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Philip H. Kern

Excerpt

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INTRODUCTION

This inquiry concerns itself with the intersection of two interpretative methodologies. On the one hand we may speak of ‘rhetorical criticism’ as used in biblical studies to describe a text-centred approach, the purpose being to determine how the shape of that text, its innate strategic impulse, affects the reader. This in turn, depending on the stance of the practitioner, breaks down into two more channels. Either those impulses may inform the analyst’s recreation of the text’s tradition, travelling back to questions of the intent and strategy of the writer, or such questions may be bracketed off to allow the analyst to locate a text-immanent intent,¹ strategy and world of discourse. Either way this stream of scholarship attempts to deal with the text at hand and take its shape and content as primary.

On the other hand – and we will see that this approach is commonly identified with studies of Galatians – ‘rhetorical analysis’ may be a new and improved approach to form criticism, attempting to describe textual shape and content by measuring its conformity to classical handbooks on rhetoric. This approach is concerned with neither the shape nor prehistory of the text merely for their own sake; thus it side-steps some of the weaknesses of form criticism. But the question of what it can add to the discovery of meaning remains open, for it often addresses only matters peripheral to the text with any great effectiveness,² and even regarding these matters (primarily linked to sociology), it does little more than open new questions. Unfortunately, these questions often receive troubling answers because both the literary-critical and classical backgrounds of the interpretative scheme have been ignored.³

¹ That is, the intent of the text as opposed to that of its creator.

² Clines, *Pentateuch*, 7–15.

³ It will become clear that I do not question the use of Galatians as an artefact –

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The educational system of the ancient world at once found its centre and pinnacle in rhetoric. Thus to credit Paul with producing a piece of refined oratory imputes certain qualities to him; for example, the rhetor necessarily depended upon a particular linguistic register reflecting the 'oratorical domain', discussed in this thesis in terms of levels of language. This use of language, as remains the case to some degree, reveals the speaker's level of *paideia*.

Rhetoric has thus been used of late to refine our understanding of Paul's backgrounds, providing the data to work back from a rhetorical discourse embedded within an epistle to the source of Paul's ability.⁴ Manifold explanations for Paul's oratorical prowess are proffered, ranging from prolonged higher education in the manner of his day to a rejection of the question altogether as irrelevant to the matter of his background. But conclusions concerning Paul's backgrounds – social, educational, financial – affect too much of NT studies to be determined by excessively hypothetical propositions; it is imperative that we build on a solid foundation.

For evidence that literary conclusions control wide-ranging discussions, consult David Aune's article in which he treats 'Romans as a *Logos Protreptikos* in the context of Ancient Religious and Philosophical Propaganda'.⁵ He has five questions relating to (1) Jewish literary history; (2) Paul's education and what it tells of Jewish proselytism; and (3) Paul's view of leadership over against philosophical schools – all of which arise from Paul's supposed employment of a particular letter/speech form. Joop Smit and C. K. Barrett feel that Paul's writing permits us to speak of his 'professional skill as a rhetorician';⁶ while John Fitzgerald, also allowing the implications of his work to run their course, more cautiously observes: 'Inasmuch as this instruction in epistolary style was provided by teachers of rhetoric, the correspondence of Paul's letters to the styles and letter types given by Ps.-Demetrius and Ps.-Libanius

i.e. as a tool useful for understanding Paul's social world. But wrongly identifying the epistle as a piece of classical rhetoric is as misleading as, say, confusing a first-century Jewish potsherd with a Greek one from four hundred years earlier.

⁴ The fault lies not with the logic of this move but with the inherent weakness of an edifice built without a foundation. Since the evidence opposes the suggestion that Paul wrote classical orations, it cannot support the conclusion that Paul reveals the *paideia* behind rhetoric.

⁵ Aune, 'Romans as *Logos Protreptikos*', 91–124.

