A NOT-SO-NOBLE DEATH: FIGURED SPEECH, FRIENDSHIP AND SUICIDE IN PHILIPPIANS 1:21-26

J L JAQUETTE

ABSTRACT

Arthur J Droge proposes a provocative thesis: Paul's deliberations on life and death in Philp 1:21-26 are best understood against the background of Greco-Roman discussions of suicide. Droge's thesis is weak at two points. First, it fails to explain how Paul's reflections in this passage fit the rhetorical strategy of the letter. Second, granting Droge's suggestion that Paul is 'alluding' to the possibility of his own suicide, interpreters are still left with providing a rationale for the apostle's decidedly circumlocutionary language. This article addresses these two weaknesses. First, by showing that Paul's speech is 'figured' or oblique and framed specifically for purposes of persuasiveness in delicate matters we are able to understand the allusive nature of Paul's rhetoric. Second, identifying Philippians as a hortatory or psychagogic letter of friendship and appreciating the role of exemplification in moral protrepsis enables us to understand how allusions to suicide at this point in the letter serves Paul's rhetorical strategy. By addressing these two weaknesses we offer additional support for Droge's challenging thesis.

1 INTRODUCTION

In a number of publications Arthur J Droge has proposed a provocative thesis: Paul's deliberations on life and death in Philp 1:21-26 are best understood against the background of Greco-Roman suicide (1988; 1989; 1992; Droge & Tabor 1992). Despite Droge's case for re-evaluating the exigence of this pericope, a survey of recent studies fails to unearth any dialogue with his proposal (O'Brien 1991; Marshall 1992; Silva 1992; Reeves 1992). This strange lacuna would appear to indicate that either Droge has carried the day or scholars remain unconvinced. Since silence usually implies censure I suspect that the latter is the case.

Droge advances a number of strong arguments to support his position. But

1 The following six are noteworthy: (1) Droge rightly refuses to explain Paul's supposed change of attitude in Philp 1:25-26 as either the consequence of a prophetic revelation or the result of an inward dialogue that reaches a climax in an assertion of optimistic trust.
if his proposal is to gain wider acceptance three critical weaknesses must be addressed. First, by limiting his survey of self-killing in antiquity to philosophical and theological reflections, Droge too easily minimises the dread, doubt and denunciation evident in popular morality. Contrary to the modern myth of *Romana mors* ancient attitudes have more ambiguity than is commonly assumed. The large number of philosophical discussions on the topic—many of which do support voluntary death—should not be allowed to camouflage the ancient tension between glorification and scorn, tolerance and respect of self-killing.²

Second, if 'in general, ancient society did not discriminate against suicide' then why is Paul's rhetoric so oblique and allusive that, among the interpreters of Philp 1:21-26, only Droge has discovered the apostle's meaning (1988:263)? Droge fails to provide a rationale for Paul's decidedly circumlocutory language.

Third, by failing to explain how Paul's reflections in this passage fit the rhetorical strategy of Philippians, Droge joins the vast majority of commentators that his imprisonment is about to end. By the time the apostle writes Philippians he is not only confident that he will receive a favorable verdict (1:25-26) but reminds the community that he will visit them in the very near future (2:24). (2) Droge (following Palmer 1975) makes good sense of 'to die is gain' (1:21). For Paul death is gain not only because it means union with Christ (1:23) but also because it means release from the unique pressures he faces as apostle to the Gentiles. Philippians gives ample evidence of the travail of apostolic life (1:7,13,14,17,29,30; 2:17,25,27; 3:10,21; 4:11-12,14,16). (3) Droge gives full weight to the phrase, 'yet which shall I choose I cannot tell' (και τι αἰτησομαι ου γνωριζω, 1:22; RSV). Instead of seeking the key to Paul's indecision in some (lack of) divine revelation Droge takes the passage 'to mean what it says, that the question of life or death is a matter of Paul's own volition, not something to be imposed on him from the outside' (1988:279, his emphasis). (4) Droge admits that Paul's deliberations on life and death and the possibility—indeed, desirability—of suicide are allusive (1988:278-283). As we shall see allusiveness is the key to Paul's rhetorical strategy. (5) Droge provides a rationale for Paul's decision not to take his own life. He argues that the statements attributed to Socrates by Plato in *Phaedo* 61D-62C destigmatised suicide (‘a man must not kill himself until god sends some necessity [διαγγέλη] upon him’ [62C]) and exerted a marked influence on subsequent philosophical discussions of suicide, including Philp 1:21-26 (‘but to remain in the flesh is more necessary [διαγγελειοτερον] on your account,’ [1:24]). (6) Droge rescues Paul from his post-Augustinian interpreters who have been predisposed to eliminate any possibility that Paul infers suicide in this text (Ambr On Death as a Good 3.7 and John Donne, *Biothanatos* 3.4.8 [in Clebsch 1983:84] are noteworthy exceptions). Augustine deals with the problem of suicide in *Contra Gaudentium Donistarum Episcopum* and *CivD* 1.17.27. Others (notably ClA1 Str 4.16.3-17.3 who attempts to moderate against an excessive fascination with voluntary death) denied that individuals had the right to take their own lives. But the Bishop of Hippo defines the Christian doctrine that condemns suicide and eventually finds its way into canon law. See Bels (1975) and Droge & Tabor (1992:168-83). Unless indicated otherwise, texts and translations of Greek and Latin authors are taken from the LCL.

