

Paul, Plutarch and the Problematic Practice of Self-Praise (περιαυτολογία): The Case of Phil 3.2–21*

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Paul's boasting is often considered to be problematic. This paper explores Pauline boasting from the perspective of Plutarch's views on self-praise. Outlining what kinds of self-praise were and were not acceptable to someone like Plutarch, the paper analyses and positions Paul's boasting in Phil 3 in this context, concluding that, however offensive it may be to modern ears, this boasting was probably less so to the ears of his contemporaries.

Keywords: rhetoric, Paul, Plutarch, self-praise, boasting, Philippians

1. Introduction

Paul's boasting of himself in a number of instances in his letters has provided and continues to provide a source of exegetical discussion.¹ Whereas modern interpreters are embarrassed by the apostle to the Gentiles, given that

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¹ See for the pertinent texts the list provided by K. C. Donahoe, 'From Self-Praise to Self-Boasting: Paul's Unmasking of the Conflicting Rhetorico-Linguistic Phenomena in 1 Corinthians' (PhD diss.; University of St Andrews, 2008; available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/493>, accessed 29 January 2013) xiv: Rom 2.17, 23; 3.27; 4.2; 5.2, 3, 11; 11.18; 15.17; 1 Cor 1.29, 31; 3.21; 4.7; 5.6; 9.15–16; 13.13; 15.31; 2 Cor 1.12, 14; 5.12; 7.4, 14; 8.24; 9.2–3; 10.8, 13, 15–17; 11.10, 12, 16–18, 21, 30; 12.1, 5, 6, 9; Gal 6.4, 13, 14; Eph 2.9; Phil 1.26; 2.16; 3.3; 1 Thess. 2.19; 2 Thess 1.4; Heb 3.6; Jas 1.9; 3.14; 4.16. See also H. D. Betz, 'De laude ipsius (Moralia 539A–547F)', *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (ed. H. D. Bertz; SCHNT 4; Leiden: Brill, 1978) 367–93, at 378, for references to extra-canonical early Christian texts.

his boasting seems to be morally objectionable,² the question also arises why Paul would use a rhetorical *modus operandi* that would make his audience less rather than more inclined to listen to him sympathetically, given that self-praise was often regarded as offensive in antiquity as well.³ Given the unlikelihood of such an approach, one should allow for the possibility that there is more to Paul's boasting than meets the morally offended eye (or ear) at the start.⁴

- 2 See e.g. the overview provided by M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (HUT 28; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991) 53–60, as well as the earlier contribution by C. R. Holladay, '1 Corinthians 13: Paul as Apostolic Paradigm', *Greeks, Romans, and Christians* (ed. David L. Balch, E. Ferguson, W. A. Meeks; FS Abraham J. Malherbe; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 80–98, esp. 85–88, with reference to Plutarch, Epictetus and Seneca. K. Stendahl, *The Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 3 offers an outspoken evaluation: 'Paul was arrogant. But he was so blatantly arrogant that one can somehow cope with it. He was always the greatest: the greatest of sinners, the greatest of apostles, the greatest when it came to speaking in tongues, the greatest at having been persecuted. That is because he wasn't married. Or perhaps that is *why* he wasn't married. Nobody could stand him – but he was great, and that makes his battle with his weakness so moving on quite a personal level.' See also the comments of G. F. Hawthorne, *Philippians* (WBC 43; Waco: Word, 1983) 159 on Paul's boasting in Phil 3: 'In this statement Paul does not intend to say that he is better than anyone else', or at 161: 'Paul's instruction ... appears on the surface to be an expression of intolerable conceit.' With a sense for understatement D. K. Williams, *Enemies of the Cross of Christ: The Terminology of the Cross and Conflict in Philippians* (JSNTSup 223; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002) 166 paraphrases Terrence Callan's findings ('Competition and Boasting: Towards a Psychological Portrait of Paul', *ST* 40 (1986) 137–56), by stating that 'Paul was quite a competitor'. For an overview of the function of autobiography in general, see G. Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography: Toward a New Understanding* (SBLMS 73; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 1–69.
- 3 This is the *communis opinio*; for a brief review, see e.g. C. Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise, and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric', *NTS* 32 (1986) 1–30, 8–10. For a very substantial and well-documented overview of the discourse on self-praise, see L. Pernot, 'Periautologia, problèmes et méthodes de l'éloge de soi-même dans la tradition éthique et rhétorique gréco-romaine', *Revue des Études Grecques* 111 (1998) 101–24.
- 4 The more recent suggestion of Angela Standhartinger ('"Join in Imitating Me" (Philippians 3.17): Towards an Interpretation of Philippians 3', *NTS* 54 (2008) 417–35) that Phil 3.1–21 represents parts of Paul's testamentary statement (conceived either as a speech or as a letter), 'smuggled out of prison' (431) and subsequently integrated into what is now the canonical Philippians, has the advantage that it links Phil 3 more closely to Hellenistic Judaism, but at the same time the major disadvantage that it does not only introduce many additional hypotheses, but also seems to be superfluous when considering Phil 3 in the light of the possibilities that Hellenistic rhetoric offered in general. Also commentaries such as W. Schenk, *Die Philippenerbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984) and J. Reumann, *Philippians* (AB 33B; New Haven: Yale University, 2008) take the view that Philippians is best understood as a combination of multiple earlier texts. Here, the widely accepted proposal of Alexander is followed; see: L. C. Alexander, 'Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians', *JSNT* 37 (1989) 87–101.

The paper is concerned with this last issue and seeks to study it in a way that both sheds new light on a text that has hardly been studied from the perspective of Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions regarding self-praise, and is methodologically more precise than earlier research on this topic. Therefore, it asks the question: 'How does Paul's boasting in Phil 3.2–21 relate to Plutarch's view of morally acceptable and unacceptable self-praise?' The paper uses Phil 3.2–21 as a case study because this is one of the texts in which Paul's boasting is developed quite fully and identified as such by him (see Phil 3.3), while it is at the same time a text that has not been examined frequently from the perspective of περιαντολογία,⁵ unlike pertinent passages from e.g. 1 Cor⁶ or 2 Cor,⁷ to which Phil 3 certainly is similar.⁸ In fact, none of the extant (major) commentaries on Philippians uses this notion to help understand what Paul is doing in Phil 3.⁹ Nonetheless, a number of features of Phil 3, besides the fact that the self-presentation of a figure of authority and the perception of his standing (ἡθος) by those he addressed was always of importance,¹⁰ give reason to relate the text to the Greco-Roman discourse on self-praise.

First, vv. 4–6 may be noted, where Paul lists both his achievements and his descent. Even when these remarks are prefaced by *καίπερ ἐγὼ ἔχων πεποιθήσιν καὶ ἐν σαρκί*, which qualifies his achievements negatively, Paul

5 This also applies to the relatively recent contribution of Michael Wojciechowski, 'Paul and Plutarch on Boasting', *JGRChJ* 3 (2006) 99–109, who, while rightly pointing out that more attention for Plutarch is needed, hardly touches on Phil 3.

