"Whatever gain I had ...":

Ethnicity and Paul's self-identification

in Philippians 3:5-6

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Abstract

This study is not an exercise in Vernon Robbin's groundbreaking socio-rhetorical criticism as put forth in his impressive The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse and Exploring the Texture of Texts. *It does have much in common with his "social and cultural texture". It also touches "inner texture" in relation to Paul's implied argument, "intratexture" with respect to the implied importance of scripture for Paul, and "ideological texture" in relation to Paul's statements about the righteousness of God, millennial hopes, and ethical norms in contrast with his ethnic identify. These suggestions only scratch the surface of possibilities for using socio-rhetorical criticism to interpret ethnicity in Philippians. Social-rhetorical critics, I trust, will see even more socio-rhetorical potential for this subject than I have mentioned. Indeed, I hope that it stimulates such analysis.*

1.   ETHNICITY, ETHNICITY THEORY, AND THE ETHNIE

1.1   The modern term "Ethnicity"

The modern English term "ethnicity," derived from the Greek word *ethnos*, appears to have arisen in 1941 when sociologist W Lloyd Warner introduced it to describe previously studied non-African and non-Asian, largely "white" European, immigrants to the United States, thus as an alternative to the term "race" (Sollors 1996:x-xliv).[2] The term seems to have first appeared in a

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[2] The term "race" is now considered by most anthropologists to be largely a social construct, not a biological fact; yet, in the real world of politics and social relations, it persists.

dictionary in1953 (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:4). However, the term "ethnicity" did not become a widespread description of a high profile analytical concept in the social sciences until the 1960s, largely as a result of Fredrik Barth's seminal essay on ethnicity in 1969. Since then discussion has tended to focus on ethnicity theory and the concept of the *ethnie*.

1.2 Ethnicity theory

There are three primary theoretical approaches to ethnicity, "primordialism," "constructionism," and "instrumentalism." As will be observed, primordialism and constructionism have produced an "objectivist/subjectivist" debate in the field of anthropology. There are also at least two subsidiary, related approaches, social psychology and "ethno-symbolism." Here are some brief descriptions of theoretical approaches.[3]

1.2.1 Primordialism

Primordialism has roots in the classical sociology of Max Weber but is usually traced more directly to studies by Eduard Shils (1957:130-145) and Clifford Geertz (1973), whose key writings preceded Barth's seminal essay by about a decade. Primordialism refers to the view that ethnic groups are characterized by deep, ineffable attachments related to family, language, territory, custom, and religion. They express an intense solidarity and a passion that is overpowering and coercive. The focus of primordialism is on the emotional strength of ethnic bonds; such bonds are said to have a "sacred" quality. For Shils and Geertz primordialism is usually determined and static. Attachments are thought not to develop and change in the course of social interaction, but are considered to be natural affections. Thus, ethnic identity has a fixed, compelling, *a priori*, and involuntary quality.

Subsequent theory about primordialism has tended to take two theoretical directions. One is *sociobiology*, especially represented by Pierre van den Berghe (1987), who claims that ethnicity is really an extension of kinship. Van den Berghe's focus is nature, not nurture. A common critique of sociobiological primordialism is that it reduces ethnicity to biological drives and does not take sufficient account of cultural factors.

The second, more common, alternative is *cultural* primordialism, which focuses on just those cultural factors about ethnicity that are stressed by the opponents of sociobiology. Cultural primordialism is sometimes defended as "objective" because it takes account of the describable cultural features.

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[3] I have been helped by a number of studies in this field (see works consulted). I give special thanks to Richard Jenkins who forwarded me his forthcoming article, "Ethnicity, anthropological aspects", in N J Smelser and P B Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, Oxford: Pergamon, 2001, pp 4824-4828.

It should be noted in passing that insiders' descriptions of their own ethnicity (emic descriptions) tend to be put in primordial terms.