² For example, passages in Josephus that alternatively praise the heroism of the Jews at Masada who took their own lives rather than submit to the Romans (BJ 7.323-36) and describe the iniquity of suicide (3.362-82) evidence profound ambivalence towards the topic. Droge & Tabor 1992:91-96 attempt (unsuccessfully, I believe) to show that the two accounts are purposely antithetical.
who give the impression that the pericope is a parenthesis with tremendous potential for insight into the weighty matters of Paul's views on personal eschatology, but quite unrelated, or at best only loosely linked, to the other concerns of the letter (Garland 1980; Bloomquist 1993:183). In his desire to promote a thesis Droge fails to integrate Paul's deliberations in Phlp 1:21-26 into the rest of the letter (on the integrity of Phlp see Jewett 1970; Garland 1985; Watson 1988; O'Brien 1991:10-18; Stowers 1991; Bloomquist 1993; Koperski 1993). If Droge's thesis is to gain wider acceptance it is necessary to demonstrate how Paul's allusive reference to a voluntary death functions in his moral protrepsis.

In what follows I will deal with the latter two weaknesses. While the depth and general abhorrence of suicide cannot be established, indications of a general antipathy towards the practice come from all corners and all periods of antiquity. Camus's assessment of suicide as the 'one truly serious philosophical problem' applies as much to antiquity as it does to our own time (1955:1). It is reasonable to expect that Paul would approach the matter with caution. In the first part of the paper I will show that Paul's circumlocutory language reflects the controversial nature of the topic. If employed by a rhetorician/letter-writer for persuasive purposes, autothanasia must be handled with extreme care. I will explore the rhetorical strategies available to Paul for purposes of persuasiveness in delicate matters. In the second half of the paper I will show how allusions to suicide in a letter densely packed with Greco-Roman cultural codes of friendship serve Paul's rhetorical strategy and ultimately his moral protrepsis.

3 Droge's survey of self-killing in antiquity, relying as it does on the literature of the elite, leads him to conclude that 'in general, ancient society did not discriminate against suicide, nor did it attach any particular disgrace to it, provided there was sufficient justification for the act' (1988:263). By concentrating solely on philosophical-theological discussions of self-killing Droge joins a long list of scholars who succumb to the distorting perspective of reality which Holmberg has termed the 'fallacy of idealism'. This approach 'regularly leads to the serious methodological mistake of confusing phenomena with the descriptions of them, and a naive fusing of texts and historical reality' (1990:2-3; 1980:201-2). Droge is heavily dependent upon the discussion in Rist (1969:233-55) which, while an extremely useful survey, is limited to Stoic deliberations. The most recent book-length study of suicide in antiquity (Van Hoof 1990), begins with the concrete phenomena, moves to the level of popular morality, and concludes with a relatively brief examination of philosophical and religious reflections on the topic. Van Hooff persuasively argues that 'the relation between ancient ideas about self-killing on the one hand and reality and mentality on the other, is better not reviewed as the autonomous development of philosophical concepts (1990:152). The philosophical-theological material may legitimate existing situations. But the philosophers also attempt to distance themselves from existing values, especially when they act as utopians and advocate change. Attempting to find an answer to the question whether and to what extent communities saw it as their task to condemn self-killing, philosophers are perhaps the least authoritative sources. Nevertheless, ancient thinkers are often used as spokespersons for the community's reaction to suicide. Van Hooff's study demonstrates that ancient popular attitudes toward self-killing were quite diverse and reflect a tension between respect and horror, awe and condemnation.
180 A NOT-SO-NOBLE DEATH

2 CRAFT, CAUTION AND FIGURED SPEECH IN PHILIPPIANS 1:21-26

Plutarch advises frank speech (παρρησία) ‘when occasions demand of him that he check the headlong course of pleasure or of anger or of arrogance, or that he abate avarice or curb inconsiderate heedlessness’ (Mor 69E). But frank speech is not a strategy for all occasions and, in fact, can cause unnecessary and debilitating pain (69E). Even friends must be judicious in their use of frank speech.

Apart from (shameful) flattery and the (dangerous) adverse criticism associated with frank speech, Demetrius counsels a third option for those who desire to be persuasive in delicate situations: figured speech (ἐσχηματισμένον) (Eloc 294). Blunt speech yields to figured speech in situations where the speakers are (or feel) threatened or unsure of their audience and/or the topic is controversial. It is a strategy of power, convenience, and artful craftiness used to enhance persuasiveness through oblique suggestion in controversial matters (Quint Orat 9.2.75; see Ahl 1984:184). Figured speech permits one a certain amount of distance from the audience and/or the topic under consideration and expects the crucial connections in the logic of the argument to be made by the hearers/readers. Comparing figured speech to an arrow Quintilian highlights the advantage of an oblique approach which, unlike the direct effort, quietly finds its way to the heart of the matter without arousing the suspicion of the target (Orat 9.2.75). As ubiquitous as it is allusive, figured speech invites hearers to apply what they have heard to themselves (Quint Orat 9.2.65; Dion Hal Rhet 9.1.322).

