

CHRIST AS THE *TELOS* OF LIFE:
MORAL PHILOSOPHY, ATHLETIC IMAGERY, AND
THE AIM OF PHILIPPIANS

Submitted by Bradley Arnold to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology in March 2013.

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material
and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper
acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and
that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree
by this or any other University.

Signature:

ABSTRACT

The aim of Paul's letter to the Philippians has been understood in various ways: e.g. reassurance, consolation, advance of the gospel. This thesis presents a new analysis of Philippians that challenges these proposals and offers a new way of thinking about Paul's overarching argumentative aim in this letter.

After demonstrating the need to examine three areas (viz. moral philosophy, athletics, and vivid speech) in an historical analysis of Philippians and addressing methodological issues pertinent to this investigation (Part I), I turn to map out the historical context relevant for this project (Part II): viz. the broad structure of thought in ancient moral philosophy, ancient athletics and its association with virtue, and the use of vivid description to persuade an audience. The final part of this thesis (Part III) is an exegetical analysis of Philippians that interprets the letter in light of the contextual material discussed in Part II, exploring how this contextual material contributes to and is interrelated in Paul's persuasive appeal to morally form the Philippian Christians in a particular way.

In this analysis I argue that Paul's pattern of thought in Philippians is structured similarly to the broad structure of thought in ancient moral philosophy, which is oriented toward an ultimate *τέλος* and views the virtues as necessary in attaining this goal. Paul's use of athletic language, framing his argument in the letter (1:27–30; 4:3), fills out this perspective on life by presenting the nature of Christian existence in terms of a contest of virtue, which is similar to how moral philosophers used this language. This perspective on life is vividly depicted and summed up in the image of the runner in Phil 3:13–14. As a vivid description this imagery would have had a powerfully persuasive effect and rhetorically plays a significant role in Paul's argument. With this imagery, Paul is presenting himself as striving toward Christ, the *τέλος* of life, which entails thinking and living in a particular way to make progress toward this goal—the final attainment of which is complete transformation to become like Christ. It is this vivid description of the runner that encapsulates Paul's overarching argumentative aim in the letter, persuading the Philippians to pursue Christ as the *τέλος* of life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to so many for the support and encouragement that has seen me through writing this thesis. I want to especially thank David Horrell, my supervisor, who critically read and offered insightful feedback on my work. His example and wisdom have helped me in ways too numerous to mention. I am also grateful to Louise Lawrence and my examiners, Peter Oakes and Morwenna Ludlow. I would also like to thank those who have helped me financially. I am grateful to the University of Exeter for awarding me with a scholarship to fund my studies here. I am also particularly grateful for those at First Baptist Church Chilton, Texas, and especially Larry and Kathy Maxey who were very generous in their assistance. I also would like to thank two dear friends, Gorazd Andrejč, who was a great dialogue partner throughout the duration of my doctoral work, and Clinton Sharp, who has been a constant source of spiritual wisdom and friendship. Lastly, I would like to thank my family, and particularly my Mom and Dad (Bud and Evelyn Arnold), who have seen me through many things in life, and have always offered words of encouragement and support in various ways. It is to them that I dedicate this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abbreviations	6
INTRODUCTION	7
PART I	
APPROACHES TO PHILIPPIANS AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS	
Chapter 1	
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH: INTEGRITY, GENRE, AND THE AIM(S) OF PHILIPPIANS	10
1.1. Partition Theories	10
1.2. Epistolary Approaches	14
1.3. The Pattern of Thought in Philippians	23
1.4. Thematic and Rhetorical Approaches	33
1.5. Athletic Imagery and Its Function in Philippians	54
1.6. Conclusion: Aims of the Thesis	63
Chapter 2	
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR AN HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION	66
2.1. A Critical Approach to History	66
2.2. The Processes of Constructing Knowledge	70
2.3. Shared Knowledge across Socio-Economic Levels	76
2.4. Conclusion	82
PART II	
HISTORICAL CONTEXT: MORAL PHILOSOPHY, ATHLETICS, AND VIVID SPEECH	
Chapter 3	
THE STRUCTURE OF THOUGHT IN ANCIENT MORAL PHILOSOPHY	84
3.1. Aristotle's <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	85
3.2. Hellenistic Moral Philosophies	96
3.3. Conclusion	111
Chapter 4	
ANCIENT ATHLETICS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A GOOD LIFE	113
4.1. Prominence of Athletics: The Games	113
4.2. The Athletic Ideal: Virtue and the Making of Perfect Citizens	122
4.3. Construction of the Good Life: Moral Philosophy and Athletics	131
4.4. Race Imagery and the Entirety of Life	141
4.5. Conclusion	142

Chapter 5	
VIVID DESCRIPTION: THE VERBAL AND THE VISUAL	144
5.1. Vivid Speech: ἔκφρασις, Ancient Human Psychology, and Persuasion	145
5.2. The Image of the Runner as a Vivid Description (Phil 3:13–14)	162
5.3. Conclusion	163

PART III

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS: MORAL PHILOSOPHY, ATHLETIC IMAGERY, AND VIVID SPEECH IN PHILIPPIANS

Chapter 6	
DISCERNING AND MODELING THE VIRTUOUS LIFE (PHIL 1:1–26)	166
6.1. Concern with Life as a Whole: Discerning the Superior Things (Phil 1:1–11)	166
6.2. Positive and Negative Examples of Virtue (Phil 1:12–26)	174
6.3. Conclusion	182

Chapter 7	
LIVING VIRTUOUSLY: CITIZEN-ATHLETES WITH THE ΦΡΟΝΗΣΙΣ OF CHRIST (PHIL 1:27–2:30)	184
7.1. The Contest of Virtue: Citizenship and Athletics (Phil 1:27–30)	184
7.2. The Intellectual Aspects of Virtue: The φρόνησις of Christ (Phil 2:1–11)	196
7.3. Exhortation to Moral Integrity: Radiating Light in the World (Phil 2:12–18)	205
7.4. Examples of Virtue: Timothy and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:19–30)	210
7.5. Conclusion	213

Chapter 8	
PURSUING CHRIST AS THE ΤΕΛΟΣ OF LIFE: THE VIRTUOUS AND FULLY SUFFICIENT LIFE (PHIL 3:1–4:23)	214
8.1. Christ as the τέλος of Life (Phil 3:1–11)	214
8.2. Pursuing Christ as the τέλος of Life: The Image of the Runner (Phil 3:12–14)	225
8.3. Exhortation to Live Virtuously: Learning from Examples and Rules (Phil 3:15–4:7)	231
8.4. The Virtuous and Content Life (4:8–23)	241
8.5. Conclusion	248

CONCLUSION	249
------------	-----

BIBLIOGRAPHY	252
--------------	-----