6 See e.g. Mitchell, *Paul*, 46–7.

7 See H. Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (ed. G. Strecker; KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970⁹ [1924]), esp. his judgement on the matter (in view of 2 Cor 11–12) at 345: 'Paulus teilt durchaus die Anschauungen Plutarchs und des Griechentums, in dessen Namen Plutarch spricht.' See M. M. Mitchell, 'A Patristic Perspective on Pauline περιαντολογία', *NTS* 46 (2001) 354–71, at 355.

8 See e.g. J. Gnlika, *Der Philippenerbrief* (HThK.NT 10.3; Freiburg: Herder, 1968) 189.

9 Including e.g. G. D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), Hawthorne, *Philippians*, or G. F. Hawthorne and R. P. Martin, *Philippians* (WBC 43; Waco: Word, 2004), expressing puzzlement with the rhetorical moves of Paul at p. 182.

10 See e.g. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.2.3–4; cf. e.g. Quintilian, *Inst.* 3.8.13, and the discussion by Mitchell, *Paul*, 45ff. See further also A. J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Greco-Roman Sourcebook* (LEC 4; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 135–6; this integration of person and speech was also an important aspect of (later) rabbinic tradition. See on the latter B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1961) esp. 184, as well as e.g. K. Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement* (LNTS 325; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 140–1. All of this also applies to letter writers and their self-presentation, as is exemplified by Paul's near-contemporary Seneca in his *Epistulae ad Lucillum* 106. For Stanley K. Stowers ('Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven', *Pauline Theology*, vol. 1 (ed. Julette M. Bassler; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 105–121, at 108), this is even a 'classic case'. See also Williams, *Enemies*, 103–4.

nevertheless lists them emphatically. In fact, it could be argued that he presents an *enkomion* on himself here, listing both his *res gestae* and his pedigree, while focusing on what may be termed Paul's piety and pursuit of justice (εὐσέβεια and δικαιοσύνη), which were standard themes in *enkomia* of various sorts, while self-praise itself can be regarded as a particular kind of *enkomion*.¹¹ Thus, by presenting his own biography in a very positive way, Paul forcefully substantiates the claim made in Phil 3.4, namely that if anyone has reason for boasting in the flesh, it is him.¹² Second, from v. 8 onwards, Paul again lists achievements on his part, specifically the radical alteration of his attitude vis-à-vis Christ and his striving to 'gain' Christ in order to achieve resurrection from the dead (vv. 9–11).¹³ Third, in v. 12 (οὐχ ὅτι ἤδη ἔλαβον ἢ ἤδη τετελείωμαι), Paul qualifies his second boast (vv. 8–11) by stating that he has not reached the goal yet, only to develop this aspect of his behaviour in such a way that he can present himself, together with unidentified others, as an example in Phil 3.17 (the content of this example is probably provided by vv. 4–14, where Paul describes his previous and current walks of life and their respective values). Furthermore, while Paul assigns himself (and unnamed others) praise and looks forward to a glorious future (literally: see vv. 20–1), he also assigns blame in his remarks about the 'dogs' (see v. 2) that are his adversaries in this pericope and may be thought of as 'radically Jewish Christians', promoting circumcision as an requirement (for male converts, obviously) to join the people of God.

All of these features of Phil 3 will be discussed below. At the same time, the way for reading letters through a rhetorical lens has been cleared by the emergence of nuanced views on the interrelationship between epistolography and rhetoric, such as Klauck's.¹⁴ For the analysis of Phil 3 with regard to the issue of self-praise, a focus on Plutarch is helpful, because he is the author of the only surviving full treatise on the subject from the first–second century, and a near-contemporary of Paul, presenting insights that are likely to have also been current in Paul's own day and age.¹⁵ The particular relevance of the Paul-Plutarch interface with

11 See Betz, 'Laude', 367.

12 As is generally recognised; see e.g. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 131–4; P. T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 367–8, 381.

13 This is also broadly recognised; see e.g. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 135.

14 H.-J. Klauck, *Die antike Briefliteratur und das Neue Testament* (Paderborn: Schönigh, 1998) 179: 'Die Rhetorik sollte nicht auf Kosten der Eigenheiten der Briefgattung, zu deren Erfassung die Epistolographie beiträgt, betrieben werden. Eine inflationäre Verwendung des Begriffes "Rhetorik" ist zu vermeiden, seine Reichweite jeweils genau anzugeben und seine Auffächerung auf verschiedene Teilgebiete zu berücksichtigen. Werden diese Grenzen beachtet, kann die Rhetorik selbstverständlich mit großem Nutzen für die Erhellung der Argumentationsstruktur (z.B. durch die Herausarbeitung von Enthymemen, Exempla oder die Zuweisung zu Ethos, Pathos und Logos) und der sprachlichen Gestaltung ... von Briefen eingesetzt werden.'

15 See Wojciechowski, 'Paul', 101.

regard to self-praise has also been recognised recently, accompanied by a call for more research into this.¹⁶

Methodologically, the present article seeks to improve on extant research on Paul, self-praise and Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions, and on research on Paul, Plutarch and self-praise, by focusing on two texts by Plutarch and Paul and their view and use of self-praise only. This differs from earlier research on the subject. In a recent survey, Wojciechowski has noted that the latest research on Paul and boasting, and Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions regarding this, has largely confirmed Windisch's 1924 conclusion regarding 2 Corinthians ('Paulus hält sich strikt an die Vorschriften, wie sie die Rhetorik für die "περιαντολογία" aufgestellt hat'), although Wojciechowski excepts Paul's boasting in his own weakness and suffering from this agreement between Paul and 'die Rhetorik'.¹⁷ Wojciechowski thus confirms an earlier survey of research provided by Mitchell, who also pointed out that Paul stuck to the canons of acceptable self-praise in the eyes of later authors, specifically John Chrysostom.¹⁸ Still,

16 Wojciechowski, 'Paul', 100. Another overview of research is presented by Donahoe, 'Self-Praise', xxvii–xxiv, focusing on research on 1 Cor and concluding that a more sophisticated analysis of Paul's 'boasting' or 'self-praise' is needed, by making use of in-depth knowledge of Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions.