In delicate situations discussing controversial matters figured speech presses the hearer to ‘seek out the secret which he would not perhaps believe if he heard it openly stated, and to believe in that which he thinks he has found out for himself’ (Quint Orat 9.2.71). Persuasiveness is ‘assisted by the fact that the hearer takes pleasure in detecting the speaker’s concealed meaning, applauds his own penetration and regards another man’s eloquences as a compliment to himself’ (Orat 9.2.78). Figured speech invites hearers to apply what they have heard to themselves.

Figured speech has as its goal not only crafty obliqueness but also censure and improvement (Schenkeveld 1964:117,121). The strategy maintains good taste and protects speakers from reprisal while at the same time allowing them to correct and admonish (Demetr Eloc 287; Quint Orat 9.1.13; 2.66). Wary

4 Ahl (1984:177) prefers to translate σχήμα and ἐσχηματισμένον ‘figured speech’ rather than ‘innuendo’ (Grube 1961:56) or ‘covert allusion’ (Demetrius 1932:478) ‘because neither alternative gives any intimation of the meticulous arrangement schema implies’. See Hermogenes Inventiones 4.13; Philostr Ep 2.257-258.28; Dion Hal Rhet 8.1.2.281-282; 9.2.323.
adverse criticism of others gently leads them to pursue a more satisfactory course. Instead of speaking in direct terms Demetrius suggests that one should either ‘blame some other persons who have acted in the same manner...or praise individuals who have acted in the opposite way’ (Eloc 292). Demetrius’s hope is that the hearer will be admonished without feeling censured and ‘emulate....the subject of these praises, and covet praise for himself’ (292). Quintilian remarks that caution is justified when censuring others ‘because the sense of shame is a stronger deterrent to all good men than fear’ (Orat 9.2.76).

Paul is quite capable of employing a bold rhetorical strategy to effect change in his congregations (cf 2 Cor 3:12; 7:4). But he is equally adept at employing figured speech when the circumstances demand such an approach (Fiore 1985; Sampley 1993). There are three reasons why Paul would employ the strategy in Phlp 1:21-26. First, as a controversial topic suicide would certainly fit into the category of matters which are best approached delicately. Paul frames his rhetoric allusively and not only confirms antiquity’s ambivalence toward the practice but also compels his readers to discover an aspect of his prolepsis that would be infelicitous if stated bluntly. A figured presentation of suicide frames this controversial topic sensitively. Paul gives enough hints that his (original) readers will not fail to understand that he had the choice—and decided not to exercise it—to end his life voluntarily. But he stops short of bluntly presenting the details and compels his readers to make the connection themselves.

Second, Paul’s oblique strategy meets a rhetorical situation fraught with the tensions that demand a studied and careful presentation of his own exemplary ethos—an ethos that Paul hopes will move his readers to reassess their relationships with each other. For all its strengths the congregation at Philippi was no stranger to internal rivalries and disputes (1:27; 2:2-4; 4:2-3; note also the large number of words formed with σω- [1:7, 27; 2:2, 17, 18, 25; 3:21; 4:3, 14] and the the use of ‘all’ [31 times]). Paul must say something which will help them to put aside petty squabbles based on stations, status or improper moral reasoning. While Paul appears to be on firm ground with his readers he demonstrates the type of sensitivity to a delicate situation that is effectively expressed in figured speech. Paul’s leverage with the congregation does not demand a blunt approach to their problems. Rather he employs a sensitive and cautious rhetori-

---

5 Inasmuch as Paul’s desire is to help the Philippians make a decision about the future, I find the assessment of the letter as an example of deliberative rhetoric by Watson (1988) and Bloomquist (1993) persuasive.
6 The word φρονέω is found ten times in the letter (1:7; 2:2 [twice], 5; 3:15 [twice], 19; 4:2, 10 [twice]). According to Meeks (1991:333) the term was often used to talk about practical moral reasoning (as opposed to contemplative wisdom).
7 Paul’s self-description is not apologetic; it is parenetic. In agreement with Stowers 1991:116 I see no evidence in Philippians to indicate that Paul is defending himself against charges brought against him or that he suspected might be brought against him.
Third, an allusive treatment of suicide fits the goal of figured speech: censure and/or improvement. The strategy allows Paul a certain amount of distance from his readers as he gently but firmly corrects and admonishes them. Instead of bluntly censuring the Philippians’ unsatisfactory conduct he employs a carefully crafted strategy that encourages circumspection on the part of his readers and offers them an exemplum.

