

ERIC COVINGTON

Functional Teleology
and the Coherence of
Ephesians

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

470

Mohr Siebeck

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470



Eric Covington

Functional Teleology and the Coherence of Ephesians

A Comparative and
Reception - Historical Approach

Mohr Siebeck

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Because of Grace

Preface

This book is a revised version of my doctoral thesis completed at the University of St Andrews. It must be noted that the present project is only a small part in the larger picture of New Testament ethics. In terms of Richard Hays' four-fold task of New Testament ethics, this project remains firmly within the initial, descriptive task, leaving a large amount of work left undone in the synthetic, hermeneutical, and pragmatic tasks necessary for enacting the ethical principles highlighted here.¹ While the synthetic task has been briefly hinted at in the conclusion, there has been no room to address the hermeneutical and pragmatic implications of the thesis. It is my hope that this descriptive analysis will provide a firm basis for the expansion of teleological ethics into daily life wherein is the most difficult and important test of the present thesis.

The completion of this project would not have been possible without a strong and supporting collaborative community. First, I would like to acknowledge my *Doktorvater*, Professor Mark W. Elliott. This project would not have begun, much less reached its current state and structure, without his thoughtful consideration, tireless support, and positive encouragement. His humble collegiality, encyclopedic knowledge, and competent scholarship serve as exemplary models for life inside and outside the academy.

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¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation – A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), 3–7.

Perrin, Daniel Block, and John Walton) were instrumental in my early biblical education and the formation of my research interests, as were Bob Garrett and Kaylyn McGowan Hopper at Dallas Baptist University.

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The community and collegiality at St Mary's College provided an ideal location at which to study and live for the four years I spent working on this project. I was able to form lasting connections with friends and colleagues, who also contributed not only to my scholarship but also to life in St Andrews. Colleagues in the Hadow Room of the Roundel helped introduce me to and inspire me through doctoral life and scholarship, and their collegiality and friendship have left an indelible mark on my time at St Andrews. Space precludes a full list of those who inspired and encouraged me through daily questions and conversations, but special mention should be made of Matt, Michael, Max, Brett, and William who all played a large part in my work and life, whether at the beach, over dinner, at coffee, or on the Scottish links. Many thanks for your friendship and support!

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New Braunfels, June 2018

Eric Covington

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List of Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
AGP	<i>Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie</i>
AJEC	Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung.</i> Part 2, <i>Principat</i> . Edited by Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972–
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3 rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
BÉFAR	Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises d’Athènes et de Rome
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BibInt	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BJS	Brown’s Judaic Studies
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BNTC	Black’s New Testament Commentaries
BSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
Cael.	Aristotle’s <i>De caelo</i> (Heavens)
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCTC	Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
CSHJ	Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism
CurBR	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature

EKKNT	Evangelisch-katolischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>Ep.</i>	Seneca's <i>Epistulae Morales</i>
<i>Eth. eud.</i>	Aristotle's <i>Ethica eudemia</i> (Eudemian Ethics)
<i>Eth. nic.</i>	Aristotle's <i>Ethica nicomachea</i> (Nicomachean Ethics)
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
<i>Fin.</i>	Cicero's <i>De finibus</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HthKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JGRChJ	<i>Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism</i>
JHebS	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
JSJS	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
L&N	Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, eds., <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains</i> , 2 nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989.
LEC	Library of Early Christianity
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LNTS	The Library of New Testament Studies
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 9 th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996.
LTQ	<i>Lexington Theological Quarterly</i>
MM	Moulton, James H., and George Milligan. <i>The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament</i> . London, 1930. Repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997
NTL	New Testament Library
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTSI	New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel
NovT	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
ÖTKNT	Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
OTL	The Old Testament Library

<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985.
PACS	Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
PCNT	Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament
<i>Phys.</i>	Aristotle's <i>Physica</i> (Physics)
PTNC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>Pol.</i>	Aristotle's <i>Politica</i> (Politics)
<i>ProEccl</i>	<i>Pro Ecclesia</i>
PTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
PTIU	Publications of the Thomas Instituut te Utrecht
<i>RelS</i>	<i>Religious Studies</i>
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
RGG	<i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Edited by Hans Dieter Betz. 4 th ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLStBL	Society of Biblical Literature Studies in Biblical Literature
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SCG	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
ScrTh	<i>Scripta Theologica</i>
SEAug	Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
SPhiloM	Studia Philonica Monograph Series
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>
STI	Studies in Theological Interpretation
STr	Scriptural Traces: Critical Perspectives on the Reception and Influence of the Bible
<i>Sull.</i>	Plutarch's <i>Sulla</i>
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVF	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> . Hans Friedrich Augusst von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1903–1924
THE	Theologische Existenz heute
TEMA	Textes et Etudes du Moyen Âge
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TThSt	Trierer theologische Studien
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

“It is quite true what philosophy says: that life must be understood backwards.