1.2.2 Constructionism

In 1969 Norwegian Fredrik Barth's seminal introductory essay to a collection of ethnographic studies of ethnicity, *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, launched an approach based on the views of Barth's teacher Edmund Leach, who had reacted against the static nature of dominant theoretical approach of the previous generation, structural functionalism. Barth made a similar critique of what he perceived to be the static quality of primordialism. He claimed that the key to ethnicity is not a catalogue of objective racial or cultural traits ("cultural stuff"), but rather persons and groups that define and construct their own ethnicity as they go. Ethnic self-descriptions therefore change. Barth's contribution is especially important to scholars of antiquity since the essays in his collection derive especially from interethnic relations in non-modern and non-industrial societies. Here are three of Barth's most important points:

- Ethnicity is the way in which groups of persons *organize themselves*, that is, ascribe and identify themselves with respect to their origins and backgrounds. Clearly, there is an element of choice. Indeed, people often change their ethnic identities. How others – outsiders – ascribe and identify them according to the "cultural stuff" (traits) usually associated with ethnic identity is only part of the picture and self-generated.

- Most significant are *the social boundaries themselves* – the boundaries between "we" and "they" – not what is used to fill them, the concrete content, such as traits or "cultural stuff." Cultural similarities and differences are important only in so far as the members of ethnic groups make them so; some are played down or denied; others are highlighted and exaggerated. These tend to be of two types: first, overt signals or signs – dress, language, house-form, style of life and the like – which can be marked and exaggerated by geography or ecology; second, basic values, that is, the norms of morality and virtue by which behavior is judged.

- Finally, it is important to see how and why ethnic groups generate and maintain these self-defined group boundaries (Barth 1969:13-14).

In short, for Barth ethnicity is both self-ascribed and other-ascribed, but the accent lies on the former. It is an identity based not only on origins and backgrounds, but also on the generation and maintenance of the boundaries to preserve it. It is, in his often-cited comment, "the social organization of cultural difference". Barth's ethnicity theory moves the analysis from static categories to dynamic categories, that is, to interacting relations, boundary formation, and boundary maintenance. The concept is basically abstract and a-historical. It is obviously more "subjectivist". In a self-evaluation dating from 1994, Barth considered his views to have been an anticipation of postmodernism (Vermeulen & Govers 1994:12).

1.2.3 Instrumentalism

Instrumentalism builds on the Barthian constructionist perspective but moves it toward social mobilization to further the cause of the political-economic interests of a given ethnic group. Self- and group-defined ethnicity is therefore considered to be rational and self-interested (Varshney 1995). Criticism of instrumental ethnicity focuses on its materialism and tendencies to omit affective considerations, or "participant's primordialism", an emic consideration noted previously.

These three approaches are the center of ethnicity theory discussions. Two other related approaches may be added. They are:

1.2.4 Social psychology

Donald Horowitz uses social psychology in relation to the cultural and economic resources (advantages) of a particular ethnic group (Horowitz 1985). From his perspective ethnic identity is based primarily on kinship myths and collective honour; such groups tend to stereotype other groups in ethnocentric ways.

1.2.5 Ethno-symbolism

Ethno-symbolists such as John Armstrong are very interested in the persistence, yet change and resurgence, of ethnic groups (Armstrong 1982). These factors are related to the way in which nostalgia about the perceived past – cosmogonic myths, election myths, memories of a golden age, and symbols – shapes cultural groups.

There are numerous attempts to critique, as well as integrate or synthesize these views (Yang 2000:47-56). Most recent writers on ethnicity – sociobiologists excluded – seem to agree with Barth that people ascribe ethnicity to themselves in particular cultural contexts. However, they disagree on whether the emphasis should be on primordialism, that is, the emotional,

irrational, and ineffable elements, or instrumentalism, that is, rational and self-interested motivations. Perhaps some clarification can be achieved from the emic/etic distinction suggested in the previous descriptions. Members of ethnic groups themselves will usually give some primordial reason for their ethnic self-identity. Cultural elements or traits may be offered as symbols of this identity – language, dress, or physical markings or characteristics. Outsiders in the culture will tend to accept such views. Ethnic analysts, however, often look for more hidden, in some cases, unconscious, motives for such self-definition. In short, if one accepts that ethnicity is indeed socially constructed and at times has instrumental motives, it is difficult to dismiss the observation that natives themselves will persist in an appeal to their "primordial" roots (Hall 1997:18).

1.3 The *Ethnie*

Thus far, I have avoided discussing the term *ethnie*. This term is now commonly employed by many ethnicity theorists to refer to an ethnic group or ethnic community. Hutchinson and Smith modify Schermerhorn's widely used definition of *ethnie* as follows: "a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among at least some of its members" (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:6). For Schermerhorn, the elements of common culture are symbolic and consist of "kinship patterns, physical contiguity (as in localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kinship among members of the group" (Schermerhorn 1978:12).