There is a fourth set of clues that points to the allusive nature of Phlp 1:21-26. A large variety of topoi present in the text are routinely associated with figured speech (Watson 188:59-65). Paul’s euphemism for death (‘depart,’ εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι, 1:23) fits Demetrius’s definition of ‘that kind of [figured] language which makes inauspicious things appear auspicious and impious acts appear pious’ (Eloc 281). This particular euphemism is one of the terms at the disposal of ancient authors who either wanted to denote horrified admiration of such a show of personal autonomy and free will, maintain a kind of discrete neutrality in the light of such a controversial topic or simply to express the unspeakable. Paul frames suicide euphemistically in order to ‘give gentle expression to unpleasing facts’ (Quint Orat 9.2.92). Paul’s selection of the term ‘choose’ (αἰρῆσομαι) is deliberate, oblique and designed to cleverly augment his euphemism for death.

Quintilian states that it is occasionally necessary to frighten the audience in order to arouse pathos, a tactic aided by expressions of wishing, detestation, entreaty, or anxiety (Orat 4.1.20-22, 33). Framed by Paul’s conviction that he will return to active duty as the Philippians’ psychagogue, Phlp 1:20-24 is a digressio that takes the reader into the apostle’s inner musings (see Cic InvRhet 1.51.97; DeOr 2.19.80; 2.77.311-12; 3.53.203=Quint Orat 9.1.28; Quint Orat 4.3.12-15.). After ‘delighting’ his readers with an intimate’s view of his ‘innere erregte Ungewikheit’ Paul makes a neat and elegant return to his main theme: he is confident he will remain (Lohmeyer 1964:62). But the digressio does not only delight (Quint Orat 6.2.29; 9.1.28). As an oblique disclosure of his very

8 Watson (1988:61) classifies 1:3-26 as the exordium. His analysis is helpful especially in the way he shows how Paul builds positive pathos in his readers by creating his own salutory ethos. But as we shall see it fails to account for a number of very significant cultural codes distributed throughout the letter. Cf Bloomquist (1993:126).
9 The idea of parting from life encompasses a rich semantic domain which includes such phrases as ‘leaving life (Diodorus Siculus 20.71.5; Luc Macrobi 19; Achilles Tatius 7.6.4), ’casting away or rejecting life’ (Hdi Hist 3.75; Pausanius 8.51.8; Achilles Tatius 2.30.2; Diodorus Siculus 17.117.3; Plut Conv 146D), ‘thrusting away life’ (AnthPal 7.731), ‘leading oneself out’ (AnthPal 7.95; DiogLaert 7.130; Plut De communibus notitiss adversus Stoicos 1076B; Plotinus Enneades 1.9; Athenaeus 4.157B), ‘loosening from life’ (PsHippoc Ep 7.89), ‘distancing oneself from existence’ (DionHal AntRom 9.27.5), ‘undo oneself from life’ (Eur Hip 356, 726; Diodorus Siculus 20.21.1), ‘placing oneself outside of life’ (Plut Am 774B; Diodorus Siculus 12.11.2), ‘striving after death’ (Sen Ep 24.23), ‘taking refuge in death’ (Tac An 6.26.2), and ‘seeking death’ (Tac An 1.5.4).
real desire to voluntarily end the vicissitudes of apostolic existence and enjoy the consequent deepened relationship with the Lord, it is an implicit if subsequent threat conveyed to raise the anxiety of his readers. Quintilian points out that one of the tricks for obtaining the good will of the hearers is to demonstrate the novelty, even scandal, of a case and exciting hope or fear (Quint Orat 4.1.33). The anxiety created by Paul’s reflections on a voluntary departure in Phlp 1:21-26 is, of course, mitigated by his decision to remain. The digression elicits positive pathos by showing how Paul’s concern for his readers outweighs his personal desire.

Paul’s hesitation between the two alternatives life and death reminds one of Quintilian’s description of the figure dubitatio in which the orator pretends (!) ‘to be at a loss, where to begin or end, or to decide what especially requires to be said [or done] or not to be said [or done] at all’ (Orat 9.2.19; see also Orat 9.1.30 and Cic DeOr 3.53.203). When Paul asks, ‘And what shall I choose?’ (Phlp 1:22), he employs a question as a figure ‘not to get information, but to emphasize [a] point’ (Orat 9.2.7).10

Employing the figure impersonation (personaōpatōtā) rhetoricians are able to ‘display the inner thoughts of our adversaries as though they were talking with themselves...or...introduce conversations between ourselves and others, or of others among themselves’ (Quint Orat 9.2.30; see Cic DeOr 25.85). One might employ impersonation to allow hearers an entré into a conversation with oneself. Sharing personal information about himself Paul lets his readers in on some of the powerful emotions at work within: confidence that release is imminent, fear both of personal shame and the shame that he might bring on Christ, yearning to ‘depart’ and be with his Lord, but a still greater desire to be useful to the Philippians. This strategy is akin to the figure concessio which ‘pretend[s] to admit something actually unfavourable to ourselves by way of showing our confidence in our cause’ (Quint Orat 9.2.51).