But then one forgets the other principles: that it must be lived forwards.
Which principle, the more one thinks it through, ends exactly with the thought
that temporal life can never properly be understood
precisely because I can at no instant find complete rest
in which to adopt the position: backwards.”

— Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals* 43 IV A 164¹

In what is one of the earliest commentaries on Ephesians originating from the late fourth century (ca. 386–388 CE), Jerome notes a tension between the importance of the text and its difficulty and obscurity. At the beginning of his commentary, Jerome locates Ephesians within the “middle” of the New Testament epistles, but its “middle” position does not refer exclusively to its central location within the *Corpus Paulinum*. Rather, Jerome compares Ephesians to “the heart of an animal” which “is in its mid-section, so that you might understand from this the magnitude of the difficulties and the profundity of the questions it contains.”² Here, the profundity of the letter at the heart of the epistolary corpus is set explicitly alongside the letter’s exegetical difficulties and the interpretive questions it engenders. Just after making this statement, Jerome further notes that the letter’s author “has heaped up more obscure ideas and mysteries unknown to the ages in this epistle than in all the others.”³ Though obviously a letter of significance, for Jerome Ephesians is a letter characterized by mystery, obscurity, and difficulty.

For modern scholars of Ephesians, much the same tension remains. The letter’s importance remains unquestioned with it having been called “the crown of Paulinism,”⁴ yet so, too, does its complexity. John Muddiman gives

¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Papers and Journals: A Selection*, ed. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin, 1996), 161.

² Ronald E. Heine, *The Commentaries of Origen and Jerome on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77.

³ Ibid., 77–78.

⁴ C. H. Dodd, “Ephesians,” in *Abingdon Bible Commentary*, ed. Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, and David G. Downey (New York: Abingdon, 1929), 1224–1225.

voice to the modern difficulties of studying Ephesians, exclaiming that the letter “has no setting and little obvious purpose!”⁵ Added to the conceptual obscurities and difficulties mentioned by Jerome are the well-known historical issues concerning the author, recipients, and occasion of the letter. The issue of the letter’s provenance remains largely entrenched in the same arguments either for or against Pauline authorship that have been repeated for centuries.⁶ The uncertainty of Ephesians’ authorship has resulted in its being accorded a tenuous connection with the undisputed Pauline material. Modern studies of Pauline issues – even by those who hold to authentic Pauline authorship of Ephesians – only refer to Ephesians referentially if, indeed, at all.⁷

Not only is the letter’s authorship debated, so, too, are the letter’s recipients. The text-critical problem concerning the presence of ἐν Ἐφέσω in Eph 1:1 has created differences of opinion concerning the recipients of the letter stretching all the way back to Marcion’s description of the letter being originally addressed to the Laodiceans.⁸ Further complicating the issue is the lack of any clear reference to a precipitating historical situation within the letter, which has resulted in most scholars’ conceiving of Ephesians as an encyclical letter intended to be circulated among various churches in Asia Minor.⁹ This, in turn, has raised questions concerning the genre of the letter and how the

⁵ John Muddiman, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, BNTC (London: Continuum, 2001), 12.

⁶ One recent argument comes from Douglas A. Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 309–338, who contends the letter is authentically Pauline, though he ultimately contends that the letter commonly known as “Ephesians” is better identified as the lost letter to the Laodiceans (see Col 4:16b) and dated to around 50 CE. While Campbell’s early date is novel, the suggestion of recipients bears a strong affinity with Marcion’s description of the letter, which Adolf von Harnack follows (see Shirley Jackson Case, “To Whom Was ‘Ephesians’ Written?,” *The Biblical World* 38 [1911]: 315–320).

⁷ There is, for example, only one mention of Ephesians (in a footnote) in E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1977), 449, n.9. Even N. T. Wright, who to his credit pushes for the inclusion of Ephesians within Pauline studies more than most (see N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and The Question of God 4 [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013], 56–61), opts “as a concession to troubled consciences” to treat Ephesians only referentially (p. 61).

⁸ See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 532 for a concise description of the textual issues.

