There are numerous attempts to critique, as well as synthesize, all these theories of ethnicity (Scott 1990; Yang 2000:47-56). Here I shall be eclectic and focus on key "primordial" elements, but take seriously the constructionist point that ethnicity is not static. Combining Shils' and Geertz's five features with those of Hutchinson & Smith (1996) who modified Schermerhorn's analysis (Schermerhorn 1978:12), I arrive at seven features (Duling 2003a: 227-28, developed in Duling 2003b):

- a *proper* name that identifies and expresses the community's "essence";
- myths of common ancestry related to some distant time and place, giving a sense of fictive kinship;

[25] For more extensive treatment, see Duling (2003a, 2003b); Esler (2003:Ch 3), "Ethnicity, Ethnic conflict and the Ancient Mediterranean World" (see especially Jenkins 1986, 1997).

[26] This is the subtitle of Barth 1969. Barth's subjective approach led him to later think of himself as a forerunner of postmodernism (Barth 1994).

[27] See Duling (2001), Appendix 1, for a summary of rational choice theory.

- shared memories of "the past", including heroes and events, and their commemoration;
- phenotypical (genetic) features;
- some connection with a homeland, whether physical or symbolic;
- a common culture, including language and religion;
- a sense of solidarity with an ethnic population.

Not every feature has to be present in every self-definition; however, two of them – kinship and homeland – are virtually universal.

Does modern ethnicity theory have any relevance for antiquity? Consider the following quotation from Herodotus:

> For there are many great reasons why we should not . . . [desert to the Persians], even if we so desired; first and foremost, the burning and destruction of the adornments and temples of our gods, whom we are constrained to avenge to the utmost rather than make pacts with the perpetrator of these things, and next the *kinship of all Greeks in blood* and *speech*, and *the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common*, and the *likeness of our way of life*, to all of which it would not befit the Athenians to be false.[28]

This ancient quotation emphasizes the name (Greeks, specifically Athenians), in opposition to the Persians, a common kinship, a common language, a common religion, and common customs. While it is important not to force ancient views into modern theory, and, while it is true that the Greek term *ethnos*, from which "ethnicity" comes, has a broader meaning than its modern derivative,[29] it is also true that *ethnos* in antiquity includes the above phenomena. This conclusion will be helpful for understanding what Paul *chose* to cite for his ethnic heritage.

10. RHETORIC AND ETHNICITY IN 2 CORINTHIANS 11:22

Behind 2 Corinthians 10-13 lies a conflict between Paul and the "superapostles", which is transformed into a conflict between Paul and certain Corinthians. From a social-scientific perspective, the context of Paul's self-defence can be seen as a factional conflict within a small group.[30] Paul had recruited the Corinthians; he had been, and still considered himself to be, their

[28] Herodotus *Histories* 8.144.2 (italics mine [Loeb (Godley)]); see Hall (1997:44); Duling (2003b, forthcoming).

[29] Duling (2003b:228-33) has an extensive discussion of the semantic domain and philology (see also Muthuraj 1997).

[30] See Duling (1997) for a fuller discussion.

leader; he had had status ascribed to him; however, outsiders had challenged his legitimate authority and had threatened his status, and thus his very honour. Paul claimed that these opponents were Hebrews, Israelites, and the seed of Abraham; he used self-praise and comparison in his defence: "So am I!"

It is time to consider Paul's ethnic self-descriptions more carefully. In the Hebrew Bible the term "Hebrew" distinguished the "people of Israel" from the Egyptians (Gn 43:32; Exodus *passim*) and in the New Testament it distinguished them from the Greeks (Ac 6:1). Popular etymology traced the name to Eber, son of Shem (Gn 10:21), among whose descendants was Abraham (Gn 11:16-26). The name "Hebrew" was also associated with a particular homeland, originally the land of Canaan (Gn 40:15). Finally, "Hebrew" was the language spoken by "the Hebrews" (Ac 3x; Jn 4x; Rv 9:11; 16:16). Although the description "Hebrew" was predominantly used by outsiders (Gn 39:14, 17; Ex 1:16), it was adopted by insiders (Ex 1:19; Jn 1:9). Grave and synagogue inscriptions at Rome and elsewhere show that Israelites had come to identify themselves ethnically as "Hebrews" (Schürer 1973:83-92).

In short, the name "Hebrew" marked off a self-defined ethnic group. It implied archetypal/mythical ancestor-heroes, a homeland, and often a language. In Philippians 3:5 Paul implies that his parents were Hebrews.

Paul's second ethnic self-description is "Israelite", a similar boundary-marking term. An excellent commentary on its meaning for Paul is his own statement in Romans 9:3-5, which highlights "religion":

> [3] For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren (*tōn adelphōn*), my kinsmen by race (*tōn syngenōn kata sarka*). [4] They are Israelites (*Israēlītai*), and to them belong the sonship (*hē huithesia*), the glory (*hē doxa*), the covenants (*hai diathēkai*), the giving of the law (*hē nomothesia*), the worship (*hē latreia*), and the promises (*hai epangeliai*); [5] to them belong the patriarchs (*hoi pateres*), and of their race according to the flesh (*ex hōn* ["out of them"] *to kata sarka*), is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen.