17 As noted by H. D. Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner 'Apologie' 2 Korinther 10–13* (BHT 45; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972) 75 (Windisch' own analysis is no longer than one page of his commentary; see Windisch, *Korintherbrief*, 345). For the survey, see Wojciechowski, 'Paul', 100–1, reviewing the following contributions: G. Strecker, U. Schnelle, G. Seelig, *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus*, vol. II. *Texte zur Briefliteratur und zur Johannesapokalypse*, part 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), specifically: 85–7, 116–17, 256–68, 413–14, 484–6, 488–9, 496, 504–5, 510, 577–8, 588, noting a lack of substantial reference texts to do with the ancient discourse on self-praise; Betz, *Apostel*; E. A. Judge, 'Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice', *AusBR* 18 (1968) 37–50; Forbes, 'Comparison'; J. A. Glancy, 'Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11.23–25)', *JBL* 123 (2004) 99–135; J. Sánchez Bosch, '*Gloriarse*' *segun San Pablo* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970) 4–26; Betz, '*Laude*', esp. 378–81; D. F. Watson, 'Paul and Boasting' *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (ed. J. P. Sampley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 2003) 77–100, esp. 79–81, 90–4, 97; and L. Aejmelaeus, 'Tårebrevet och Plutarkhos: Paulus' självskryt i "Tårebrevet" (2.Kor. 10–13) jämfört med Plutarkhos' regler för det rätta sättet att berömma sig själv', *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 101.2 (1996) 108–18. Wojciechowski is unaware, however of Donahoe, 'Self-Praise', and F. Bianchini, *L'elogio di sé in Crist: l'utilizzo della περιαντολογία nel contesto di Filippesi 3,1–4,1* (AB 164; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006), who also presented his argument in id., 'Paul: Who was He? In Search of the Apostle's Identity', *International Seminar on Saint Paul* (Rome: Society of Saint Paul – The General House 2009, available at: www.paulus.net/sisp/SISP_Acti_eng.pdf) 21–48, at 39 (also published as 'Alla ricerca dell'identità dell'apostolo Paolo', *Rivista biblica* 57 (2009) 43–69).

18 See Mitchell, 'Perspective'. One may note, however, that even if John Chrysostom can indeed fit his hero Paul's rhetoric, especially in 2 Cor, into the categories for inoffensive self-praise

Wojciechowski rightly notes that more consistent attention to Plutarch is needed when it comes to the analysis and evaluation of Paul's self-praise in its first-century context. The reason for this is that previous comparisons were not developed very fully – neither with respect to Plutarch, nor to Paul – or have only focused on one or two aspects of Paul's boasting without considering broader sections of his work. This paper proposes to do precisely this, but in a way that improves methodologically on that of the work of Wojciechowski (and other earlier scholars of the topic) and leads to more precise results, both with regard to Plutarch and with regard to Paul's writings, especially Phil 3. This is achieved (a) by focusing on one treatise of Plutarch on this specific topic only, and not comparing Paul to a mixture of different Greco-Roman authors (even Wojciechowski, who calls for more attention to the Paul–Plutarch interface has a tendency to supplement Plutarch with Quintilian when he deems this necessary), which has the advantage that the Paul–Plutarch interface can be studied in an uncompromised and more detailed way;¹⁹ and (b) by focusing on one Pauline text in its entirety and in its context, which avoids imposing preconceived classifications on Paul's boasting,²⁰ instead taking one's analytical cue from Plutarch's discussion of self-praise.

given by Plutarch, his doing so also indicates that other, less charitable, readings of Paul's boasting would be possible. In fact, the observation that John Chrysostom, a highly sympathetic interpreter of Paul who himself had a considerable stake in a positive reception of the apostle and his writings, takes great trouble to fit Paul's self-praise into (probably generally accepted) Plutarchian categories should make one suspicious as to the extent to which this is indeed possible. It is noteworthy, though, that Chrysostom's categories are so akin to Plutarch's, which is, however, a topic different from the one pursued in this study. See, however, Mitchell, 'Perspective', 358: 'In speaking about Paul's self-praise Chrysostom employs a cultural stock of terms and *topoi* about boasting which are completely familiar from Plutarch.'

19 Hence, the question will not be whether Paul agrees with the Greco-Roman precepts with regard to self-praise, as was e.g. Windisch' concern, but specifically how he related, in Phil 3, to what would become the Plutarchian view of things. That there were differences between Plutarch on the one hand and (Latin) authors of textbooks on rhetoric such as Cicero (*De inventione*), Quintilian (*Institutio oratoria*) and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is demonstrated by Donahoe, 'Self-Praise', who concludes her survey and comparison of these four by stating: 'Similar to Plutarch, these three rhetoricians [i.e. the Cicero, Quintilian and the author of *Rhet. Her.*] emphasize the character of the individual who praises himself and the circumstances that lead him to praise himself. They contend that self-praise must always be free of arrogance and maintain that self-praise is acceptable in cases of self-defense. They differ from Plutarch, however, by focusing more on earning the audience's goodwill through the use of self-praise and, with the exception of Quintilian, by commenting less on the negative reception of self-praise' (Donahoe, 'Self-Praise', 21).

20 As e.g. Wojciechowski, 'Paul', does.

Specifically, this paper addresses Paul's way of arguing in Phil 3 by comparing it to his near-contemporary Plutarch's (ca. 46–120 CE; Paul: ca. 5–ca. 67 CE) view of 'self-praise' as he outlined it in his treatise Πῶς ἄν τις ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινέσειεν ἀνεπιφθόνως (Lamprias' catalogue, no. 85) or Περὶ τοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινέειν ἀνεπιφθόνως as it is entitled in the manuscripts, which also carries the Latin title *De laude ipsius* (or *De ipso citra invidiam laudando*).²¹ In this way, this paper seeks to further contextualise Paul's use of self-praise by relating it to the views of one – prominent – contemporary, rather than to a constructed 'conventional' Greco-Roman attitude vis-à-vis self-praise.²² This allows for more detail in the analysis and the comparison of the two authors, without, however, implying that they had direct knowledge of one another.²³ Thus, this paper both contributes to the understanding of Phil 3.2–21 as such and also advances the rhetorical analysis of Paul's letters with regard to περιαντολογία methodologically. In order to do so, first Plutarch's view of such self-praise will be outlined, then Paul's self-praise in Phil 3.2–21 will be analysed in relation to Plutarch's views on the subject, and subsequently conclusions will be offered about the (in)offensiveness of Paul's use of self-praise from a Plutarchian point of view.

2. Plutarch's View of Self-Praise

Plutarch outlined his view on self-praise in the treatise already mentioned above, and that will be referred to here as *De laude ipsius*. The treatise is addressed to a statesman, probably C. Julius Eurycles Herculaneus L. Vibullius Pius, which gives some indication of the work's intended audience.²⁴ The issue

21 See Betz, 'Laude', 367. The text that is followed here is: Ph. H. de Lacy and B. Einarson, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. VII (Harvard: Harvard University, 1959) 110–67; see also R. Klaerr and Y. Vernière, *Plutarque: Oeuvres morales*, vol. VII.2 (Paris: Budé, 1974) 57–85, 187–94.

22 For this approach, see e.g. Bianchini, *L'Elogio*. It aligns itself with approaches that focus on the (possible) reception of New Testament writings in certain contexts; see e.g. S. van Tilborg, *Reading John in Ephesus* (NTSup 83; Leiden: Brill, 1997), as well as P. Oakes, 'Jason and Penelope Hear Philippians 1.1–11', *Understanding, Studying and Reading: New Testament Essays in Honour of John Ashton* (ed. C. Rowland and C. H.T. Fletcher-Louis; JSNTSup 153; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 155–64.

23 In this way, a contemporary, albeit admittedly hypothetical, but nevertheless illuminating, parallel is created to Mitchell's study of Paul's self-praise by later patristic authors. See Mitchell, 'Perspective'. See also e.g. Bianchini, *L'Elegio*, 58–61. A further case study could be undertaken by looking at Paul's usage of self-praise from the perspective of early Jewish literature and the LXX/Tenakh, in which Paul himself was steeped, and part of his audience as well. See for a brief overview of some pertinent passages, see e.g. Wojciechowski, 'Paul', 109–10; for a discussion of esp. Jer. 9.22–23 LXX as an intertext, see Donahoe, 'Self-Praise', 82–6.