⁹ See Gerhard Sellin, *Der Brief an die Epheser*, KEK 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 57.

letter's various structural elements hold together.¹⁰ So, too, questions concerning the letter's genre and structure have led to issues understanding Ephesians' communicative intent and conceptual coherence. These interpretive difficulties have led to assertions that the letter is “verschlossen, abstrakt, und spröde.”¹¹

Though there is no consensus concerning these historical issues, a general stasis has developed with most discussions repeating established evidence and conclusions. In contrast, the question of the letter's conceptual coherence has attracted a number of various proposals, and it remains one of the most open and divisive topics in Ephesians scholarship. There have been several competing proposals for determining the letter's conceptual coherence, and there have even been recent questions concerning the extent to which Ephesians may even be considered coherent. So Kreitzer notes, “Recent investigations into the form and style of the letter suggest that it is more accurately described as a collage of phrases and materials which have been pasted together.”¹² Indeed, Ephesians combines apocalyptic, ecclesial, Christological, anthropological, cosmological, sociocultural, and ethical elements all within the small space of its 2,422 words, and there has been little agreement about how such diverse concepts cohere.

As the next chapter will demonstrate in more detail, a determination of the letter's logical coherence must take into account three particular issues: 1) The integration of the letter's cosmic, ecclesial, and ethical elements, (2) the explanatory potential of the proposed structure of coherence for the letter's established doctrinal characteristics, including ecclesial unity, cosmic Christology, and eschatology, and (3) the necessity of maintaining historical plausibility while simultaneously not exceeding the letter's sparse contextual evidence. The present study seeks to examine the issue of conceptual coherence in Ephesians in a way that accounts for these three issues.

Using the observations of recent studies in ancient ethical thought that have highlighted the importance of conceptions of the human *telos*, or functional purpose, this study examines the logical coherence of Ephesians through the categories of functional teleology. It begins by investigating the

¹⁰ See Jean-Noël Aletti, *Saint Paul, épître aux Ephésiens: introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 2001), 4–17 concerning the generic difficulties of Ephesians. See also Holland Hendrix, “On the Form and Ethos of Ephesians,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 42.4 (1988): 3–15.

¹¹ Gerhard Sellin, “Adresse und Intention des Epheserbriefes,” in *Studien zu Paulus und zum Epheserbrief*, ed. Dieter Sänger, FRLANT 229 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 172.

¹² Larry J. Kreitzer, “Hierapolis in the Heavens: A New Proposal for Reading the Letter to the Ephesians,” in *Hierapolis in the Heavens: Studies in the Letter to the Ephesians*, LNTS 368 (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 5.

extent to which teleological conceptions featured in ancient ethical logic. Part One provides an overview and definition of the logical structure of “functional teleology” in ancient ethical thought before turning to examine how this structure was utilized in Epicurean, Stoic, and early Jewish ethical texts. In Part Two, the project examines the *Auslegungsgeschichte* of Ephesians, focusing on Thomas Aquinas’ *lectura ad Ephesios*, to demonstrate how Ephesians has been previously interpreted using functional teleological categories. Aquinas’ *ad Ephesios* raises a number of significant questions and observations for further study in Ephesians. Finally, the project turns to an historical-exegetical examination of Ephesians that analyzes the text using the lens of functional teleology, which identifies appropriate ethical behavior in light of an individual and ecclesial *telos* within God’s *ultimus finis* for all of creation.

Parts Three and Four conclude that Ephesians demonstrates a logical system of thought based on the description of the appropriate human *telos* to which all human behavior should be directed in light of the church’s function within Ephesians’ broader *Weltbild*. In this way, Ephesians coherently holds together concepts of cosmology, ecclesiology, and human ethics through the logic of functional teleology.

Chapter 2

The Question of Coherence in Ephesians

1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the status of current discussions concerning the coherence of Ephesians before detailing the observations, guiding thesis, and methodological defense of the present study using the categories of functional teleology. This brief overview of recent scholarship on the question of Ephesians' conceptual coherence will clarify the problem and highlight a number of areas that must be taken into account when addressing this issue in light of Ephesians' ambiguous historical data. These issues and the observation of recent studies concerning the importance of the teleological structure of ancient ethics examined will allow for a detailed presentation of the guiding thesis and the terms used throughout the study. Finally, a discussion of the methodological approach is required before the historical examination of functional teleology in ancient philosophical ethics begins in Part One.