⁶ Smit, 'Deliberative Speech', 24; Barrett, *Freedom and Obligation*, 32. Cf. also Fitzgerald 'Ancient Epistolary Theorists', 193; Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth*, especially 400.

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is highly significant. It provides another piece of evidence that Paul's educational level was high and that he received training in rhetoric'.⁷ Christopher Forbes moves from 1 Corinthians via reference to Paul's tertiary education to 'a certain social standing'. Though his logic is sound, and his conclusions held tentatively, he builds, like the others, on the premise that Paul's means of expression are those of classical oratory.⁸ Thus certain elements coalesce, permitting a direct flow of logic from employment of rhetoric to the appropriate education (i.e. tertiary) to social standing.

For the second position, that the question holds little relevance, one may begin with the influential reflections of Kennedy:

It is not a necessary premise of this study that the evangelists or Saint Paul had formally studied Greek rhetoric. In the case of Paul the evidence is somewhat ambivalent . . . Even if he had not studied in a Greek school, there were many handbooks of rhetoric in common circulation which he could have seen. He and the evangelists as well would, indeed, have been hard put to escape an awareness of rhetoric as practised in the culture around them, for the rhetorical theory of the schools found its immediate application in almost every form of oral and written communication: in official documents and public letters, in private correspondence, in the lawcourts and assemblies, in speeches at festivals and commemorations, and in literary composition in both prose and verse.⁹

These words are heavy with implications for NT studies. While to Kennedy Paul's rhetorical awareness says more about his literary milieu than about his education, it is surely significant that, at least at some level, Paul and the evangelists are thought to stand in a similar relationship to rhetoric.

Burton Mack, occupying a middle ground, maintains (though undoubtedly he does not intend his absolute claims to be taken literally) that 'all people, whether formally trained or not, were *fully schooled* in the wily ways of the sophists, the eloquence required at civic festivals'.¹⁰ Hence he concludes that 'To be

⁷ Fitzgerald, 'Ancient Epistolary Theorists', 193. Fitzgerald then cites Betz, 'Problem'. Cf. Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth*, 400; Malherbe, *Social Aspects*, 59.

⁸ Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony', 22–4.

⁹ Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 9–10.

¹⁰ Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, 31; emphasis added.

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engulfed in the culture of Hellenism meant to have ears trained for the rhetoric of speech'.¹¹ Lest one think that Mack simply refers to a high gloss on one's natural ability to argue well – without implying a system of rhetoric – he goes on to label what was learned by these means 'the rules of discourse' and describes them as 'firm'.¹²

Perhaps the clearest expression of this position comes from Douglas Campbell, who explains that because Graeco-Roman society was so thoroughly immersed in it, rhetoric maintained some degree of influence over everyone. Paul would have been no different: his general education, continual travel and innate intelligence were sufficient for rhetoric to infuse his patterns of speech and thought.¹³

Betz avoids the question of Paul's status in his commentary – though he does betray an awareness of sociological implications when he refers to 'the myth of Paul the non-thinker' and the inseparable falsehood that 'he cannot have received a decent education'. His commentary attempts to show that Paul's carefully constructed epistle reflects his 'literary skills',¹⁴ undermining disparaging views of Paul by highlighting his sophistication.

Rhetoric relates more directly to Paul's background in the argument of Robert G. Hall, who insists that those who favour the biographical evidence of Galatians over that of Acts have a misplaced faith: rhetorical conventions allow for details in the narrative which, though not altogether reliable, pose no threat to the educated listener. Hence Paul presents no more reliable biographical data in Galatians than does Acts – meaning that we have very little evidence for his life except what we infer from the less direct statements of his letters.¹⁵ Gerd Lüdemann similarly argues that in a forensic dispute the most useful account of events is preferable to the most accurate, so Paul's narrative need not supply historical detail.¹⁶

Another question which rhetoric may help answer concerns the nature of the Galatian churches. To the tired discussion of who received the epistle Betz adds a fresh insight: 'The sophisticated

¹¹ Ibid.¹² Ibid.¹³ D. S. Campbell, *Rhetoric of Righteousness*, 75–6.¹⁴ Betz, *Galatians*, xiv.¹⁵ Hall, 'Historical Inference', 308–20.¹⁶ Lüdemann, *Paul*, 57–62.