24 See De Lacy and Einarson, 'Introduction', *idem*, *Moralia*, 110–13, at 113. For an overview of the rhetorical architecture of the work, see Betz, 'Laude', 367–72.

that Plutarch is concerned with, as many before him had been,²⁵ is the following: ‘it is agreed that to speak to others of one’s own importance or power is offensive, but in practice not many even of those who condemn such conduct avoid the odium of it’ (539B).²⁶ Thus, Plutarch notes the same conundrum that was mentioned at the start of this paper: while self-praise is morally offensive, it is used nevertheless, apparently in the hope that it will be acceptable in some way after all. Accordingly, after the statement just quoted, Plutarch sets out to explore both why self-praise is morally objectionable and what sort or kinds of self-praise would still be acceptable. First, he outlines why self-praise is to be rejected in general:²⁷

First we regard self-praisers as shameless, since they should be embarrassed even by praise from others; second as unfair, as they arrogate to themselves what it is for others to bestow; and in the third place if we listen in silence we appear disgruntled and envious, while if we shy at this we are forced to join in the eulogies and confirm them against our better judgement, thus submitting to a thing more in keeping with unmanly [literally ‘servile’] flattery than with the showing of esteem – the praise of a man to his face.²⁸ (539D-E)

Rhetoric that uses such an offensive *modus operandi* would, accordingly, defeat its own purpose, not only because it is unconvincing for ethical reasons, but also because it prevents the speaker from persuading his audience.²⁹ This notwithstanding, however, there are cases in which the use of self-praise (περιαυτολογία – the term that Plutarch in fact uses) would be appropriate for a statesman, provided that it is ‘not for any personal glory or pleasure’, but for more virtuous reasons, i.e. when ‘the offensive element is taken out and the

25 See Betz, ‘*Laude*’, 367.

26 See also Betz, ‘*Laude*’, 373: ‘although there is general agreement in the Greco-Roman culture that self-praise is to be rejected, great poets like Euripides, Pindar and Timotheus unashamedly indulge in it’. See for the following esp. Betz, ‘*Laude*’, and Donahoe, ‘Self-Praise’, 2–17, who offers an excellent overview of Plutarch’s argument. For the broader discourse, see Wojciechowski, ‘Paul’; Forbes, ‘Comparison’; and Pernot, ‘*Periautologia*’.

27 In fact, throughout his treatise, Plutarch can be seen to draw on religious, ethical and rhetorical objections to self-praise. See e.g. Betz, ‘*Laude*’, 373–7 – though it must be agreed with Donahoe, ‘Self-Praise’, 5 n. 5, that Betz overstates the importance of the religious aspect (protest against self-deification); besides, the use of the term ‘religious’ as a heuristic category for the analysis of first- or second-century texts would need some further qualification.

28 πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἀναισχύντους ἠγοῦμεθα τοὺς ἑαυτοὺς ἐπαινοῦντας, αἰδεῖσθαι προσήκον αὐτοῖς κἂν ὑπ’ ἄλλων ἐπαινῶνται· δεύτερον δὲ ἀδίκους, ἃ λαμβάνειν ἔδει παρ’ ἐτέρων, αὐτοὺς αὐτοῖς διδόντας τρίτον ἢ σιωπῶντες ἄχθεσθαι καὶ φθονεῖν δοκοῦμεν, ἢ τοῦτο δεδοικότες ἀναγκαζόμεθα συνεφάπτεσθαι παρὰ γνώμην τῶν ἐπαινῶν καὶ συνεπιμαρτυρεῖν, πρῶγμα κολακεία μᾶλλον ἀνελευθέρῳ προσήκον ἢ τιμῇ τὸ ἐπαινεῖν παρόντας ὑπομένοντες.

29 See e.g. Betz, ‘*Laude*’, 377.

ethical concern is put in'.³⁰ As a first (and for Plutarch obvious) case, which he mentions by way of introduction, he notes the following instance:

when the occasion and the matter in hand demand that the truth be told about himself, as it might about another – especially when by permitting himself to mention his good accomplishments and character he is enabled to achieve some similar good.³¹ (539E)

When exploding further occasions, in which self-praise may be justified, Plutarch notes the following:

- (a) 'In the first place self-praise goes unresented if you are defending your good name or answering a charge' (540C).³² Notably, this does not only apply to those (falsely) accused of something (Pericles is Plutarch's example), but also to those who are struck by adversity, as he notes:

When in boxing or fighting men rise to their full height and hold the head erect, we applaud; so the man cast down by fortune, when he stands upright in fighting posture 'like a boxer closing in', using self-glorification to pass from a humbled and perilous state to an attitude of triumph and pride, strikes us not as offensive or bold, but as great and indomitable.³³ (example in case: Patroclus' dying speech, asserting his true strength; 541A–B).

This also can be seen as claiming justice for oneself and clearing one's name, given that 'freedom of speech that is involved in a plea for justice gives scope for self-praise'.³⁴ (541D)

- (b) A second instance in which self-praise would be justified is when one wishes to demonstrate, using the example of one's own behaviour, what would have

³⁰ Betz, 'Laude', 377.

³¹ καιροῦ καὶ πράξεως ἀπαιτούσης ὡς περὶ ἄλλου τι λεχθῆναι καὶ περὶ αὐτοῦ τῶν ἀληθῶν· μάλιστα δὲ ὅταν ἦ τὰ πεπραγμένα καὶ προσόντα χρηστὰ μὴ φεισάμενον εἰπεῖν διαπράξασθαι τι τῶν ὁμοίων.

³² αὐτὸν δὲ ἐπαινεῖν ἀμέμπτως ἔστι πρῶτον μὲν, ἂν ἀπολογούμενος τοῦτο ποιῆς πρὸς διαβολὴν ἢ κατηγορίαν. And he continues: 'For not only is there nothing puffed up, vain-glorious, or proud in taking a high tone about oneself at such a moment, but it displays as well a lofty spirit and greatness of character, which by refusing to be humbled and overpowers envy. For men no longer think it fit even to pass judgement on such as these, but exult and rejoice and catch the inspiration of the swelling speech, when it is well-founded and true' (540D).

³³ ἂν δὲ πυκτεύοντες ἢ μαχόμενοι διεγείρωσι καὶ ἀνάγωσιν ἑαυτοὺς ἐπαινοῦμεν, οὕτως ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ τύχης σφαλλόμενος ἑαυτὸν εἰς ὀρθὸν καθιστὰς καὶ ἀντίπαλον 'πύκτης ὅπως εἰς χεῖρας', ἐκ τοῦ ταπεινοῦ καὶ οἰκτροῦ τῇ μεγαλαυχίᾳ μεταφέρων εἰς τὸ γαῦρον καὶ ὑψηλόν, οὐκ ἐπαχθῆς οὐδὲ θρασὺς ἀλλὰ μέγας εἶναι δοκεῖ καὶ ἀήττητος.