2. The Conceptual Coherence of Ephesians in Recent Scholarship

Questions concerning the letter's coherence and its historical situation are often irrevocably intertwined and so, while the present focus is predominantly on how the conceptual coherence of Ephesians has been understood in recent scholarship, some discussion of the differences in historical understandings of the letter will be inevitable. A full discussion of the history of Ephesians scholarship is beyond the bounds of this introduction, so the present section details particularly theories concerning the conceptual coherence of the letter in recent scholarship from the last eighty years.

2.1. Ephesians and Post-1940s Ecclesiology

Events surrounding and following World War Two precipitated a shift in the study of Ephesians, with questions concerning both Jewish-Christian relations and ecumenicism taking a more meaningful and practical importance. As Rudolf Schnackenburg notes, the ecclesiology of Ephesians – particularly

Eph 2:11–22 – play a significant role in irenic and ecumenical discussions and in associated understandings of the letter’s coherence and purpose.¹ Markus Barth influentially highlights the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Ephesians’ ecclesiology.² The depiction of the ecclesial body of Christ made up of both Jew and Gentile becomes particularly important for Barth, and he concludes that in Ephesians, “the Gentiles became members of the one body of Christ only by their insertion into Israel.”³ While Barth’s emphasis on Ephesian ecclesiology focused primarily on the question of Jewish-Christian relations, others were also appealing to the letter for ecumenical concerns.

William Rader suggests that ecumenicism “more than any other [movement] has spurred study of Ephesians in the twentieth century.”⁴ Pope Pius XII’s encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* in 1943 spoke of the church as the mystical body of Christ with 19 specific references to Ephesians spread throughout the document.⁵ Joseph Bluett notes that this encyclical, which “draws upon all the different fields of theology,” is deeply influenced by the Pauline letters (in which he includes Ephesians).⁶ Subsequently, Heinrich Schlier’s and Rudolf Schnackenburg’s commentaries both find particular significance in the letter’s description of the church as the body of Christ. Schlier’s commentary devotes a significant excursus to discussing the church as τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ in Eph 1:18, noting that the concept is of “fundamental Bedeutung” to the letter’s ecclesiology.⁷ Schlier goes on to note that the corporeal ecclesiology of Ephesians presents Christ as “der Ursprung und das Ziel des Lebens der Kirche” and that the letter’s ecclesiology has close

¹ Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron, EKKNT 10 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 321.

² Markus Barth, “Israel and the Church in Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians,” in *Israel and the Church: Contribution to a Dialogue Vital for Peace* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1969; repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 80. The article originally appeared as Markus Barth, *Israel und die Kirche im Brief des Paulus an die Epheser*, TEH 75 (Munich: Kaiser, 1959).

³ Barth, “Israel and the Church,” 90.

⁴ William Harry Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11–22*, BGBE 20 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1978), 212.

⁵ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi*, Encyclical Letter on the Mystical Body of Christ 29 June 1943, Vatican Web site, accessed 1 April 2016, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html.

⁶ Joseph Bluett, “The Theological Significance of the Encyclical ‘Mystici Corporis,’” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 1 (1946): 58.

⁷ Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser: Ein Kommentar*, 7th ed. (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1971), 89. Schlier discussed the corporeal metaphor in relation to Ephesians prior both to *Mystici Corporis* in 1943 and his Übertritt to the Catholic Church in 1953 in Heinrich Schlier, *Christus und die Kirche im Epheserbrief*, BHT 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1930), 37–48.

ties to the letter's Christological "Repräsentation des 'Hauptes' im Kosmos."⁸ Schnackenburg similarly finds the letter's ecclesiology to be the main theme of the letter, in which its cosmological and ethical concepts are rooted. He notes that Ephesians "confronts us with the idea of the Church, the one, holy Church, inseparably bound to Christ,"⁹ while further suggesting that Christ employs the church "according to her presence in the world" for the "indispensable task for the divinely-intended re-establishment and uniting of everything in Christ (1.10)."¹⁰ Schlier and Schnackenburg both rightly emphasize the ecclesiological significance of the body metaphor and recognize the importance of maintaining the letter's ecclesial, cosmological, and ethical components. This approach points significantly to Ephesians' functional and purposeful construal of the church within the cosmos. While Schlier and Schnackenburg tend to focus primarily on the image of the church as the body of Christ to explain this concept, Ephesians' ecclesiology extends beyond the description of the church as the body of Christ – significant as this element is. The corporeal metaphor, as Chap 7 will explore in further detail below, is tied to a series of ecclesial metaphors that speaks to the functional purpose of individuals within the church and the church within the cosmos. Functional significance permeates the entire letter.