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character of Galatians as a literary and rhetorical product suggests that the Galatian churches were composed primarily of Hellenized and Romanized city dwellers, rather than the uneducated and the poor'.¹⁷ It is unclear how this observation correlates with his remark that 'The effectiveness of rhetoric depends primarily upon the naiveté of the hearer, rather than upon the soundness of the case',¹⁸ but such an assessment clearly opposes the tenor of Lightfoot's discussion: he described the Galatians as barbaric Celts who never completely gave up their rude and fiery ways, and found Paul's language to accord well with such a readership.¹⁹

Thus the concern underlying this thesis is significant because Paul's rhetorical abilities are being asked to enlighten our understanding of Paul the man, his background, and the churches to whom he writes. Bruce Winter, Duane Litfin and others, moreover, demonstrate that Paul's attitude towards rhetoric also says much about his theology.²⁰

At least some readers of the NT feel that we ought to combine the awareness of our inability to read as a member of Paul's society with the goal of trying to overcome whatever anachronism and displacement we *can* successfully identify. While this may not yield the only valid reading of the text, it does seem to such scholars a necessary exercise, and in light of methodological advances is thought to be overlooked at scholarship's peril. An example of such a path forward is the anthropological approach undertaken by, among others, Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey.²¹ Another approach, one that at times aims for the very heart of Paul's world of discourse, is rhetorical criticism.

This latter method claims a long history, and of late, a growing popularity. I aim to define and evaluate 'rhetorical criticism' in order to determine what it can contribute to understanding Galatians. Chapter 2 will therefore provide a mini-lexicon of the terminology heard in the world of rhetorical studies, though in the end one might conclude that this entire project is nothing more than an attempt to define an analytical mode.

Following matters of definition, chapter 3 will present and

¹⁷ Betz, *Galatians*, 2; cf. Aune, 'Review of Betz', 323–4.

¹⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, 24.

¹⁹ Lightfoot, *Galatians*, especially 13–14.

²⁰ Betz, 'Problem', 16–48; Winter, *Philo and Paul*; Kennedy, "'Truth" and "Rhetoric"', 195–202; Litfin, *Theology of Proclamation*.

²¹ See especially Malina, *Christian Origins*; Neyrey, *Paul*.

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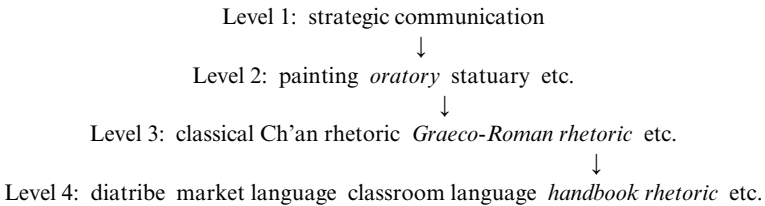
analyse the various methodologies which use rhetoric to explain Galatians. By overlooking the restrictions inherent within Graeco-Roman rhetoric, some scholars have applied categories which properly describe material from another sphere altogether. Chapters 4 and 5 will then test the claim that Galatians is a classical speech, arguing first that it does not conform to the structure of the classical oration. Often the sources depended upon to support a rhetorical approach are read in questionable ways. It is then argued that with regard to species, Galatians again conflicts with expectations created by readings of the oratorical handbooks. Chapters 6 and 7 will discuss Paul's language: first, by surveying the attitude of the church fathers and some later writers towards Paul's writing, it is shown that he was not thought to have produced Graeco-Roman oratory. This finds confirmation in the ongoing debate concerning NT Greek. Each attempt to classify Paul's language solidifies the position that he did not use the language of oratory. A brief conclusion reviews the argument that with regard to structure, species and level of language, Paul does not conform to Graeco-Roman oratory. Furthermore, to wrongly attribute such a procedure to him interferes with the attempt to understand the apostle's social and educational background.