The combination of these four factors—the controversial nature of suicide, the rhetorical exigence of Philippians, the strategy of delicate protreptic censure, and the variety of topoi found in Phlp 1:21-26 commonly associated with an allusive rhetorical strategy—indicates that Paul follows a figured approach in this text. But what does Paul hope to accomplish with a cautiously crafted allusion to his own suicide? For the answer to this question we must turn to the variety of cultural codes in Philippians that inform our understanding of the letter’s rhetorical strategy.

10 See also Orat 9.2.11. As an example of this type of figure Quintilian turns to Terence Eunuchus 1.1.1 (‘What, then, shall I do [Quid igitur faciam?]’), an interesting parallel to Phlp 1:22. On the translation and punctuation of καί τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνώριζω see O’Brien (1991:126-7).
3 FRIENDSHIP AND THE RHETORIC OF SUICIDE

A number of stock motifs and topoi prominent in both ancient discussions of friendship and psychagogic letters of friendship are also prominent in Philippians (Stowers 1991:106-7; see also Koskenniemi 1956:115-27; Thraede 1970; Schenk 1984:63-65; Stowers 1986:50-70; White 1990:201-15; Fitzgerald, 1992). Paul employs these common motifs to instruct the Philippians as a more experienced friend might counsel one less wise in the ways of moral progress. Identifying the cultural codes prevalent in ancient letters of friendship and exploring how a figured treatment of suicide in Phlp 1:21-26 powerfully reinforces these motifs, even as it pushes the ancient paradigm of friendship to the boundaries of convention, will help us parse the argumentative logic of Philippians (see Judge 1974 and White 1990).

3.1 Psychagogic models of friendship

Friendship furnished the setting for moral exhortation, including instruction by letter. Friendly mentors often presented examples (παράδειγμα, exemplum) of those who had successfully endured the vicissitudes of life and thus modeled laudable behavior. Indeed, because people put more faith in their eyes than in their ears, personal examples were regarded as more persuasive than words (Sen Ep 6; 8.3; 83.1; Ben 5.19.8; and Musonius Rufus Fragmenta 11 [in Lutz 1947:83]). Socrates and other sages served as common paradigms of exemplary behavior (Luc Demon 2-3; Nigrinus 26; Xen Mem 1.2.3; 6.3; Sen Epp 6; 52.1-9; cf 1 Pet 3:5-6; ClRm 1Cl 4-5). Pseudo Isocrates pointed Demonicus to Hercules and Theseus as worthy models but prefers his young reader’s own father as the παράδειγμα sine qua non (Demonicus 9-11; see also Pliny Ep 8.13; 1 Cor 4:14-17; 2 Tim 1:5).

Moralists recognised the desirability of personalised instruction which could be adapted to the circumstances and needs of individuals (Plut De recta ratione


12 According to Quintilian exemplification employs a named or anonymous person’s life and character as ‘one of the greatest embellishments of oratory and specially adapted to conciliate the feelings, as also frequently to excite them’ (Orat 9.1.30=Cic DeOr 3.53.204). On exemplification (exemplum, παράδειγμα) see [Cic] Her 4.1.2; 3.5; 49.62; Cic InvRhet 1.29.49; DeOr 2.40.169; Quint Orat 5.11.1-5; 9.1.31; Aristot Rhet 1.2.1356B-1357B; 2.20.1393A-1394A; Arist RhAl 8.1429A-1430A. See PsIsoc Demonicus 9-11; Sen Epp 25.6; 52.8; 94.40-41; Marcus Aurelius Meditations 11.26; Sen Ep 95.72; Plut Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus 85A-B; Heb 13:7; ClRm 1Cl 17-18, 55; Pol Ep 8-9; Fiore (1986); and Malherbe (1986:135-8).
audiendi 43E-44A; Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur 70D-71D; Apollonius of Tyana Ep 10; Philo Decal 36-39). By setting a personal example of moral progress, moralists made possible the continuing security and cultivation of the virtuous life for their disciples (PsDiog Ep 15 [in Malherbe 1977:109]; Julian Or 7.214D; cf Luc Icar 29-31). Stating that they had come not only in word but also in deed, they drew attention to their own accomplishments as warrants for their demands (see Sen Ep 108.35-37; DioChrys Or 70.6; Luc PergMort 19 and Demon 3). Exhortation to live like a specific human paradigm was a call to conduct oneself as a μυμτης of the model. Providing oneself as a moral example also implies that the exemplar will be held responsible by the μυμτης (see Sen Epp 2.6.6; 7.1.7; Musonius Rufus, Fragment 11 [in Lutz 1947:83]); and Sherwin-White 1966:42).

In Philippians Paul appeals to a number of examples of praiseworthy behavior. The detailed and positive characterisations of Timothy (2:19-24) and Epaphroditus (2:25-30) are calculated to elicit a certain type of conduct. The actions and choices of these men demonstrate how the Philippians should treat one another. Evaluating the so-called Christ hymn (2:5-11) Stowers concludes: 'This text serves as a hortatory model illustrating the virtues of friendship advocated in 1:27-2:4. Most directly, the “hymn” constitutes a narrative modeling of the exhortation in v. 4: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others”'(1991:119; see also White 1990).