2.2. Ephesians and Gnosticism

Another interpretive movement emphasized Ephesians' understanding of the body of Christ for a different reason: its parallels to Gnosticism. Under the influence of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, whose key proponents for Ephesians include Schlier,¹¹ Käsemann,¹² and Pokorný,¹³ the main interpretive background in the first half of the twentieth century was judged to be Gnosticism. It was suggested that the Gnostic mysteries, the use of the body motif, and the cosmic redeemer-myth were all strongly influential in the writing of Ephesians.¹⁴ More recently, however, the influence of Gnostic structures of thought has been widely qualified with the later dating of much of the Gnostic data. Recent scholarship has been less prone to speak of a single

⁸ Schlier, *Epheser*, 94.

⁹ Schnackenburg, *Ephesians*, 343.

¹⁰ Ibid., 344–345.

¹¹ Schlier, *Christus und die Kirche*.

¹² Ernst Käsemann, "Epheserbrief," *RGG II*:517–520

¹³ Petr Pokorný, "Epheserbrief und gnostische Mysterien," *ZNW* 53 (1962): 160–194 and Petr Pokorný, *Der Epheserbrief und die Gnosis: Die Bedeutung des Haupt-Glieder-Gedankens in der entstehenden Kirche* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965).

¹⁴ See the summary of Sellin, *Epheser*, 59.

tradition as “Gnosticism,”¹⁵ and historical uncertainty about the date, origins, and background of Gnostic thought has cast doubt on the appropriateness of using it in comparative studies with the New Testament.¹⁶ Gerhard Sellin notes that the theory of Gnostic influence largely began to wane in the 1980s before concluding, “Es wurde fraglich, ob man in Bezug auf neutestamentliche Schriften überhaupt von Gnosis reden könne.”¹⁷ With particular respect to Ephesians and Colossians, Christoph Marksches concludes the letters are unlikely to be combatting Gnostic mythology because there is no mention “of a defective creation and creator or angelic powers which are opposed to God, and nowhere is there any hint of a differentiation between the historical Jesus and a heavenly Christ-figure.”¹⁸ While Ephesians influenced later Gnostic thought, suggestions that gnostic doctrines inform the composition of Ephesians are untenably fragile.¹⁹

2.3. Ephesians in Modern Comparative Study

Recent comparative studies have moved from Gnosticism to the Greco-Roman and Second Temple Jewish thought world of the first-century. Tet-Lim Yee has examined Ephesians in light of the New Perspective’s re-evaluation of the relationship between Judaism and early Christianity. Yee focuses specifically on Eph 2:11–22 to examine the “theme of Jewish attitudes towards the Gentiles and ethnic reconciliation” in Ephesians.²⁰ Yee rightly highlights the importance of ethnic reconciliation in Ephesians and highlights the socio-cultural, anthropological, and ecclesial aspects of the letter; yet, much like the socio-scientific studies surveyed below, it fails to incorporate the cosmological elements of the letter, which, Chapter 7 will argue below, are integral for interpreting Ephesians.

¹⁵ See the main thesis apparent in the title of Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁶ See the survey of Robert McLachlan Wilson, “Jewish Gnosis and Gnostic Origins: A Survey,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 45 (1974): 177–189.

¹⁷ Sellin, *Epheser*, 59.

¹⁸ Christoph Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 72.

¹⁹ See Nils Alstrup Dahl, “Interpreting Ephesians: Then and Now,” in *Studies in Ephesians: Introduction Questions, Text- & Edition-Critical Issues, Interpretation of Texts and Themes*, ed. David Hellholm, Vemund Blomkvist, and Tord Fornberg, WUNT 131 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 462 and Elaine H. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 115 for more on the later “Gnostic” use of Ephesians.

²⁰ Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles, and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul’s Jewish Identity and Ephesians*, SNTSMS 130 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

George van Kooten explores the conceptual connection between God, Christ, and the cosmos (what he terms its “cosmic Christology”) in particular relationship with similar concepts within Colossians.²¹ Van Kooten suggests that Ephesians represents a Hellenization of the original Pauline cosmology that exhibits significant conceptual similarity with the cosmological thought of Greco-Roman philosophical schools. His emphasis on the cosmic Christology of Ephesians, however, leans too far in the other direction. Particular aspects of van Kooten’s construction of Ephesians’ historical situation over extend the limited evidence available and are ultimately unconvincing.²² Van Kooten seriously incorporates the cosmological aspects of the letter, yet in doing so his reading preferences the cosmic over the ecclesial and ethical aspects of the letter. While cosmic Christology may be an integral theme, it ultimately cannot provide the conceptual coherence of Ephesians.