These scholars also list six main features of the *ethnie*, which come close to the definition:

- a common *proper name*, to identify and express the "essence" of the community;

- a myth of *common ancestry*, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an *ethnie* a sense of fictive kinship, what Horowitz terms a "super-family" [Horowitz 1985:ch 2];

- shared *historical memories*, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events, and their commemoration;

- one or more *elements of common culture*, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;

- a *link* with a *homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with Diaspora peoples;

- a *sense of solidarity* on the part of at least some sections of the *ethnie's* population (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:7).

The elements of an *ethnie* here are descriptive. Although they tend to focus on the "cultural stuff" of primordialism, they can be viewed from any of the several theoretical perspectives noted previously.

2.   THE SEMANTIC DOMAIN AND PHILOLOGY

It is clear from the foregoing that in the last half century ethnicity theory has come into its own. A crucial question is, does it represent how ancient Mediterranean peoples thought of *ethnies* and their own ethnicity? In lieu of a comprehensive, book-length study of ancient texts, I shall draw on the Greek semantic domains of Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida (Louw & Nida), the Greek philological analysis of Jonathan Hall in *Ethnic identity in Greek antiquity* (Hall 1997), and observations of Anthony Saldarini who was noted for his familiarity with second-temple Israelite thinking (Saldarini 1994).

2.1   Immediate family and marriage

Initially, one should note kinship terms associated with the biological nuclear family. Such terms are *patēr* (biological [or adoptive] male parent or father)*, apatōr* (without [record of] father), *matēr* (biological [or adoptive] female parent or mother)*, amatōr* (without [record of] mother)*, huios* (son)*, prōtotokos* (first born son), *thygatēr* (daughter)*, teknon* (immediate offspring), *pais* (son)*, thygatrion* (little daughter), *goneus* (parent)*, mammē* (grandmother)*, and *ekgonos* (grandchildren). Related terms that are valorized negatively are *nothos* (bastard), *orphanos* (orphan), and *ateknos* (childless). There are also kinship terms referring to the same generation, such as *adelphos* (brother)*, adelphē* (sister), *syntrophos* (foster brother or sister), and *anepsios* (cousin).

Some terms are associated with kinship by marriage. Examples are *anthrōpos* and *anēr* (husband), *gynē* (wife), *skeuos* (vessel, probably "wife as sex partner"), *nymphios* (bridegroom), *nymphia* (bride), *pentheros* (father-in-law), *penthera* (mother-in-law), *nymphē* (daughter-in-law), and *chēra* (widow).

Kinship terms are often transferred from natural to voluntary groups, that is, they become "fictive" kin terms. Well known examples are *adelphoi* (brothers), *huioi tou phōtos* (sons of light), and *tekna phōtos* (children of light).

Terms of biological relationship and marriage obviously belong in the semantic domain of ethnicity because persons in these relationships generally share, or at least share over time, a common culture and ancestry; indeed, terms such as "father" and "son" become metaphors of ancestor and descendant.

2.2   Descent and ancestors

Genos comes from *ginomai*, "I become", or "I come into existence", often with reference to birth. In most respects it is related to lineage, that is, kinship at a more distant remove. Yet, it is also related to the broader term *ethnos*, as well as *topos*, both terms yet to be discussed.

As based on its etymology, *genos* refers to "a category or class based upon an implied derivation and/or lineage" (Louw & Nida). Hall (1997:35) notes that in Herodotus *genos* is generally narrower in scope than *ethnos* but is sometimes interchangeable with it. *Genos* can be translated as "(birth) family," "offspring," or "descendants" which could be a group of any size related by birth. Herodotus says that "Greeks" are both an *ethnos* and a *genos* in that they share *the same blood*. Here the two terms seem interchangeable. In Hall's view, therefore, a *genos* should not be seen as *simply* as a group nested within, and hierarchically subordinate to, an *ethnos*, which is a common lexical anachronism.[4] Nonetheless, by extension *genos* can sometimes refer to kind, type, or classification, but with respect to the same origin (Louw & Nida). Paul apparently uses the extended meaning when he writes, "there are perhaps a great many *kinds* (genē) of languages in the world" (1 Cor 14:10).

Genos stresses common descent, but can sometimes be related to a common *place* of origin, still another category to be noted. Yet, Herodotus allows that people from *different* geographical regions can be of the same *genos* and *ethnos* if they are migrants.