In addition to these important exemplars Paul has recourse to yet another παράδειγμα. As the Philippians' psychagogue he boldly presents himself as an exemplum of one who struggles in the journey toward greater maturity in Christ and wishes to impart that knowledge to his friends (3:17; 4:9). But there are other, more subtle texts where Paul uses the topos of personal exemplification. Our passage is one of them (Stowers 1991:115). When Paul states, ‘But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account... I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith’ (1:24-25), he presents himself in the role of an exemplary psychagogue. He provides the Philippians with a model on which to pattern their own lives. Here Paul does not explicitly call for imitation of himself as he does in 3:17 and 4:9, but the agenda is the same and for the same reason (see also 1 Th 1:6-7; 2:14; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Gl 4:12; Castelli 1991).

Phlp 1:21-26 highlights both a tangible model of love determining action towards others and of a life lived for the gospel. Paul's figured discussion of the choice he makes 'for your sake' not only admits the Philippians into his very

personal deliberations. It is carefully designed to help the readers focus on the conduct that should be evident in their own lives. His readers would no doubt have been deeply impressed by the example of a psychagogue who decides *not* to choose the obviously preferred—voluntary death and consequent being with Christ—in order to remain and serve them. He expects similar conduct from his readers. One should so look to the interests of one's friends that, given the opportunity to voluntarily end one's life and enjoy the heightened presence of Christ or remain in the flesh and experience the vagaries of a life devoted to the service of Christ's people, the true friend will choose the latter.

Situated in the *exordium* to build his own *ethos* and elicit positive *pathos* from his readers, Paul's personal example places the burden of the letter's paraenesis right up front: 'Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others' (2:4). The specific details of the example are presented obliquely because of the controversial nature of suicide. Paul's allusive *exemplum* allows us to take 'pleasure in detecting the speaker's concealed meaning, applaud[ing our] own penetration and regard[ing] another[']s ... elo­quences as a compliment to [ourselves]' (Quint *Orat* 9.2.78).

### 3.2 Friendship and sacrifice

Friends could suffer and die for friends. One might feel strongly the need to avoid the tyrant's demands to betray one's friends. Self-sacrifice in this case was dignified and unselfish. Those who endured pain when they could just as well take their own lives are lauded (cf Valerius Maximus 4.7.5).

Seneca, no mean supporter of suicide as the supremely free act, commends his friend Lucilius for *not* retreating from the threat of the tyrant by seeking voluntary death (*QNat* 4A). Seneca commends Lucilius because he had preferred a higher value than his personal *dignitas*, that is loyalty to his friends. The *refusal* to take one's life, an action rejected because it is selfish and thus undignified, garnered Seneca's support. The Younger Pliny gives an example of Titius Aristo who, for the sake of friends, decides not to commit suicide.

A few days ago, he sent for me and some of his intimate friends, and told us to ask the doctors what the outcome of his illness would be, so that if it was to be fatal he could deliberately put an end to his life, though he would carry on with the struggle if it was only to be long and painful; he owed it to his wife's prayers and his daughter's tears, and to us, his friends, not to betray our hopes by a self-inflicted death so long as these hopes were not in vain (*Ep* 1.22.8-9).

---

14 Suffering can be expected, since friends struggle together in a common *aigwvyn*. On the agonistic nature of friendship see Marshall (1987:2, 35-67). Van Hooft (1990:126-9, 236-7) identifies ninety-seven cases of suicide where the *causa moriendi* can be attributed to *devotio* or *fides*. 
The critical element in Titius's decision is the magnitude and duration of his pain. But the choice is also affected by his concern for family and friends. Titius's decision on the side of life is an honourable one.

Given the choice of departing and being with Christ or remaining and serving the Philippians and, as a consequence, surrendering deeper communion with Christ and enduring the vicissitudes of apostolic existence, Paul prefers the former. Paul proves himself a loyal friend of the Philippians by choosing the necessary (service) over the preferred (suicide).

Christ, too, serves as a warrant and model for the kind of sacrificial friendship which constitutes his community and which Paul encourages, so that ruler and ruled will also be friends when Christ returns. Paul's dictum 'imitate me as I imitate Christ' (1 Cor 11:2) includes the pattern of friendship modeled by Lord and apostle. Christ surrendered vast privileges in order to serve and suffer for his friends. Paul's deliberations in Phil 1:21-26 detail the sacrifices he incurred on behalf of his friends. Paul's model is Christ, the true friend who surrenders his exalted status (or its possibility) for his friends. Christ voluntarily and sacrificially dies; Paul voluntarily and sacrificially remains. Christ's choice to surrender his life on behalf of others evidences a martyr's sacrificial death. Paul's choice to remain in order to serve the Philippians demonstrates a death sacrificed.

