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"Our πολίτευμα Belongs in Heaven" (Phil 3:20)

Comparing Paul's and Seneca's Narratives of Consolation

Alex W. Muir | ORCID: 0000-0002-4434-3713
University of Edinburgh, New College, Edinburgh, UK
muir.alexw@gmail.com

Abstract

This article argues that Paul's narrative about collective πολίτευμα in heaven (Phil 3:20) constitutes a moment of climactic consolation in the letter to the Philippians. This position is reached through an extended comparison with Seneca's *On Consolation to Mother Helvia* (*Ad Helviam*). It emerges that similar narratives of consolation are constructed in the *Ad Helviam* and Phil 3:15–21. In both texts, adversity is recognised and rationalised, before it is defied then transcended through rhetorical and cosmological arguments. There are, however, also differences owing to Paul's and Seneca's different contexts: in particular, the threat of certain Judaizing opponents to Paul's gospel in Philippi.

Keywords

Phil 3:20 – πολίτευμα – consolation – comparison – Seneca

1 Introduction*

Like many chapters in the letters of Paul, there is much at stake in the interpretation of Phil 3. Among scholars favouring partitions in Philippians,

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Phil 3:2–21 is thought to constitute much, if not all, of a separate letter.[1] This is often referred to as a *Kampfbrief*, since Paul reacts against certain opponents to his apostolic gospel. While these opponents greatly concern Paul and induce rhetorical comparisons (συγκρίσεις), to say that they dominate Phil 3 is an overstatement: Paul's own example, which the Philippians are to imitate (Phil 3:17), is foregrounded. In her valuable discussion of Phil 3 as exhortation to imitation, Angela Standhartinger notes that "Philippians 3.2–21 … consists *mainly* of an explicit biographical part (3.4–14/15a) that branches off into parenes[i]s (3.15b–17) and an eschatological perspective (3.20–21)."[2] Consequently, the opponents are background figures for much of the section.

Nevertheless, the opponents are still present in Phil 3. It is not the purpose of this article to determine their identity,[3] but to highlight how they provoke apostolic grief and pose a further threat to the Christ-believers in Philippi, from whom Paul is distanced by imprisonment. It follows that both Paul and the Philippians require consolation. If we focus solely on the mimetic and paraenetic aspects of Phil 3 for the believers' future conduct, we risk overlooking its emotional and psychagogical dimensions for the present situations of Paul and the Philippians.[4] The following discussion seeks to redress this imbalance

1 For a partitioned account of Philippians, see John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33B; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) 3, for a division into three parts, all sent separately from Ephesus: Letter A (4:10–20), B (1:1–3:1), C (3:2–21). Regarding Phil 4:1–9, Reumann considers that it is "likely" partly contained in B and "perhaps" in Letter C. For a middle way between a unified letter and partitions, see Hans Dieter Betz, *Studies in Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (WUNT 343; Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2015) vii, who argues that Phil 3:2–21 is a separate *memorandum* and Phil 4:10–20 a receipt in the style of an administrative letter; but they are all sent as one package from Rome. In what follows, I do not argue for partitions because of continued consolatory *topoi* throughout the letter.

2 Angela Standhartinger, "'Join in imitating me' (Philippians 3:17): Towards an Interpretation of Philippians 3," *NTS* 54.3 (2008) 420 (emphasis mine). Standhartinger also includes Phil 4:8–9 within this fragment.

3 See Ryan D. Collman, "Beware the Dogs! The Phallic Epithet in Phil 3.2," *NTS* 67.1 (2021) 105–120, for a convincing proposal that the opponents in Phil 3 are Judaizing gentiles. For contrasting views on opposition throughout Philippians, see Samuel Vollenweider, "Rivals, Opponents and Enemies: Three Kinds of Theological Argumentation in Philippians," in *The First Urban Churches 4, Roman Philippi* (ed. James R. Harrison and L.L. Welborn; WGRWSup 13; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2018) 291–305; Nina Nikki, *Opponents and Identity in Philippians* (NovTSup 173; Leiden: Brill, 2018); Morna Hooker, "Philippians: Phantom Opponents and the Real Source of Conflict," in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflicts in Early Christianity; Essays in Honour of Heikki Räisänen* (ed. Ismo Dunderberg et al.; NovTSup 103; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 377–395.