Finally, note an insider-outsider distinction about *ethnos* and *genos*. The Greeks tended to refer to *others* with the term *ethnos* and to *themselves* as *genos*, that is, a *genos Hellēnōn*, a "family of Hellenes". A similar

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[4] A view implied by Liddell & Scott (1996) on *ethnos* and *genos*.

distinction is found in Latin. The Romans tended to refer to others as *natio* and to themselves as *populus.* A vague analogy in English – not to be confused with the ancient terms and their meanings – might be when one thinks of oneself as a citizen of a "nation" and *others* as members of "ethnic groups", or what is sometimes called "ethnics".

One of the most important cognates of *genos* is *syngeneia.* It is often found with *ethnos* and *genos* and is usually translated "kinship", "relatives", or "relationship", whether literally and directly biological, or with a view to family genealogy and legitimation, or with respect to a common eponymous ancestor. The term reflects *belief* in a shared descent. Other cognates include *syngenēs* (relative, kinsman, fellow countryman, fellow citizen); *syngenis* (relative, kinswoman); the socio-political group *genea* (posterity, descendants, offspring, people of the same kind); *genesis* (lineage, family line); *genealogia* (genealogy); *agenealogētos* (one with no record of ancestors or without genealogy [Melchizedek]); *allogenēs* (a person from "another" or "different" [*allo*-] kin group seen as a socio-political group, thus a "foreigner"); and *agennētos* (unborn, unbegotten).

Other related terms include *patēr* in the broad sense of eponymous ancestor, *patrōos* or *patrikos* (paternal)*, patriarchēs* (patriarch)*,* and *propatōr* (forefather). Collective socio-political terms related to descent or ancestry include *patria* (a people, a group that is rooted in an ancestral *patēr*); *phylē* (tribe);[5] *symphyletēs* (fellow countryman), and *dōdekaphylon* (twelve tribes). Similarly *oikos* ("house" used metaphorically as "biological family" and "extended family") can also become socio-political [house of Israel]). Other expressions are *hoi par' autou* (associates, including family, neighbors, friends), *hoi idioi autou* (his own people); and in some cases *laos* (a people). I note also *panoikos* (entire household; cf. *oikeios*, family member or relative) and *ho esō* (insider).

There are also mainly agricultural metaphors of distant descent, for example, *rhiza* (root or descendant), *anatolē* (descendent or offspring, from *anatellō*, "I cause to rise," [translating Hebrew *zemach*, "shoot"]), *karpos tēs osphyos* (fruit of the genitals)*, sperma* (seed)*,* and *spora* (what is sown, seed, ancestry, parentage).

2.3   Society and politics

Because of the derivation of English terms "ethnic," "ethnicity," and the like, the question of the meaning and translation of *ethnos* becomes especially important. As noted previously, *ethnos* is broader than *genos*, and, indeed,

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[5] Some anthropologists offer cautionary comments about the English word "tribe," which can in colonial contexts have ethnocentric connotations, as in the term "tribalism."

ethnos is the largest unit of description in the semantic field. This term should not be limited to an "*ethnic* group," however one defines it. One reason is that it can refer to almost *any* kind of group – and of *any* size. Homer, for example, uses *ethnos* to describe *flocks* of birds and *swarms* of flies or bees. Moreover, *ethnos* does not refer simply to "nation." To be sure, it usually refers to a large human socio-political collectivity and is sometimes translated "nation." However, Homer uses it for bands of warriors and young men and groups of the dead (Saldarini 1994:68-83; Hall 1997:34 ff). Herodotus uses it for the inhabitants of collectivities of several sizes, that is, a village, a city, several cities, or a whole region. Thus, a "nation" would be permissible if one thinks analogously of "the Iroquois nation," but not if one thinks of a modern nation-state. A better translation in most instances would be "a people."

Related socio-political terms in Greek can merge with the sense of ancestry and place, that is, *genos* and *topos*. Examples are *patria* (a people), a large socio-political group that is rooted in an ancestral *patēr* and *phylē* (tribe, people, clan), a people that is related through an eponymous ancestor. A *symphyletēs* is a "fellow member of the same *phylē*," thus a member of the same tribe, or in relation to the *polis*, for example, a "fellow citizen." The kinship term *huioi*, "sons," and the spatial term *oikos*, "house," can also function as a socio-political entity (sons of Abraham; house of Israel). Related terms are *paroikos* (resident alien) and *zenos* (stranger).