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TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF RHETORIC

Rhetoric

Rhetoric, the first and most difficult term to be defined, loses precision due to its broad cluster of meanings and its complex history. We will isolate four levels of rhetoric – though each, in the appropriate sphere, could be understood as the only necessary referent of the term. Our definition will endeavour to explain the following chart:



These levels constitute a schema which grows out of the classical rhetorical handbooks – meaning that the order has been reversed. The handbooks discuss the narrowest level of rhetoric, while we begin with the broadest.

Universal rhetoric or strategic communication

Level 1 rhetoric is persuasion, i.e. effective communication, summed up as 'strategy'. To speak only in terms of discourse is to impose unnecessary restrictions on the discussion, since a painting or a sculpture can have rhetorical force, that is, it may be effective. And clearly the effect of a painting is the result of neither reading nor hearing, so it must be accomplished through something broader – something we will call participation. Much investigation has gone into the question of what happens in a participatory event; for

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example, Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, in their now standard text, *The New Rhetoric*, attempt to describe how persuasion comes about in a communicative encounter.¹

But they represent only one way to approach persuasion, and while their effort is wide-ranging, it must admit as one of its antecedents the work of Aristotle, who attempted to describe how to persuade in a more restricted sphere: the courts and council of Athens. Much that he says would be true of arguments conducted in other spheres, for it is inconceivable that the courts employ a method of argumentation and a language that has no place outside the halls of justice. For example, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca discuss at some length the limits of rational forces as persuasive, and the necessity of various non-rational appeals for the generation of conviction. This non-rationality, now often associated with Perelman and Kenneth Burke, was already recognized by the ancients, as revealed by the handbook identification of three persuasive forces: ethos, the personal appeal of the orator; pathos, the emotions of the audience; and logos, the rational arguments. Thus non-rational appeals are seen to have loomed large in classical theory, even as in modern. But this observation does not suggest that Aristotle ever envisaged an expansion of rhetoric to other persuasive spheres.

Our first level of rhetoric is thus established at least partially by contrast with classical oratory and represents the larger group of which classical rhetoric is only a subset. To isolate points of overlap should not be difficult, and it should not lead to the equating of the subset with its superset. But precisely this confusion appears in several studies which apply rhetorical theory to Galatians for analysis. We need continually to ask if the analyst is speaking of rhetoric as universal strategic communication, or as one of its many subsets.

Oratory

One type of strategic communication is that which employs words – thus ‘persuasive speech’.² Politicians, lawyers, preachers and scholars all employ particular modes of speech with which they try to accomplish their purposes. Very often, it is assumed, their

¹ Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*.

² Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation*, 158.

primary strategy is rational argument – but such is not necessarily the case. Although the television advertisement and the politician often seem to use different techniques to manipulate the participant into buying the goods on offer, we again see the relevance of Perelman and others who have attempted to show that much persuasive discourse is effective outside the sphere of the rational.³ Perelman's explanation is that other forces intervene to convince; similarly, Kenneth Burke argues that rhetoric is about identification – that is, the rhetor's goal is to lure the participants into identifying with the rhetor or with a foundational aspect of the argument so that they can then be transported to a new position.⁴

A further observation concerning this particular level 2 rhetoric may prove helpful: by calling it a rhetoric which employs words we mean simply that they are the material of this rhetorical subset. Thus, in contrast to other forms of rhetoric on the second level, the rhetoric of our concern does not use paint and canvas or stone.