4 Despite the excellent links she makes to ancient testament literature, Standhartinger nowhere conceives of Phil 3 as consolation. For a link between consolation and testament literature, see George L. Parsenios, *Departure and Consolation: The Johannine Farewell*

by focusing on the latter, chiefly by considering how Paul's narrative concerning a shared "citizenship in heaven" (πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς)[5] in Phil 3:20 constitutes a moment of climactic consolation in the letter.

2 Comparing Ancient Notions of Consolation

The practice of consoling was a *sine qua non* among moral philosophers from diverse schools in antiquity. While moral philosophers had different strategies and techniques in effecting consolation, all were agreed on its central purpose: to remove or in some way displace grief. This is well articulated by Cicero in the *Tusculan Disputations*, where he surveys some of the main approaches (3.31.75):

> haec igitur officia sunt consolantium, tollere aegritudinem funditus aut sedare aut detrahere quam plurimum aut supprimere nec pati manare longius aut ad alia traducere.
>
> These are the duties of consolers: to remove grief totally; or to sedate it; or to remove it as much as possible; or to suppress it by not allowing it to remain any longer; or to transfer it to other things.[6]

Grief was an undesirable passion or emotion (πάθος) that required some form of intervention. The most influential philosophical system of Paul's time was Stoicism, albeit mediated through some Platonic psychological elements.[7] On the Stoic system, the passions were wholly irrational. This was particularly true in the case of grief: for the Stoic sage to feel grief was a *non sequitur*; there was no corresponding positive emotion (εὐπάθεια; *constantia*) to grief.[8] Instead, the closest eupathic relation was joy (χάρα; *gaudium*) which was the inverse of the passion of pleasure (ἡδονή; *voluptas*). Thus, Paul Holloway is justified in setting up a dialectic relationship between grief and joy: "The goal of consolation

Discourses in Light of Greco-Roman Literature (NovTSup 117; Leiden: Brill, 2005). This is particularly meaningful if Philippians is valedictory consolation, as I believe to be the case in Phil 4:8–9.

5 Some other possible meanings of this phrase are considered below.

6 All translations of ancient texts are my own, unless stated.

7 See, e.g., Larry L. Welborn, "Paul and Pain: Paul's Emotional Therapy in 2 Corinthians 1.1–2.13; 7.5–16 in the Context of Ancient Psychagogic Literature," *NTS* 57.4 (2011) 548.

8 See Cicero, *Tusc.* 4.12–15.

was to defeat grief, one of the four cardinal passions, and to replace it as far as possible with its contrary, joy."[9]

Holloway is a particularly influential voice for our discussion. While the pervasive aspect of joy in Philippians is well known, very few studies have considered Philippians as a letter that formally conveys consolation in a manner comparable to that of the ancient philosophical schools. Holloway, for his part, goes so far as to argue that Philippians conforms *wholly* to the ancient letter of consolation.[10] Although this categorisation can be questioned,[11] Holloway's work shows how meaningful parallels can be drawn from Philippians to broader ancient practices of consolation. Holloway devotes relatively little space, however, to the end of Phil 3, where the apostle introduces his narrative about collective πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς, which has consolatory elements.[12]

Many—although not all—of these consolatory elements are clearly seen when we bring in a parallel text from ancient philosophy, which purports to be a consolation.[13] Seneca's *On Consolation to Mother Helvia* (henceforth the *Ad Helviam*) is prime comparative material in this regard. The basic rhetorical situation of the *Ad Helviam* is that Seneca writes to his mother from exile in Corsica, and in Stoic fashion, seeks to show that exile ought not to be categorised as an evil, but an "indifferent."[14] The similar rhetorical situation in Philippians—Paul's writing from imprisonment—invites extended comparison.[15] In what follows, we shall consider how aspects of adversity and

9 Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017) 2.

10 Holloway, *Philippians*, 1, and *passim*.

11 Here, the work of Troels Engberg-Pedersen on Philippians as paraenesis *qua* exhortation is particularly influential. This was inaugurated by his *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000) 81–130.