An important point is that modern English speakers use the words "ethnic" and "ethnic heritage" of themselves, but the Greeks usually used the term *ethnos* in relation to *other peoples*, not themselves. Thus, in some respects *ethnos* is closer to English expressions such as "ethnics" or "an ethnic," which have the ring of ethnocentric stereotyping. Certainly the ancients commonly stereotyped others; one of the most common examples is Titus 1:12: "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."[6] In any case, the plural form *ta ethnē* is normally used for *other peoples* than one's own. Therefore, *ethnē* – "other peoples" – describes outsider groups, each of which shares a common language, certain cultural features such as dress, and certain religious practices, such as festivals. In the Greek LXX *ta ethnē* translates Hebrew *ha-goyîm*, "the other peoples", who are from an Israelite perspective, "non-Israelites" or "Gentiles". Other derivatives that reflect this inner Israelite development are the adjective *ethnikos* (Gentile, heathen, pagan) and adverb *ethnikōs* (like a Gentile, as a heathen, similar to a pagan). It was possible for Israelites of the Greco-Roman period to think of a *Hellēn* (Greek man) or a *Hellēnis* (Greek woman) as a member of *ta ethnē*. Language is important in identifying outsiders; yet, it is also true that Diaspora

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[6] See many other examples of stereotyping in Malina and Neyrey (1996).

Israelites who spoke Greek could be given a name related to their spoken language, that is, *Hellēnistēs* (Hellenists).

2.4   Space and place

If *ethnos* and *genos* sometimes have geographical or regional overtones, there is a linguistic sub-field explicitly related to place. I have mentioned *oikos* (house) extended to a socio-political collectivity, as in the "house of Israel", and the cognate *paroikos* (foreigner, resident alien). *Topos* (place) can also mean "inhabitants of a place" and *entopios* "one who lives in a place", thus an "in-habitant", "local person". Similarly, *chōra* means not only "region", but also "inhabitants of a particular region". From *polis* (city-state) comes *politēs* (one with full status in a *politeia*, thus "citi-zen"); *politeuma* (the place where one has the right to be a citizen, "commonwealth")*; sympolitēs* (fellow dweller in a *polis*, thus "citizen")*;* the socio-political entity *politeia* (the *right* to be a citizen of a particular place, thus, "citizenship", also "people", "state"). One may note again *xenos* (one outside one's reference group or in-group, stranger, foreigner)*, allotrios* (one from another geographical region, stranger, foreigner).

2.5   Culture and religion

From an Israelite perspective, there are terms for *ethnoi* that are more religio-cultural. For Israelites *hoi anomoi* (those who do not follow the Law [Torah]) are by definition unclean outsiders. Similarly *hē akrobystia* (the foreskin [people]) is a label given to the uncircumcised by "those called circumcision (*peritomēs*) of the flesh" (Gl 2:7-9). A male Gentile can thus be called an *akrobystos* (an uncircumcised man).

The problem of male circumcision recalls the expression *sebomenoi ton theon* (those who worship [the one true] God, or God fearers). This expression is used for those obligated to fulfill certain commandments, but do not become circumcised. In contrast, the terms *prosēlytēs* and *prosēlyta* refer to full converts to the house of Israel, which for males means undergoing circumcision.

3.   CORRELATING STATUS DATA

In their discussions of *progymnasmata*, rhetorical handbooks, and physiognomic writings, Malina & Neyrey (1996) highlight three ancient status markers: generation, geography, and gender. The following outline arranges these status markers according to the categories of ascribed honour (by descent or grant of an honourable person) and acquired honour (by victory in

social contexts). Six of them overlap with categories related to ethnicity, particularly those associated with generation in relation to group and geography (numbers 5-10).