3.3 Expressions of affection and the presence-absence motif
One of the requirements of friendship is that friends spend time together and be present for one another. One's role as friend/mentor is dependent upon one's presence with another. But the physical absence of the psychagogue was less of a problem than might first be expected. Indeed, friendly letters claimed to be substitutes for personal presence and functioned as the medium for dealing with the problem of one's absence. A letter overcame the distance between friends by allowing them to converse with each other and offer exhortation, entreaty, advice and correction. As a substitute for one's presence, a letter was expected to contain what one would have said had one been present and to say it in a style appropriate to the occasion. Since a letter was thought to reflect the character and personality of its writer, one had to be careful to write as though one were speaking to the reader. Expressions of affection and yearning to be with one's friends are often combined with this presence-absence motif.

The combination of affectionate language and the presence-absence motif is abundantly apparent in Philippians (1:7, 8, 23, 27; 2:19, 23, 26; 4:1). But Paul is caught between conflicting desires to be with different friends in different...
places. Indeed, the rhetoric of 1:21-26 is shaped by just such a dilemma. Strikingly, one of Paul's friends—a friend that he desires (ἐπιθυμία) to depart and be with (1:23)—is Christ. To be with Christ is 'better by far' (1:23). Yet being with Christ will take the apostle away from other friends, the Philippians. If he remains in the flesh to serve his readers, he cedes his preferred desire to be with Christ. Paul's desire to depart and be with Christ would have made perfect sense to the Philippians. His decision to be absent from the Lord and present with the Philippians must have been all the more appreciated because both letter writer and readers agree that their common friend is also their common benefactor. But the decision is amplified by what Paul chooses not to do in order to remain for the Philippians' sake. The fact that the specific details involved are not presented confirms both their controversial nature and Paul's oblique strategy. Paul's choice is the reflection of the delicate balance between competing affections. Paul's rhetoric is the sensitive association of a controversial topic with careful censure.

The presence-absence motif is powerfully reinforced by the Paul's figured deliberations about a genuine choice to terminate his life. The Philippians know that Paul's separation from their common patron-friend, Christ, could have been resolved by suicide. They also know that Paul demonstrates genuine friendship when he voluntarily cedes the desired presence of Christ for them. It is unlikely that the Philippians failed to grasp the significance of the example provided by their psychagogue. Nor would they have misunderstood the magnitude of the sacrifice Paul made on their behalf. Absence from the Lord means presence with the Philippians (cf 2 Cor 5:6-9). Their own relationships were to be reflections of one who unselfishly deemed his preferred presence with the Lord less necessary than his presence with them.

3.4 Paul's novel twist on antithetical models

The agonistic nature of ancient friendship is evident in the antitheses the moralists often employed in their paraenesis. Contrasting models highlight exemplary behavior and proscribe unsatisfactory conduct (see PsIsoc Demonicus 9-11; Sen Epp 52.8; 94.48, 50; 95.13; DioChrys Or 32.11-12; Sallust Bellum Catilinae 51; Cic Quinct; Quint Orat 5.11.6; Marshall 1987:53-55; and Malherbe 1992: 283-5 nn 66, 67). Philosophers might accentuate the faults of their hearers in order eventually to improve them. Stowers identifies the 'fundamental architecture' of Philippians as one of antithetical models of friendship (1991:115). By contrasting himself with others Paul urges the readers to emulate one kind of
Paul's language of opposition is less an attempt to paint supposed 'enemies' in a negative light than a common pedagogical strategy employed to highlight worthy conduct.

Two complementing narratives (1:21-26; 2:5-11), each giving an example of the conduct Paul wants his readers to demonstrate, function as exemplary 'bookends' for the direct paraenesis in 1:27-2:4. On one side of the exhortation Paul details his own conduct (1:21-26). Paul decides on life—clearly a sacrifice by his own account—in order to remain and serve the Philippians. On the other side of the paraenesis Christ's sacrificial conduct (2:5-11) completes the period and again illustrates the virtues of self-sacrificing friendship. According to the hymn Christ surrendered vast privileges in order to serve and suffer for others. Like his Lord, Paul gives up great benefits in order to serve others. His surrender of any benefits (life) on behalf of others conforms to and telegraphs the pattern in 2:5-11, and, like Christ, Paul can expect a reward for his sacrifice (3:10-11; cf 2:5-11). Both exemplars sacrifice something of inestimable value in order to serve.