12 See Holloway, *Philippians*, 178–180. Holloway labels this section a "concluding exhortation"; but I shall argue that consolation also applies here.

13 A caveat applies with the literary *consolatio*—particularly in Seneca's case—that there are often other underlying intentions besides consoling. See Marcus J. Wilson, "Seneca the Consoler? A New Reading of his Consolatory Writings," in *Greek and Roman Consolations: Eight Studies of a Tradition and Its Afterlife* (ed. Han Baltussen; Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2013) 93: "generic markers of the *consolatio* may disguise in whole or in part some ulterior motive on the author's part."

14 On the Stoic topos of "indifferents," see Cicero, *Fin.* 3.21.53.

15 Paul A. Holloway, "Paul as Hellenistic Philosopher: The Case of Philippians," in *Paul and the Philosophers* (ed. Ward Blanton and Hent de Vries; New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) 58–62, has recognised the comparative value of the *Ad Helviam* for Philippians. I believe that more can be said, however; I seek to analyse the *Ad Helviam* further to illumine Phil 3:15–21, and especially 3:20, as an integral part of Paul's consolatory strategy in the letter.

grief are initially acknowledged and rationalised, then defied and transcended by both Paul and Seneca through consolation on a cosmic scale. By taking this comparative approach, we follow a principle well articulated by Troels Engberg-Pedersen, namely that "the aim of the comparison should be to understand each *individual* thinker better *through* the comparison."[16] By looking at Seneca, then Paul, we shall establish and account for both the similarities and differences in how they envision consolation.

3 Seneca's *Ad Helviam*

The *Ad Helviam* is one of two consolations composed during Seneca's exile in Corsica, which had been imposed on him by the emperor Claudius.[17] We shall analyse the narrative of consolation that Seneca constructs by following the contours of this text.

3.1 *Exile Rationalised and Defied* (Ad Helviam *1–13*)

Seneca starts by addressing his own and his mother's situation with a grandiose claim: his undertaking of consoling "his own," while being lamented by them, was unprecedented (1.2).[18] He soon tackles the "womanly grief" (*muliebris dolor*, 3.2) that might have been felt by his mother, but vigorously disallows it: "banish, indeed, lamentation, wailing, and other things" (*lamentationes quidem et heiulatus et alia … amove*, 3.2).[19] Seneca's avowed *modus operandi* accordingly coheres with conventional Stoic *apatheia* regarding the

16 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Paul in Philippians and Seneca in *Epistle* 93 on Life after Death and Its Present Implications," in *Paul and Seneca in Dialogue* (ed. Joseph R. Dodson and David E. Briones; Leiden: Brill, 2017) 268. Emphasis his.

17 For Seneca's recall, see Tacitus, *Ann.* 12.8. The other more complex consolation is written to Polybius, who had proximity to Claudius. In the *Ad Polybium*, however, Seneca is not a wholly contented and self-sufficient exile; instead, he is held captive by his sufferings (18.7). On the differences between the two consolations, see Elaine Fantham, "Dialogues of Displacement: Seneca's Consolations to Helvia and Polybius," in *Writing Exile: The Discourse of Displacement in Greco-Roman Antiquity and Beyond* (ed. Jan Felix Gaertner; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 173–192. Fantham concludes instructively: "the issue is not one of sincerity, but one of effective persuasion and a double audience" (192).

18 *Non inueniebam exemplum eius qui consolatus suos esset, cum ipse ab illis comploraretur*. The meaning of *suos* ("his own") conceivably extends beyond Helvia and Seneca's family. Suetonius, *Cal.* 53.2 records that Seneca had gained great popularity in Rome during Caligula's emperorship on account of his rhetorical prowess.

19 See further: Amanda Wilcox, "Exemplary Grief: Gender and Virtue in Seneca's Consolations to Women," *Helios* 33.1 (2006) 73–100.

elimination of grief: "I have decided to conquer (*vincere*) your grief, not to circumvent (*circumscribere*) it" (4.1).