I. *Ascribed honour*
Generation

Individual

1. physical attributes: beauty, strength, agility, might, health
2. physiognomic features
3. native intelligence
4. age

Group

5. immediate family: parentage, especially father
6. ancestors; genealogies
7. tribe, clan, or *ethnos*
8. language; speech; dialect

Geography

9. city of origin
10. region of origin

Gender

II. Acquired Honour

11. nurture and training; education
12. accomplishments/character (physical development; including virtues and their resultant actions, e.g., the four philosophical virtues – wisdom, justice, temperance, and fortitude – or Stoic virtue lists; patronage, etc.)
13. Destiny: power, wealth, friends, children, fame, long life, happy death
14. trade or profession
15. voluntary association (political/religious/trade groups)

4. TOWARDS A VIEW OF ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN ETHNICITY

The above discussion of semantic domains and the note about status indicators suggest that modern Western (etic) notions of "ethnicity" have a certain correlation with, but are not precisely equivalent to, ancient Mediterranean (emic) notions as they are captured by the terms *ethnos*, *genos*, and their cognates. With respect to similarities, the term *ethnos* refers

to "a people" related by birth and ancestry, real, mythical, or imagined, which implies shared culture and historical memories. It overlaps with the narrower term *genos*, which focuses on birth and ancestry, though it can be extended to classifications of a more general nature. Both terms can imply geographical origins, as well. One major difference, however, is that *ethnos* can occasionally refer to almost any kind of collectivity, including insect and animal groupings. More importantly, the human dimensions of term are also broad, that is, words such as "band", "group", "community", or "society", are possible. Probably the best English term in this connection is "people".

Yet, *ethnos* referring to an out-group can be contrasted with *genos* as an in-group, that is, "they" are an *ethnos* (the "X people") but "we" are a *genos*, with the same or similar roots (our family, tribe, clan). Thus, *ethnos* can have an ethnocentric flavour. The distinction is especially prevalent when the plural *ta ethnē*, "the peoples", appears and for Israelites means all non-Israelites, thus "Gentiles".

Should the relatively recent social-scientific terms *ethnicity* and *ethnie* be used to analyze ancient Mediterranean peoples? Yes, as long as one recognizes that they are loaded with outside observers' (etic) meanings and, for social-scientists, some extensive theoretical perspectives. The ancient Mediterraneans had no "ethnicity theory", but they certainly had a "self-concept", a "group concept", and an "others concept". Indeed, ancient Mediterraneans were generally very ethnocentric (Malina & Neyrey 1996). It should be added that given the human tendency to describe one's own group in more primordial terms, we should not be surprised to find that what modern theory calls primordialism in ancient insider self-descriptions. However, people also joined various voluntary associations, some of which were religiously based, and members often applied kinship language to themselves and their groups.

5. WHAT PAUL DOES NOT EXPLICITLY MENTION

With the previously discussed semantic domains and the status categories in mind, it is important to observe what Paul does not explicitly mention in Philippians 3:5-6.

5.1 Kinship: Immediate family

In the Israelite world of the first century immediate kinship was certainly the main means of ethnic identity and status, as the previous discussion indicates. Although Acts mentions Paul's nephew (Ac 23:16) and Jerome records a

tradition that Paul's parents migrated from Gischala to Tarsus,[7] Paul himself never mentions his immediate family background, not even his father. At the time he wrote 1 Corinthians he was not married (1 Cor 7:8). Yet, by extension Paul thought of his churches as families and drew heavily on fictive kin language to describe them (Bartchy 1999:68-78; Ascough 1997:223-241; Duling 1999:4-22). However, Paul was more general.

5.2   Genealogy

Paul probably recognized that one basic indicator of status and ethnic identity is a genealogy. He might have had a genealogy in mind when he cited the formula that Jesus was descended from David "according to the flesh" (Rm 1:3; cf Mt 1:2-17). However, he offered no information about his direct genealogy.

5.3   Language

Language was a key indicator of status, authority, and power.[8] For example, Philostratus wrote that Apollonius spoke perfect, accent-less Attic Greek[9] and was a master of diction.[10] This category was extremely important for ethnicity, as well. To the Greeks, Greek was the language of superior culture; outsiders were *barbaroi* (barbarians), or "babblers [speakers in foreign languages]," thus *ethnoi* with an inferior culture (Bowersock, Brown & Gabar 1999:107-129). By the first century CE, however, the term was more metaphorical, that is, it referred to "barbarians" were living within the empire. To strict Israelites, however, the *Hellēnes* (Greeks) themselves were part of *ta ethnē*.

Paul spoke and wrote Greek (his letters are in Greek, and the Lukan writer clearly implies that he knew Greek [Ac 21:37]). His *koinē* was relatively sophisticated and he could write with arrogance: "I am speaking (writing) in human terms, because of your natural limitations (your flesh)" (Rm 6:19); "I speak as to children" (2 Cor 6:13). Yet, he might have agreed with his opponents that he was "unskilled in speaking" (2 Cor 11:6, cp 10:10, 12:9). While that comment was probably related to his *oral* rhetorical skills, it overlapped with his Greek language skills.