In Galatians 1:14 and 2 Corinthians 11:26, Paul says that the Israelites are his "own people" (*en genei*; *ek genous*) which is, again, parallel to the expression "of the *genous* of Israel" in Philippians 3:5. *Genos* here implies belonging to the same socio-political group with common origins. It suggests ancestral descent from Jacob/Israel. Israel also suggests a common homeland, the "land of Israel," since Jacob/Israel "fathered" the twelve tribes. One of them was Benjamin, Paul's tribe (Phlp 3:5). The land of Israel thus became the

common Biblical term for the homeland, the land of Canaan, or Palestine. If the Lukan author is correct, Paul was not literally from the land of Israel ("Saul of Tarsus" [Cilicia = SE Turkey]: Ac 9:11; 21:39; 22:3), but as a man of the Diaspora he would have identified himself with his ancestral homeland, perhaps because of his parents (or his father). Certainly he believed he was descended from mythical ancestor-heroes Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, and Benjamin (Cohen 1999:273, 305-307). In 2 Corinthians 11:22 Paul boasts that he is of the same ethnic descent as his opponents: "Are they *Israēlitai*? So am I!"

Paul's third self-description, "seed of Abraham", has similar nuances; indeed, it is the key to Israelite ethnicity (Gn 11:27-25:11). From the patriarch Abram's seed came Isaac, then Jacob/Israel, then Benjamin, Paul's tribal ancestor (Phlp 3:5). Yahweh was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although Eber was listed as Abraham's ancestor, and thus Abraham was a "Hebrew", Abraham became the primal patriarch. He was remembered as a Babylonian whose "seed" became the fountainhead of the Israelites as a people, a *genos* and an *ethnos*. It was he who received God's promise that his numerous seed would inherit the land of Canaan as their homeland. It was he who made a covenant with Yahweh, the sign of which was the circumcision of male children on the eighth day. From Abraham's seed came both Ishmael by Hagar, his wife Sarah's maid, when Sarah was barren, and Isaac by Sarah herself when they were in their old age. It was he with whom God renewed the covenant that emphasized the promise of his seed and the land, marked by his new God-given name, "Abraham", which was popularly thought to mean "father of the peoples" in Hebrew (*'ab hamôn* [*gôyîm* = *ethnē*]. It was Abraham's faith that led him to obey God's command to sacrifice his and Sarah's only seed, Isaac, whom God then miraculously saved at the last minute. All ethnic Israelites, then, could be called the "seed of Abraham" (Jr 33:26; 4 Mcc 18:1, 23).

Abraham was so central to Paul's way of thinking that he called Christ-believers adopted "sons of Abraham" (Gl 3:7; cf Ac 13:26) and used Hagar and Sarah as allegorical symbols for slave and free. In Philippians 3:5 he identified himself not only as a Hebrew and an Israelite, but in relation to "the eighth day with respect to circumcision (*peritomē*)," one of the key ways – some scholars say *the* key way (Sim 1996:171-195) – that Hebrews-Israelites (males) were identified and identified themselves ethnically. By comparing himself with the "superapostles", Paul, "the fool", praises himself: "Are they seed of Abraham (*sperma Abraam*)? So am I." Again, his comparison sets the stage for his superiority as an apostle in the following *peristasis* catalogue.

11. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

2 Corinthians 10-13 was part of the "tearful letter". It represented the height of a conflict between Paul and the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 11:22 Paul was defending his own ethnicity. His was an ethnic self-definition that had sharp boundaries. It included his view of his *ethnos* and his *genos* and his own set of values. From the perspective of rhetorical comparison, he claimed to be ethnically equal to his opponents. He boasted of it in a human way, despite his reluctance to praise himself.

Paul used self-praise and comparison in 2 Corinthians 11:22. Did he also use irony in this verse? Not in the verse itself. But rhetorical self-praise and comparison seem to overtake irony in his self-defence and he is forced into them. Yet, the comment occurs in the Fool's Speech and his use of the fool is in the final analysis ironic. Most important, the real irony is that Paul did not ultimately place any stock in his ethnic self-praise. Yes, he had inherited the Hebrew culture; yes, he was an Israelite and his *genos* was from the seed of Abraham. In Philippians he added that he was of the tribe of Benjamin and that he followed the norms of Torah and the rite of circumcision. But as he shows in Galatians and Romans there was a different, new *genos* from Abraham, a body of believers "in Christ". He thought of himself as being leader of *another ethnos* – *ethnos* can mean simply group – one that had different values and symbols. It had broader boundaries. It was a metaphorical ethnicity.[31]

When Paul defended himself at the height of the conflict with the Corinthians, he engaged in a rhetorical defence of his ethnicity "in the flesh". He became the fool and gave the Fool's Speech. He used rhetorical comparison and self-praise. He claimed that his stock was as good as that of his opponents. But ultimately, he said, there was nothing to be gained by it (2 Cor 12:1). As he put it in Philippians 3:7-8, "… Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord."

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[31] Bartchy (1999) thinks of it as a new family with new brothers and sisters; this implies a new *ethnos*.

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