At this point, Helvia recedes from view and Seneca engages in a more generalised discussion about exile. In the process, he incorporates himself within a philosophical tradition that rationalises exile as "a transferral of place" (*loci commutatio*, 6.1).[20] Although there are some disadvantages to exile, Seneca argues against a common objection, voiced through an interlocutor: "To be without a fatherland is unbearable" (*carere patria intolerabile est*, 6.2). This leads to a series of arguments which both rationalise and defy exile from one's fatherland.

Firstly, prior to this section, Seneca had appealed to the sufficiency of nature and the self for human flourishing. Instead of deriving happiness from great resources (*non magno apparatu*), every individual can make himself happy (*unusquisque facere se beatum potest*, 5.1) through nature. This is precisely what the sage manages to achieve; on Seneca's view, the sage "has always laboured … so that he might attain all joy from himself" (*laboravit … semper … ut a se omne gaudium peteret*, 5.2). The *eupatheiai* can be cultivated through reflection upon nature, proper anticipation of fortune (5.3–4), and internal self-reflection, regardless of where the sage finds himself.

Secondly, Seneca argues that exile is a form of migration. Movement (towards Rome and elsewhere) is a natural human inclination (6.6) and consistent with divine nature (6.8). People move around for diverse purposes; but Seneca argues that migration, whether involuntary or voluntary, is no different from exile. He asks rhetorically: "But what are all these migrations (*transportationes*) of peoples other than public exiles?" (7.6). For Seneca, neither change nor loss of homeland are hardships; instead, they are natural, and ought to be rationalised as such.

To lend greater weight to his argument, Seneca invokes mythical and historical figures. He argues that Rome was founded by Aeneas, an oppressed exile and refugee, who came to Italy out of necessity rather than volition (7.7). In other words, Rome was originally a place of exile, which blurs the distinction between exile and *patria*, and in the process, mitigates grievous feelings.

20 On this tradition with reference to Cicero, Ovid, Seneca, Dio Chrysostom and Boethius, see Jo-Marie Claassen, *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999). Other notable treatises include: Musonius Rufus, *That Exile Is Not an Evil*; and Plutarch and Favorinus' *On Exile*. Peter van Nuffelen, *De Migratione Abrahami* und die antike Exilliteratur," in *Abrahams Aufbruch: Philon von Alexandria, De Migratione Abrahami* (ed. Maren R. Niehoff and Reinhard Feldmeier; SAPERE 30; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017) 203–218, shows how Philo's *De migratione Abrahami* can also be accommodated within this tradition, *mutatis mutandis*.

Seneca also incorporates precepts from two Roman authorities, Varro and Marcus Brutus, to show that the Stoic cosmic city is accessible anywhere.[21] Seneca reasons that this makes for effective consolation for the exile: wherever he goes, "common nature and individual virtue" (*natura communis et propria virtus*) also follow because of the beneficence of nature, including its "divine spirit" (*divinus spiritus*, 8.3). Corsica, by being "within the world" (*intra mundum*, 8.5) is categorically not a place of exile. Concerning his own situation, he comments, "provided that I always have my mind (*animum*) directed on high … what does it matter on which land I tread (*quantum refert mea, quid calcem*)?" (8.10). This is Seneca's first major vision and narrative of cosmic consolation in the *Ad Helviam*.

Thirdly, Seneca provides further proof that exile can be a place of virtue through the *exemplum* of Marcellus. Seneca narrates how Brutus visited Marcellus when the latter was exiled but, contrary to expectation, found him "living most happily (*beatissime*)" (9.4). Indeed, when Brutus had to return to Rome without Marcellus (*sine illo*), it was as if Brutus was the one headed for exile (9.5). On hearing Brutus' report, the senate in Rome echo his position: they beg for Marcellus' return "so that *they* might not be exiles—if they should be without him (*sine illo*)" (9.6). As well as highlighting the possibility of cultivating virtue in exile, Seneca's rhetorical strategy in invoking Marcellus is deliberate: he endeavours to generate his own recall by identifying himself with Marcellus. Such co-identification is apparent in a section of *prosopopoeia* where Seneca even imagines how Marcellus would have exhorted (*adhortatus*) himself in exile (9.7–8).