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[7] Jerome *De vir. ill.* v; *In epist. ad Phil* 23.

[8] See my discussion of literacy and power in Duling (2002), "Matthew as marginal scribe in an advanced agrarian society." *HTS*, 58(2), 520-575.

[9] *Life* I, 7.

[10] *Life* I, 15.

5.4   Geography: City of origin and citizenship

With respect to place of origin, The Acts of the Apostles says that Paul was "from Tarsus in Cilicia, a *citizen* (*politēs*) of no mean city" (Ac 21:39, 22:3, 23:34, 27:5). Acts also claims that he was a citizen of Rome, a Roman (*Rhomaios*) (Ac 16:37, 22:25-29, 23:27). Philippians, however, says nothing of status-affirming locales or Paul's Roman citizenship. Neither did Paul himself claim to be from the "land of Israel". Nonetheless, he wrote that he was from the *genos* of Israel (Phlp 3:5).

5.6   *Summary*

In offering a self-description of his former life Paul did not mention some of the most common status and ethnic markers in antiquity. He did not even mention his immediate parents. On the group side he did not mention his genealogy, language, city of origin, or region of origin.

6.   WHAT PAUL DOES MENTION

Here is a list of what Paul does mention in Philippians 3:3-5:

6.1   The eighth day with respect to circumcision (*peritomē*)

Paul's first item came from the cultural and religious semantic field (*akrobystia*, *akrobystos*, *peritomē*), that is, he chose terms related to the notion of a chosen people, a covenanted people. Yet, Shaye Cohen writes that "Judaeans and gentiles in antiquity were corporeally, visually, linguistically, and socially indistinguishable" (Cohen 1999:37). Cohen says that circumcision was not an external ethnic marker in the East, at least until the first century CE. He also notes that no evidence exists that an ancient Israelite male would have identified another Israelite male by his circumcision. Yet, for Romans – and perhaps also for Macedonians – circumcision was a marker of being Israelite. In any case, clearly Paul *chose* to make it an ethnic marker. It was an observable rite and it was male oriented.

6.2   Of the *genous* of Israel

Paul's first phrase did not refer his direct biological or genealogical descent, whether real or constructed; rather, it referred to a *genos* from a mythical ancestor whose name called forth a socio-political reality. Therefore, although a genealogy would have given concreteness to his *genos* and would have been very important to ascribed honour, Paul was content to stress his more general ethnic identity. "Israel" was one of the main self-designations of this ethnic people, whether any single member was from the land of Israel or not. If the Lukan author is correct, Paul was not born in the land of Israel. Thus,

this expression primarily suggested descent from eponymous ancestors – Abraham → Isaac → Jacob/*Israel* – and perhaps implied something about at least one of his parents, most probably his father (Cohen 1999:273, 305-307).

As the foregoing discussion shows, *ethnos* and *genos* were sometimes interchangeable, but in general *genos* was distinguishable by closer connections with the family and more common than *ethnos* as a *self-*description or description of one's own group. It carried a strong sense of descent and family, as well as geography.

One excellent statement of Paul's ethnic concept occurs in Romans 9:3-5, which contains an ancestral name, patriarchal ancestors, fictive kinship terms, divine election and promises, contractual relationship, insider group boundaries, and legally prescribed worship. It says:

> 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*). 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*); to them belong the patriarchs (*hoi pateres*), and from them according to the flesh (*ex hōn (. . . to kata sarka*) is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen.

As Paul says in Galatians 1:14 and 2 Corinthians 11:26, the Israelites are his "own people" (*en genei*; *ek genous*).

6.3   Of the tribe (*phylēs*) of Benjamin

As observed previously, the word *phylē* could sometimes be equivalent to *ethnos*, as seems to be the case in the expression "every tribe and tongue and people and group" (Rv 5:9, 7:9, 11:9, 13:7, 14:6). However, the tribes of Israel were often distinguished. In Romans 11:1 Paul wrote again that he was "an Israelite (*Israēlitēs*), of the seed of Abraham (*ek sperma Abraam*), of the tribe of Benjamin (*phylēs Beniamin*)." Putative tribal connections were still a means of self-identification (Ac 13:21: "Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe (*phylēs*) of Benjamin").