But the carefully crafted parallelism between Christ and Paul must not lead us to overlook an equally shrewd antithesis. Paul makes a subtle yet implicit contrast between himself and his Lord. Instead of surrendering his life as Christ did, Paul relinquishes his death. Christ gave up the preferable—some sort of exalted status or the opportunity for an exalted status—for the necessary (to make the Philippians into his friends, and thus friends of God). Paul gives up the better (death and consequent being with Christ) and chooses instead to serve the Philippians. Both Paul and his Lord surrender something extremely valuable. But what they sacrifice is very different. Inasmuch as the hymn emphasises the voluntary nature of Christ's surrender it is quite reasonable to expect that Paul's framing exemplum assumes a similar point—the voluntary character of Paul's sacrifice. The complementing patterns of self-sacrifice should not be allowed to conceal the contrasting objects surrendered. Christ unselfishly and voluntarily gives up his life. Paul unselfishly and voluntarily gives up death. By providing two studies of love determining action towards others, examples that both complement each other and offer a stark contrast, Paul tackles the issue with a thoroughness that spans the continuum of exemplary behavior. Certainly Christ's self-sacrifice is impressive and ultimately the cardinal exemplum. But

---

16 See especially the contrasts between sets of motives (Phlp 1:14-17), attitudes towards certain Jewish boundary rituals (3:2-11), and the exhortation to imitate one exemplar in contrast to enemies (οἱ εγκαθοι, 3:17-19).

17 The translation of βλέπετε (3:2) as 'beware' has caused most commentators to over-interpret 3:2-17 and to discover 'imminent dangers from judaizers or allude to current events' rather than recognise 'in Paul's rhetoric of friendship/enmity conventional antithetical exhortation (Stowers 1991:116).
Paul's own example is no less a tour de force of selflessness. Paul exemplifies the type of conduct that 'looks not only to one's own interests, but also to the interests of others' (2:3). The same can be said for the conduct of Christ. But the examples of what are sacrificed couldn't be more different. And as opposite ends of the continuum they cover all imaginable conduct.

The comparison between Paul and his Lord are revealing. This figured contrast highlighting the difference between the 'suffering' of two 'patrons' on behalf of their 'friends' demonstrates remarkable pedagogy. Friends die for their friends. Christ demonstrates this type of friendship. But friends also demonstrate their loyalty to friends by refusing to 'lead themselves out.' Like the Younger Pliny's friend, Titus Aristo, Paul chooses to endure 'for the sake of his...friends' (Ep 1.22.12). There are enough similarities between the two models that frame the virtues of friendship advocated in 1:27-2:4 to make Paul's point: look out for the interests of others. The controversial nature of suicide makes overt mention of the topic in Paul's reflections risky. But the readers could not have missed the subtle contrast between the different sacrifices of their Lord and their apostle.

4 CONCLUSION

The weaknesses of Droge's controversial thesis are eliminated by the arguments advanced above. The controversial nature of suicide in antiquity provides the key to Paul's allusive rhetoric in Phlp 1:21-26. Rhetoricians and letter writers had at their disposal a variety of ways to treat problematic issues or to deal with situations where caution was necessary. Figured speech was one of the preferred means. Paul's protrepsis treats the readers with respect by allowing them to discover for themselves what it obliquely implies. All the clues to the nature of Paul's deliberations in Phlp 1:21-26 fall into place when we understand that Paul's rhetoric is figured.

Showing how a figured treatment of suicide reinforces motifs commonly found in a psychagogic letter of friendship gives further clues to Paul's reflections. Paul follows conventional psychagogy by proposing a variety of specific models of behavior—both good and bad. Among the former he offers the Philippians his own conduct and gives it pride of place at the beginning of the letter. Paul chooses not to terminate his life and enjoy an end to the travail he experiences as a consequence of his apostolic call. He voluntarily surrenders the pleasures of a deepened communion with Christ. True friends will not 'lead themselves out' if others stand to benefit from their presence. Paul believes that 'to depart and be with Christ...is far better.' But as the Philippian's psychagogue and an exemplar of genuine friendship the benefit that might accrue to them if he remains overrides his desire to depart and be with Christ. The good man performs 'many acts for the sake of his friends...and if necessary dies for
them (Aristot EthNic 9.8.1169a20; cf EthEud 7.1245b). Paul is perfectly willing to sacrifice his life on behalf of his apostolic call (Rom 9:3). But in Phlp 1:21-26 Paul voluntarily cedes his presence with the Lord on behalf of the Philippians. At home with the Lord means absence from the Philippians. The examples of Paul and Christ which frame the direct paraenesis in 1:27-2:4 both demonstrate self-sacrifice. But the subtle contrast in what is sacrificed makes a powerful statement when the reader takes seriously the nature of Paul's genuine choice. Christ chooses to die for his friends; Paul selects life.

An alteration of a text from the John's gospel effectively expresses Paul's psychagogic logic of selflessness: 'Greater love has no man than this, than a man [not] lay down his life for his friends' (Jn 15:13).

**WORKS CONSULTED**

Droge, A J 1992. s v 'Suicide'. *ABD*.
Fitzgerald, J T 1992. s v 'Philippians, Epistle to the' *ABD*.
Koskenniemi, H 1956. *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia. (Annales Academiae scientiarum...
fennicae, Series B, Vol 102.2.)
Palmer, D W 1975. 'To die is gain' (Philippians 1: 21). *NovT* 17, 203-218.
Reeves, R R 1992. To be or not to be? That is not the question: Paul's choice in Philippians 1:22. *PerspRelStud* 19, 273-287.

Dr J L Jaquette, Faculty of Theology, Africa University, P O Box 1320, MUTARE, Zimbabwe.