Timothy Gombis has examined the conceptual coherence of Ephesians in light of an ancient pattern of divine warfare that “elaborates upon the triumph of God in Christ over all competing cosmic forces.”²³ According to Gombis, this pattern emerges from the ancient Near East and is mediated through the Old Testament and coherently accounts for the letter’s various emphases. It is not entirely clear, however, how the narrative of divine warfare was related to exhortations to practical, daily ethics in the ancient world. An explanatory paradigm that is able to incorporate themes rightly developed in Gombis’ work within an ethical logic verified in the ancient world would be beneficial for identifying the logic by which Ephesians holds together its cosmic, ecclesial, and ethical aspects.

2.4. Ephesians and Greco-Roman Rhetoric

A different trend in recent scholarship focuses on the rhetorical similarities between Ephesians and Greco-Roman rhetoricians as a means for understanding the conceptual coherence of the letter. So, John Paul Heil has suggested

²¹ George H. van Kooten, *Cosmic Christology in Paul and the Pauline School: Colossians and Ephesians in the Context of Graeco-Roman Cosmology, With a New Synopsis of the Greek Texts*, WUNT 2.171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 1.

²² For example, *ibid.*, 209–210 suggests, Ephesians incorporates “almost the entire structure” of Colossians in order to reintegrate a certain amount of futurist eschatology to modify Colossians’ reversal of an original Pauline imminent eschatology with a fully realized one.

²³ Timothy G. Gombis, “The Triumph of God in Christ: Divine Warfare in the Argument of Ephesians” (Ph.D. Thesis, University of St Andrews, 2005), 2. Additional aspects of Gombis’ argument also appear in Timothy G. Gombis, “Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare,” *JSNT* 26 (2004): 403–418 and Timothy G. Gombis, *The Drama of Ephesians: Participating in the Triumph of God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

that Ephesians is held together by a complex rhetorical composition containing fifteen “micro-chiastic” sections constructed in a “macro-chiastic” structure throughout the letter.²⁴ Particularly telling for the problem of Ephesians’ conceptual coherence is the first of nine criteria Heil gives in defense of detecting an extended chiastic structure. Heil’s first criterion is “there must be a problem in perceiving the structure of the text in question, which more conventional outlines fail to resolve.”²⁵ While Heil provides evidence for how his other eight criteria warrant a chiastic examination of Ephesians, he ultimately offers no further evidence concerning this first rationale – the difficulty in determining the structure of Ephesians. This assumes that the lack of an agreed-upon structure in Ephesians is so self-evident that it needs no further discussion. Heil’s proposed solution of an extended chiastic structure fails to convince due to tenuous and unconvincing posited parallels between the various sections of the letter; however, the stated rationale for the whole project (the assumed lack of a convincing description of the letter’s conceptual coherence) is revealing.

Roy Jeal has also conducted a rhetorical analysis of the epistle. Utilizing ancient rhetorical sources, he has suggested a rhetorical function for each section of the letter in an attempt to clarify the coherent relationship between the first and last three chapters.²⁶ Jeal’s work helpfully highlights ways in which Greco-Roman literature can contribute to the study of Ephesians and suggests the possibility of utilizing categories of ancient thought for further understanding Ephesians. However, it has not satisfactorily demonstrated a conceptual coherence that extends beyond rhetorical persuasion. Jeal, for example, holds that only rhetorical maneuvers integrate the “theological” section of Eph 1–3 and the “ethical” section of Eph 4–6, concluding that there is “no direct paraenetical concern apparent in Ephesians 1–3.”²⁷ Jeal’s conclusions conceptually divorce the final three chapters of the letter from the first three, creating two largely independent sections of the letter that have no conceptual coherence.

Of more benefit is Elna Mouton’s examination of the role of rhetoric in Ephesians, where she briefly mentions that one of the common features of

²⁴ See John Paul Heil, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ*, SBLStBL 13 (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 13–45.

²⁵ Ibid., 13.

²⁶ Roy R. Jeal, *Integrating Theology and Ethics in Ephesians: The Ethos of Communication*, Studies in Bible and Early Christianity 43 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2000), 62–72. Ben Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 221 has similarly undertaken a rhetorical study of Ephesians using many of the same ancient sources as Jeal.

²⁷ Jeal, *Integrating*, 9.

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