6.4   A Hebrew born of the Hebrews (*Hebraios ex Hebraiōn*)

Here is Paul's self-identification as part of an ethnic group with possible implications for language. The term "Hebrew" was commonly used by Israelites of themselves, whether from Palestine or not. For example, the identification is attested by grave and synagogue inscriptions at Rome and

elsewhere (Schürer 1973:29, 83). It is also closely associated with eponymous ancestors in relation to ethnicity. Paul uses it again in 2 Corinthians 11:22: "Are they Hebrews (*Hebraioi*)? So am I. Are they Israelites (*Israēlitai*)? So am I. Are they seed of Abraham (*sperma Abraam*)? So am I."

6.5   As to the law a Pharisee (*kata nomon Pharisaios*)

Paul had originally thought that his ethnicity was defined and preserved by the strict interpretation of the Torah for everyday life within a subgroup of Israelites, the Pharisees.

6.6   As to zeal a persecutor of the *ekklēsian* (church)

This phrase clearly shows Paul's ethnic value orientation: his willingness to persecute what he had considered earlier in his life to be deviant outsiders.

6.7   As to righteousness under *nomō* (the law) becoming blameless

Recall that *ta ethnē*, "the peoples", were also called *hoi anomoi*, "those who do not keep the Torah". At one time Paul may have thought that those who did not keep all the law were cursed (Gl 3:10). Paul did – and without blame! This was Paul's ethnic value orientation.

A constructionist would say that such a list illumines what Paul *chose* to define as his background. It was a *self-definition*, a *self-identity, with sharp, well-preserved boundaries. It included value orientations and external features that marked them. It incorporated general views of his* ethnos *and* genos.

7.   CONCLUSION

I have only skimmed the surface of what might be called Paul's ethnicity. Moreover, ethnic identity is only the beginning of his self-identity. The change that had come over Paul when he was recruited to Christianity – he thought he was recruited by God, as in the prophetic tradition (Gl 1:15) – needs to be developed in detail by comparison and contrast. I would argue that Paul believed that he had entered another *ethnos,* which had its own boundaries, its own values, and its own symbols. This *ethnos*, however, was not specified as rooted in *genos* from Israel, the *phylē* of Benjamin, the Hebrew language and culture, the norms of Torah, and the rite of circumcision. It was a different sort of *ethnos*. This was the true *genos* from Abraham, a *sōma* (body) of the new life of Christ, a more inclusive language and culture, the norms of a different kind of *gnōsis*, the model of suffering slavery, and the rite of baptism. This was a new family. While the boundaries were still somewhat fluid – the goal had not been attained – they were sharp enough to know who was in and out.

This is not the place to develop a whole analysis of Paul's new *ethnos*; that is another study, a lengthy one. However, a contrast model that brings out themes of the context of this passage shows clearly Paul's negative judgment about his ethnic self-description and what he now holds to be his new *ethnos*. It illustrates the direction that such a study would take.

Negative labels/values	Positive Labels/values
• "dogs"	• those who worship God in spirit
• "evil-workers"	• glory in Christ Jesus (good workers)
• "incisor," "cutter" (*tēn katatomēn*)	• "the (true) circumcision" (*hē peritomē*)
• ("put confidence in the flesh")	• the who "put no confidence in the flesh" (spirit)
• "all things" = "loss" (*dzēmian*), "refuse"	
• (= inferiority of *gnōsis*?)	• the superiority of the knowledge (*gnōseōs*) of Christ Jesus my Lord,
• former "gain" (*kerdē*) = "loss" (*dzēmian*)	• present gain, *kerdē*, Christ and be found in him
• righteousness of my own based on law:	• righteousness of God through faith in Christ knowing (*tou gnōnai*) him and the power of his resurrection
• circumcised on the 8th day	• sharing in Christ's sufferings
• of the people of Israel	• becoming like him in his death (baptism)
• of the tribe of Benjamin	• that if possible I may attain the resurrection of the dead
• a Hebrew born of Hebrews	
• as to the law a Pharisee	• pressing toward the goal for this prize
• as to zeal a persecutor of the church	• maturity
• as to righteousness under the law blameless	• exhortation to like-mindedness (v 15: *phronōmen*; *phroneite*; cf the exhortation before the Philippians hymn, 5:2: *phroneite*)

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