Graeco-Roman rhetoric⁵

The third level of rhetoric is a subset of larger groups of rhetoric, the particular type with which we are concerned being Graeco-Roman. We must recognize that each example (1) is a form of verbal discourse; and (2) conforms to specific patterns of expression determined by the group of which the speaker is part. Thus after dividing universal rhetoric into various material classes, we split our particular material class (verbal discourse) into cultural groups. The source of the patterns exhibited in many rhetorics is linked to conventions appropriate to particular communities, meaning that we move from persuasive discourse employing words (level 2) to their employment within a particular milieu (level 3).⁶

³ Cf. Skinner, *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*, especially chapter 5 ('Alternatives to Punishment'). He argues that reason is a weak tool for persuasion – that conditioning is actually the operative element.

⁴ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*. Cf. Koptak's use of this rhetoric of identification in Galatians ('Rhetorical Identification', 97–113).

⁵ Only this once will we use the label 'Graeco-Roman' rhetoric to mean level 3 because our purpose here is to highlight its cultural origin. Henceforth, in conformity with standard usage, we will use the designations Graeco-Roman, classical, and level 4 rhetoric to speak of the specific oratory of the handbooks and the public civil oratory of the Graeco-Roman world.

⁶ This milieu could be based on, for example, cultural, social or educational conventions, so that we would understand the rhetoric of Aristotle to be linked to his Greek culture (and some might even link it more particularly to Athens: cf. E. Black,

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Perhaps considering a rhetoric which diverges from Graeco-Roman at level 3 might assist our understanding; and some of the relevant points may be reinforced if we choose a remote, non-Western, rhetoric. Such a rhetoric is introduced in Dale Wright's article on the rhetorical practices of classical Ch'an Buddhism. He describes four 'rhetorics' found in that tradition, including the rhetorics of strangeness, of direct pointing, of silence, and of disruption.

The 'rhetoric of strangeness' is employed when the enlightened one adopts a mode of discourse characterized at least in part by a movement away from didactic conventions and representational language. This non-representational language, free of propositional statements, is then used to present arguments that do not have persuasion as their goal; so the 'ungraspability' of the subject-matter – enlightenment – becomes embodied in and characteristic of the text. Since persuasion is not a goal, the speaker is free to engage in discourse that abuses the conventions of the listener,⁷ thus the rhetoric of strangeness.⁸

With 'the rhetoric of direct pointing',⁹ gestures form an indispensable part of communication in the Ch'an tradition. It should be noted, however, that these also conform to the rhetoric of strangeness. In one instance a monk queried: 'What is the meaning of Bodhidharma coming from the West?' Without speaking his 'master came down from his elevated lecture seat and stood beside it. The monk asked: "Is that your answer?"'¹⁰

The absence of discourse, a 'rhetoric of silence', became an

Rhetorical Criticism, 126), though one could envisage the linking of his rhetoric to status enjoyed as an intellectual with an Athenian education, or to the fact that he was not native to Athens, or to any other group-classification which fits. With regard to Galatians, we could attempt to describe the rhetorics of economic, social or gender groups without regard to 'cultural boundaries'; our concern, however, is with the rhetoric which has been pulled into the study of Galatians, and that has tended to be rhetoric associated with Graeco-Roman society. (Thus we are not interacting with those who have done a Marxist or feminist reading of Galatians, but rather with those who have done a Graeco-Roman rhetorical reading.) Furthermore, the rhetoric with which we must interact has usually been understood to be that of the classical handbooks. The handbooks represent a source for a rhetoric which cuts a reasonably unified path across the diversity of that culture, indeed a narrower one than has often been assumed, as we will suggest at level 4.

⁷ Though this too can become conventional, and in fact does create a rhetoric of its own. See Wright, 'Discourse of Awakening', 27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 24–7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27–30.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 28; citing T. 51:277c (where T. 51 = *Ching-te ch'uan-ten lu* (*Transmission of the Lamp, Ching-te era*)). Taisho 51, Number 2076.