³⁴ δέχεται γὰρ ἡ παρρησία, μέρος οὖσα τῆς δικαιολογίας, τὴν μεγαληγορίαν.

happened if one had taken a course different from the one that one had taken and has to justify; an example which Plutarch offers is that of Demosthenes, who stated 'Who would not rightly have condemned me to death if even by word I had tried to sully any of our country's glories?',³⁵ thus implying that no such thing was the case (see 541F–542A).

- (c) In his speech *On the Crown*, Demosthenes also provides another occasion of inoffensive self-praise, i.e. when the rhetor praises the audience together with himself or, rather, himself together with the audience. According to Plutarch, this has the following effect on the audience: 'in this way the hearers, taken off guard, accept with pleasure the praise of the speaker, which insinuates itself along with the praise of themselves; and their delight in the rehearsal of their own successes is followed at once with admiration and approval of him who made them possible' (542B).³⁶
- (d) A further, indirect way of utilising self-praise is by means of praising a third party that is similar to oneself:

Since towards one who praises himself the generality of men feel a great hostility and resentment, but do not feel so strongly against one who praises another, but often even listen with pleasure and voice their agreement, some, when the occasion allows, are in the habit of praising others whose aims and acts are the same as their own and whose general character is similar. In this way they conciliate the hearer and draw his attention to themselves; for although they are speaking of another, he at once recognises in the speaker a merit that from its similarity deserves the same praises.³⁷ (542C–D)

- (e) Beyond this, the statesman can also remedy the problem of self-praise by attributing the deed or the honor to someone else, e.g. to a deity (542E–F). For example, Achilles mitigates his praise of himself on the occasion of killing Hector by referring to it as 'Since I by Heaven's will have slain this man' (Homer, *Il.* 22.379).³⁸
- (f) Even subtler is a further rhetorical procedure described by Plutarch: 'praising oneself by rejecting praise for certain achievements and rebuking those

35 *On the Crown*, 101.

36 λανθάνει γὰρ οὕτως ὁ ἀκροατῆς τοῖς ἰδίοις ἐπαίνοις συνυποδύομενον τὸν τοῦ λέγοντος ἠδέως προσδεχόμενος, καὶ χαίρει μὲν ἐφ' οἷς κατώρθωσε λεγομένοις, τῷ δὲ χαίρειν εὐθύς ἔπεται τὸ θαυμάζειν καὶ ἀγαπᾶν δι' ὃν κατώρθωσεν.

37 ἐπεὶ δὲ τῷ μὲν ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινοῦντι πολεμοῦσιν οἱ πολλοὶ σφόδρα καὶ ἄχθονται, τῷ δὲ ἕτερον οὐχ ὁμοίως, ἀλλὰ καὶ χαίρουσι πολλάκις καὶ συνεπιμαρτυροῦσι προθύμως, εἰώθασιν ἔνιοι τοὺς ταυτὰ προαιρουμένους καὶ πράττοντας αὐτοῖς καὶ ὅλως ὁμοιοτρόπους ἐπαινοῦντες ἐν καιρῷ συνοικεῖον καὶ συνεπιστρέφειν πρὸς ἑαυτοὺς τὸν ἀκροατήν· ἐπιγινώσκει γὰρ εὐθύς ἐν τῷ λέγοντι, κἄν περὶ ἄλλου λέγηται, δι' ὁμοιότητα τὴν ἀρετὴν τῶν αὐτῶν ἀξίαν ἐπαίνων οὖσαν.

38 ἐπεὶ δὴ τὸνδ' ἄνδρα θεοὶ δαμάσασθαι ἔδωκαν.

who offer the praise for not praising one for the right reasons (which can then be listed), thus cloaking one's self-praise in modesty' (543A-E).

- (g) A further way of using self-praise without provoking envy is to include some minor and relatively harmless shortcomings on one's own part, with regard to either descent, achievements or character, into the praise. (543F-544C)
- (h) In addition to this, Plutarch also introduces a variant of self-praise that already includes its mitigation in itself, i.e. self-praise that emphasises the burden and cost of someone's achievements, thus making them – and especially someone's reference to them – more palatable (544C-D).

Having outlined these instances, Plutarch returns to a subject that he had already mentioned: justifiable rationales for the use of self-praise, which should be distinguished from the rhetorical tactics that he offers, surveyed above.

- (1) One he already mentioned, i.e. the exhortation of others, and he restates it in 544D-F. He now supplements it with further rationales, however.
- (2) He notes that in some instances self-praise is a valid means of putting people in their places: 'there are also times when in order to overawe and restrain the hearer and to humble and subdue the headstrong and rash, it is not amiss to make some boast and extol oneself' (544F).³⁹ In this context, Plutarch also refers to Aristotle's opinion 'that not only the rulers of a great empire have a right to be proud but also those with true opinions about the gods'⁴⁰ (545A).
- (3) A further legitimisation of self-praise is when one praises oneself in order to position oneself as a source of protection and strength for others, thus preventing them from falling into despair (545B-D).
- (4) Furthermore, while pitting one's own praise against that of someone else is to be rejected as such, Plutarch does mention a kind of situation in which self-praise can legitimately be used to correct the (self-)praise of someone else, offering the example of the Athenian general Phocion, stemming from the time of Leosthenes' military successes during the Lamian war:

Phocion replied when the speakers asked what service *he* had done the state: 'Only that when I was general you speakers delivered no funeral oration, as all who died were buried in their family graves.'⁴¹ (546A)

39 οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ καταπλήξεως ἐνιαχοῦ καὶ συστολῆς ἔνεκα καὶ τοῦ ταπεινώσαι καὶ λαβεῖν ὑποχείριον τὸν αὐθάδη καὶ ἰταμόν οὐ χειρόν ἐστι κομπάσαι τι περὶ αὐτοῦ καὶ μεγαληγορήσαι.

40 Fr. 664 Rose.

41 οὐδὲν εἶπεν ἀλλ' ἢ τὸ ὑμᾶς ἐμοῦ στρατηγούντος ἐπιτάφιον λόγον μὴ εἰπεῖν ἀλλὰ πάντας ἐν τοῖς πατρώοις μνήμασι θάπτεσθαι τοὺς ἀποθνήσκοντα.

Having discussed all this, Plutarch finally turns to a further analysis of the cause of self-praise, i.e. self-love. He notes the following aspects and dynamics: (i) rivalry, i.e. when others are praised, one wishes to be praised as well; (ii) letting praise of others go to one's head so that one recounts it to others; (iii) boasting caused by legitimate self-praise; this can come into being especially when self-praise is used to reprimand others; (iv) the need to be very cautious, especially when one is already prone to boasting, not to respond all too eagerly to praise by others, or be seduced into boasting by questions about one's achievements (546B–547F).

With this, one has an overview of Plutarch's theorising about the social standing, the causes and the possible rhetorical functions of self-praise, the latter including his consideration both of situations in which self-praise is indeed justified, or even called for ((a), (b), (1), (4)), and of tactics for getting away with it (c-h).⁴² Having outlined this, it is now possible to turn to Phil 3.2–21 and relate it to Plutarch's thoughts on self-praise.

3. Phil 3.2–21 and Plutarch

In the discussion of Phil 3.2–21 to which we now turn, the question of the text's precise rhetorical structure will be bracketed, as it is not of primary importance for the task at hand. It may be noted, however, that even though Paul certainly assigns praise and blame in Phil. 3, as would suit the epideictic genre of rhetoric, his overall goal is to convince the Philippian community to opt for the most advantageous choice (see vv. 15, 18) by imitating Paul (and others; see v. 17) and thus aim for eschatological salvation (vv. 12, 14, 20–1); in other words, just as the whole of Philippians, it is likely that Phil 3.2–21 should be assigned to the deliberative genre of rhetoric.⁴³ Furthermore, as was already noted, Paul indicates that he is aware of the fact that he is boasting in a qualified way in Phil 3.3. This is of significance as it ties Phil 3 more tightly to the discourse on self-praise and boasting in the Greco-Roman world. That said, outstanding

⁴² This nuances somewhat the thesis of Pernot, '*Periautologia*', 120, that only the benefit of the other, or of the general public, would justify the use of self-praise; at the very least, Plutarch knows of inoffensive and legitimate ways of using self-praise that do not necessarily have to be entirely altruistic in nature.

⁴³ See e.g. J. T. Reed, 'The Epistle', *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 BC–AD 400* (ed. S. E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 171–93, at 172–6. As here the 'whole' of Philippians is mentioned, it should be noted that this letter of Paul is considered a literary unity. Space is lacking – obviously – to outline the reasons for this in detail here, but they have been spelled out in: P.-B. Smit, *Paradigms of Being in Christ* (LNTS; London: T&T Clark, 2013) 37–56. To this may be added that an analysis of Phil 3.2–21 with a focus on the Greco-Roman discourse on self-praise is probably closer to the rhetorical setting provided by the situation of competition indicated by Phil 3.2 than an analysis that has as its point of departure Jewish testamentary literature, as has been proposed by Standhartinger, "Join".

aspects of Phil 3.2–21 will now be related to Plutarch's theorising about the (legitimate) use of self-praise. The structure of the discussion below follows the structure of Plutarch's treatise on self-praise.

First, it should be noted that Paul uses his self-praise in the context of exhortation, as throughout Phil 3 he attempts to steer the Philippians in a direction that he considers advantageous for them.⁴⁴ Paul's presentation of his own deeds and achievements, both positive and negative, therefore serves precisely one of the primary kinds of legitimate περιαντολογία that Plutarch recognises and the first one that he mentions (see above, (a) and (1)), i.e. the service of exhorting others to virtue through one's own virtuous example (see esp. 539E–F, but also 544D–F). In other words, Paul's self-praise serves an ulterior motive: his care for the community, the salvation of which he considers to be endangered (see Phil 3.18–21).⁴⁵ When presenting himself so favourably, Paul uses the 'dogs' as a negative foil for his self-presentation; in fact, he starts off his considerations with the negative example of the 'dogs' before he offers the positive (and lengthy) example of himself.⁴⁶

Second, Paul's use of self-praise, especially in vv. 4–8, can also be seen as self-defence on his part.⁴⁷ Self-defence is listed as another kind of situation in which self-praise would be justified (see above, under (a)), when it is assumed that the 'dogs' indeed undermine both his work and his credibility – in fact, Paul's imprisonment (see Phil 1.7, 13) and other misadventures that he had to endure may well have helped to weaken his credibility further. Paul therefore both asserts his view and clears his name. He achieves this by calling to mind his flawless descent (Phil 3.4) – an issue of particular relevance for the 'radically Jewish Christian' competitors and those attracted by their message – his spotless career in terms of zeal for

44 See e.g. Fee, *Philippians*, 303, with J.-F. Collange, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians* (London: Epworth, 1979) 129; see however Bianchini, 'Paul', 39, who argues that Paul seeks to safeguard his own influence over the Philippians. While this is doubtless the case, it is not the case that it would constitute a legitimate reason for the use of self-praise; rather, Paul ought to have had, and certainly presents himself as having, the interest of others on his mind. Bianchini phrases Paul's intention more in line with (e.g.) Plutarch's concerns regarding self-praise at 41–2.

45 See e.g. Gnllka, *Philippenerbrief*, 189; W. Harnisch, 'Die paulinische Selbstepföhlung als Plädoyer für den Gekreuzigten: Rhetorisch-hermeneutische Erwägungen zu Phil 3', *Das Urchristentum in seiner literarischen Geschichte* (ed. U. Mell, U. B. Müller; BZNW 100; FS Jürgen Becker; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999) 133–54, at 135.

46 See on this the remarks of O'Brien, *Philippians*, 452–3. Paul does not mitigate the offensiveness of his self-praise here by pointing to the hypothetical inverse of his own behaviour to legitimise and praise the course of action that he has taken. This would have been another way of using self-praise in an inoffensive way (see Plutarch, *Mor.* 541F–542A); the 'dogs' that Paul uses as a negative foil may well be seen to fulfil the role of exemplifying the alternative to Paul's actions, however.

47 See e.g. the option mentioned by Fee, *Philippians*, 303.

the law (see Phil 3.5–6; in v. 4 Paul explicitly claims that his achievements ἐν σαρκί trump those of his rivals), and by outlining how he has now reached an even more superior position by throwing it all away and surrendering to Christ (see esp. Phil 3.7–8), as a consequence of which he also shares in Christ's suffering (v. 10).⁴⁸ By presenting all of his achievements in this way, Paul both clears his name and explains the true state of his affairs and those of his rivals. In some ways, this way of proceeding by Paul is reminiscent of the use of self-praise that is listed above under (f): rejecting praise for some achievements and, while doing so, drawing attention to the achievements that really count. Even if Paul does not reject praise explicitly for his past achievements, he does present them as without value, in order to highlight his current situation even more.

Third, acceptable self-praise might be part of the reason for the use of the first person plural in Phil 3.2–21, as Plutarch notes that one of the situations in which self-praise can be acceptable is a situation in which the speaker praises his audience along with himself (see above, (c)). While Paul does not explicitly praise the Philippians, three instances from Phil 3.2–21 can well be identified as examples of Paul's usage of the *pluralis sociativus*, i.e. 3.3 (ἡμεῖς γὰρ ἔσμεν ἢ περιτομή...),⁴⁹ 3.15 (ὅσοι οὖν τέλειοι, τοῦτο φρονῶμεν)⁵⁰ and 3.20–1 (ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα... τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν). By shedding positive light on the identity of the Philippians and himself, i.e. 'we', in 3.3, Paul also sheds positive light on himself, which applies to his usage of the first person plural in 3.15 and 3.20–1 as well. Thus, Paul both expresses his identification with the Philippians' relative modesty,⁵¹ and is able to encourage them.⁵² This (somewhat) discreet usage of self-praise-by-association is explicitly sanctioned by Plutarch (see above, (c)) – and can easily be seen to have functioned well in the context of Phil 3, by establishing a bond between Paul and the Philippians based on a shared positively connoted identity that was instrumental both in Paul's clearing of his own name and his provision of an

48 See e.g. M. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Black, 1997) 195: 'Paul shows how his own Jewish credentials are flawless and superior to theirs – and yet to be disregarded in Christ.'

49 See e.g., with much emphasis, E. Lohmeyer, *Die Briefe an die Philipper, Kolosser und an Philemon* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953⁹) 127; and further B. M. Thurston and J. M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009) 112. On the first person plural in Phil 3.2ff. in general, see e.g. Schenk, *Philippenerbriefe*, 254–5; see also Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 175.

50 M. R. Vincent, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1922) 113: 'A more delicate quality is given to the exhortation by Paul's associating himself with his readers.' See also e.g. Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 211.

51 See e.g. Gnllka, *Philippenerbrief*, 201. See further also e.g. Barth, *Brief*, 63–64, O'Brien, *Philippians*, 437.

52 See e.g. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 433.

example for the Philippians. Another kind of self-praise-by-association identified by Plutarch, i.e. by praising a third party that is very similar to oneself (see above, (d)), does not occur all that clearly in Phil 3.2–21 (with the possible exception of Paul's inclusion of others in his own example in 3.17), but may well be seen to occur in Phil 2.5–11, 19–30, where Christ, Timothy and Epaphroditus all receive praise, or at least a very positive presentation, that is in many ways akin to Paul's self-presentation in 3.2–21. This will not be pursued any further here, however.

A fourth way in which Paul may be seen to use a mitigated kind of self-praise that resonates with Plutarch's thinking is his emphasis on Christ as the focus and source of his new and controversial achievements (see above, (e)). This is particularly clear towards the end of Phil 3, where Paul attributes his (hoped for) future glorification to Christ (vv. 20–1), but also earlier on, when he describes Christ as the motivating factor in his current walk of life (vv. 12–14). Finally and especially, in Phil 3.3 Paul indicates that his boasting is 'in Christ' and not 'in the flesh', which, for him, makes this boasting inoffensive, it seems. Thus, Paul may well have achieved the aim of praising his own walk of life without giving offense because in the end he attributes it to Christ, a figure with whom the Philippians certainly had a positive rapport.

Fifth, apart from all of this, the rhetorical procedure described by Plutarch that would make self-praise acceptable (or at least palatable) by adding to it some minor flaws on the part of the speaker (see above, (g)) can also be found in Phil 3.2–21. This is certainly to be seen in Paul's remarks about not having reached the goal yet in the first place (vv. 12–13): by acknowledging that he has not yet run the course fully, but is 'only' striving, Paul tempers his praise of his new identity somewhat, while also making himself a more accessible example for the Philippians, who, like him, are still on their journey with Christ and have, just like Paul, not yet reached the goal. As Paul does not present his past Pharisaic achievements as a flaw per se – in fact, he underlines what a very good Pharisee he was – his remarks in vv. 4–8 probably do not fit this tactic for mitigating self-praise.

Sixth, Plutarch's category of (offensive) self-praise that becomes inoffensive due to the speaker's emphasis on the trouble that he went through to achieve what he achieved – or is achieving (see above, (h)) – should be addressed. This category also agrees well with how Paul presents himself in Phil 3.2–21. Specifically, in vv. 7–8, Paul places much emphasis on the cost of his discipleship, i.e. his giving up of all his previous status in order to gain Christ; furthermore, in v. 10, Paul refers to the participation in Christ's suffering, which is also an indication of hardship and probably has an echo in v. 21 (the reference to the body of humility), while in v. 14, in order to make his point, he utilises the metaphor of the *ἀγών*, which, as a reference to a struggle or fight, again implies hard work on his part. When read against the background of Plutarch's theorising and in the

context of Paul's self-praise, this certainly agrees with the former's tactic of mitigating self-praise by mixing it with remarks about the hardships that one had to endure in order to achieve status and perform great deeds.⁵³ In this respect, the comment by Wojciechowski that 'when Paul boasts of his weaknesses or even scourging, he plainly rejects the rhetorical conventions, showing boldness and independence'⁵⁴ must be modified: such references to weakness or trouble and boasting, or in the context of boasting as it occurs in Phil 3, are certainly part of the rhetorical repertoire surrounding self-praise (as Wojciechowski himself is aware of earlier on in his article).⁵⁵ More specifically, Paul presents his hardships as the (physical) locus of his identification with Christ's suffering and hence with Christ, even to the extent that Paul's addressees 'should read the degrading and powerful story of the execution of Jesus' in his body.⁵⁶ This thesis, developed with regard to 2 Cor 11.23-5 by Glancy, suits Phil 3.10 very well. However, in Phil 3.10 Paul also achieves something in his self-presentation and his boasting of his suffering that he does not achieve as clearly in 2 Corinthians: he presents his giving up of his former status and his identification with Christ and his suffering as a means to an end, i.e. this identification, leading to a dishonourable walk of life on earth, is in the end the road towards eschatological glory. The agonistic vocabulary that Paul utilises in this context suits this line of thought like a glove (vv. 12, 14).⁵⁷ The issue at stake, therefore, is not so much whether Paul mentions his weakness as how he wishes his addressees to interpret it; the interpretation to which he invites the readership of his letters is one that indeed turns his suffering into a token of his identification with Christ and as part of his struggle towards heavenly glorification.⁵⁸ The example of himself that Paul offers in v. 17 includes all of the aspects just mentioned and is, therefore, less offensive than one might expect it to be.⁵⁹ As Paul offers the example of himself and others in contrast to

53 See also Bianchini, 'Paul', 39-40: 'subdued boast'.

54 Wojciechowski, 'Paul', 109.

55 See Wojciechowski, 'Paul', 105-8.

56 Glancy, 'Boasting', 134.

57 See for this also P.-B. Smit, 'De voorbeeldige man is queer: Paulus' mannelijkheid in de brief aan de Filippijzen', *Onder de regenboog: De Bijbel queer gelezen* (ed. A. van Klinken and N. Pruiksmā; Vught: Skandalon, 2010) 153-3; cf. also Donahoe, 'Self-Praise', 206-7.

58 This integration seems to take place in a smoother and less controversial way than it is the case in 1 or 2 Corinthians; this might well plead for a later date of Philippians, as Paul gives evidence of a further developed theology of suffering in relationship to a life 'in Christ'.

59 See e.g. Lohmeyer, *Philippianer*, 147; Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 161, though not with reference to first-century standards of morality, but rather with implied reference to twentieth-century standards. See also Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 195, commenting on vv. 4-8: 'its purpose is not autobiographical but polemical and paradigmatic'. See also id., op. cit., 224, noting that all that has preceded v. 15 is also paradigmatic. Cf. Gnllka, *Philippianerbrief*, 191, commenting on v. 7, which is part of the example that Paul gives at large: 'An seiner Entscheidung sollen sie die richtige Entscheidung lernen' (see further also idem, op. cit., 204). Also O'Brien,

the equally exemplary ‘many’ introduced in v. 18, it also becomes clear that his intention is – again – to convince the Philippians to choose the more advantageous of two possible courses of action.⁶⁰

This initial survey covers a first set of rhetorical situations and strategies that Plutarch mentions in relation to inoffensive self-praise. When turning to his list of possible rationales for justified (and hence inoffensive) self-praise (544D–546B), skipping over his second mention of the use of self-praise in order to exhort others, which has already been discussed above, further similarities may be noted. First, Plutarch notes that self-praise may be used to put people into their places (544F–545A). This certainly applies to Paul’s presentation of himself in Phil 3.4–8 as he begins by outlining how his past achievements and status go beyond the current claims of the ‘dogs’ (see v. 4: ἐγὼ μᾶλλον) and then moves beyond this in a second round of self-praise, showing how these past achievements are nothing in comparison to what he has attained now.⁶¹ In this way, Paul’s self-praise doubly puts his competitors in their places, which suits his general positioning as a senior leader within early Christianity. Of interest in this case is a further note that Plutarch attaches to his consideration of this particular use of self-praise and its legitimation as well – specifically, those with true opinions about the gods also have a right to be proud and express this pride in self-praise (545A). This may well resonate with Paul’s use of self-praise in Phil 3. While Plutarch’s next instance of the use of self-praise, involving one’s self-presentation as a source of strength in order to prevent others from falling into despair, may not apply to Phil 3,⁶² an element of Plutarch’s last rationale for the use of (inoffensive) self-praise might be there, even if it is closely related to the first rationale just discussed: the correction of the praise of others by presenting one’s own achievements in a positive light and thus praising oneself. The way in which Plutarch describes this type of self-praise is such, however,

Philippians, 447, notes with regard to v. 17: ‘The question has often been raised whether Paul’s choice of himself as an example was truly consistent with Christian humility.’ In his own answer to this question, O’Brien notes Paul’s deferring to Christ, his denial of perfection, his inclusion of others into his example, and his usage of this example for the benefit of others, but not the relevant rhetorical conventions considered in this paper. See also Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 217.

60 See e.g. Vincent, *Philippians*, 116.

61 See also Bianchini, ‘Paul’, 39; such a comparison of oneself with others also features emphatically in the work of Plutarch, even if he does not dwell extensively on the σύγκρισις as a rhetorical technique in the context of his discussion of inoffensive self-praise. See, however, Forbes, ‘Comparison’, 2–8.

62 Unless one assumes that the issue of suffering, important as it is in *Philippians*, also is at the forefront in Phil 3; then, Paul’s reference to his own suffering and hoped-for glorification provide a source of encouragement as well. See also Fee, *Philippians*, 351, who argues that Paul offers himself as an example to the *Philippians* in order to help them to be steadfast.

that it functions in a less direct way than Paul's *modus operandi* in Phil 3. His primary rationales – when selecting these from Plutarch's arsenal of rationales – are therefore the incitement of imitation of oneself for the benefit of others and the correction of others.

Furthermore, one may also ask whether Paul falls into any of the traps that turn inoffensive self-praise into offensive self-praise, as Plutarch lists them (546C–547F). First, with regard to the question of rivalry: rivalry is certainly there in Phil 3 and Paul's self-presentation seems to be motivated by it; however, even when it is not possible to look into Paul's heart, it seems that the overruling aim of all of this, even of Paul's self-presentation as a 'hero' and an *exemplum ad imitandum*, is the well-being of the Philippians, not Paul's glorification per se, as has been shown above. Plutarch's second trap, recounting praise that one has received from others to a further audience, does not apply to Paul's self-presentation in Phil 3, but Plutarch's third category does. This third category refers to instances of inoffensive self-praise, e.g. when correcting someone else, that turn into offensive boasting when pushed too far. As Plutarch notes, this is a risk that especially older men are susceptible to. In fact, it may well be – though one would have had to ask the Philippian recipients of the letter – that Paul pushes the envelope just a little too far in his self-praise in order to correct the 'dogs' in Phil 3.⁶³

4. Effective Self-Praise in Phil 3.2–21?

On the basis of the above, an evaluation of Paul's self-praise in Phil 3 from a Plutarchian point of view, so to speak, is now possible, specifically asking whether Paul's self-praise is inoffensive and effective, or the opposite.⁶⁴ A number of conclusions can be drawn in this respect, both with regard to the nature and use of

63 See also e.g. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 366: 'Here at Phil 3 he thought it necessary to set forth his own example ... in order to reduce to nothing the efforts of the Judaizers.'

64 These observations also beg the question to what extent these findings have any implications for one's view of Paul's formal knowledge of rhetoric. While it would be tempting to think that what has been presented on these pages indeed points in that direction, it is more prudent to be somewhat more reluctant in that respect and confess agnosticism as to the extent to which Paul is applying formal rhetorical knowledge here. For this, three reasons can be adduced: (i) Plutarch's treatise seems to be a reflection on existing rhetorical practice and on what is generally seen to be acceptable and to 'work' and what not; such knowledge based on experience was accessible to all in principle, with or without formal training; in other words: rhetorical conventions can be learned without formal education in them; (ii) Paul's usage of self-praise in Phil 3.2–21 does not make very systematic impression, hence it is doubtful whether he follows a particular theory with regard to it, even if he reflects many of the conventions that Plutarch has collected; (iii) in line with the latter point: apart from his reference to boasting in v. 3, Paul does not give an indication that he is consciously concerned with self-praise in a systematic way here, which should also make one wary of drawing conclusions

self-praise in Phil 3 and with regard to Phil 3 as such, as the study of self-praise also sheds additional light on this passage as a whole.

First, given the close match between Plutarch's considerations and Paul's use of self-praise, and even when taking into account that Paul might be overdoing it slightly, it seems that a good case can be made for no longer regarding Paul's use of self-praise in Phil 3.2–21 as offensive in principle, however foreign it may be to modern ears. Good reasons for the use of self-praise existed, and Phil 3 contains a number of them – specifically, the use of self-praise (i) to clear Paul's name; (ii) to present an example for the benefit of the Philippians, even encouraging them in the face of distress; (iii) to put others in their place (i.e. the 'dogs'). Furthermore, Paul can be seen to mitigate the potential offensiveness of his self-praise in four different ways as well: (i) he admits his own flaws (e.g. his suffering and hardships, his not being perfected yet); (ii) he admits suffering and labouring to achieve his goals (i.e. his current striving to gain Christ); (iii) he includes the Philippians into his self-praise; (iv) he includes further persons in his example of himself. These observations also suggest that Paul's rhetoric in Phil 3.2–21 is fairly coherent, at least when read against the background of Plutarch's way of thinking regarding self-praise.

Therefore, one may conclude that Paul's use of self-praise remains within the boundaries of acceptable and inoffensive self-praise that Plutarch is familiar with; in fact, he may even seem to follow some of the rules laid out by him quite closely. This shows that Paul is not only closely in line with what Greco-Roman rhetorical theorists thought about self-praise in general, but that even at a more detailed level a high degree of agreement can be established between a prominent Greco-Roman connoisseur of rhetorical and social conventions and an early Christian missionary, even if the latter may not have been actively aware of these rhetorical conventions.

as to Paul's conscious use of rhetorical tools here – which does not mean that he does not use them!