Finally, as the Marcellus *exemplum* shows, rather than being idealised as the *patria par excellence*, Rome is more accurately a place of exile, thus turning the tables. *Ad Helviam* 10–13 functions as an indictment of contemporary Rome as the real place of exile, which defies the notion that Seneca is an exile in Corsica. Although the issue of poverty in exile is noted,[22] for Seneca, this is less harmful than "the madness of greed and luxury that is overturning

21 On the topos of "common fatherland" (κοινὴ πατρίς) as employed by writers of the Second Sophistic, see Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 133–180. Cicero, conversely, overlooks this topos: see Claassen, *Displaced Persons*, 84–85.

22 The extent of Seneca's wealth is well known. It was the primary accusation brought against Seneca by his detractors when he was dismissed as Nero's tutor (see Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.52), and accusations of hypocrisy have been levelled against Seneca by his past and present detractors. See, e.g., Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 25–27, who ultimately defends Seneca from such charges.

everything" (10.1) in Rome. In contradistinction to Marcellus, there are *exempla* of profligacy in Rome: Caligula and his dinner of ten million sesterces represents the zenith of Roman decadence (10.4); but it percolates down through the Roman elite. Seneca defies and condemns the elite custom of procuring luxury food items unnecessarily, believing that such comportment acts as a barrier to virtue: "if they should want to return to a sound mind, what need is there for so many manners of serving the stomach (*ventri*)?" (10.5).

This part of the *Ad Helviam*, therefore, challenges social *mores*.[23] The true exiles are the ones who fall victim to luxury in Rome, compared to the *sapiens* who is free to contemplate the cosmos—even in exile. The *exempla* in this section illustrate this dichotomy very effectively and allow Seneca both to rationalise and defy his exile.

3.2 *Transcending Exile* (Ad Helviam *14–20*)

Although Helvia goes unmentioned in the central sections of the *Ad Helviam*, in the final sections, Seneca's consolation is more specifically directed towards her. Throughout, she is characterised as a virtuous woman. In this vein, Seneca directs her towards other *exempla* of virtuous *matronae* who did not grieve the deaths of her sons (16.6–7). Thus, James Ker fittingly describes Seneca's rhetorical strategy here as "characterising the household as a secure relational space."[24] The secure household becomes a *locus* and image of consolation amid grief. Seneca features briefly and dramatically in the middle of this tableau. Envisaging his son playing and smiling, he is prompted to offer himself as a scapegoat (*piamentum*) for the family's suffering (18.6):

> In me omnis fatorum crudelitas lassata consistat; quidquid matri dolendum fuit, in me transierit, quidquid aviae, in me. Floreat reliqua in suo statu turba. Nihil de orbitate, nihil de condicione mea querar, fuerim tantum nihil amplius doliturae domus piamentum.
>
> May all the exhausting cruelty of the fates end with me; whatever my mother should have to suffer, may it carry over to me; whatever my ancestors to suffer, to me also. May my surviving tribe flourish in its present

23 Thus, Gareth Williams, "States of Exile, States of Mind: Paradox and Reversal in Seneca's *Consolatio ad Helviam Matrem*," in *Seeing Seneca Whole* (ed. Katharina Volk and Gareth Williams; Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 28; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 149, rightly comments that this section represents "an oblique commentary on the nature and limits of Roman imperial power."

24 James Ker, *The Deaths of Seneca* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) 97.

> state. I shall not complain at all about want or my condition: only may I be the scapegoat of a household so that it will suffer no more.

With these words, Seneca casts himself as a tragic hero.[25] He is vicariously (*in me*) prepared to suffer exile and more so that his family might not have to do so. He wishes that his exile might lead to an end to grief for his family, or to put it another way, that his grief might transcend theirs.

However much *pietas* this attitude may evince, Seneca realises that it will not fully console his mother. This, on some level, accounts for the climax of the *Ad Helviam*, which centres on him and in which he portrays himself blissfully transcending exile on a cosmic level. He assures his aggrieved mother that he is "happy and lively just as in the best of times" (20.1); his entire *animus* is "free from concern" (20.1) because of the philosophical reflection that he can undertake in exile. With lyrical prose, he narrates the journey and ascension of the *animus* through lands, seas, and the regions between heaven and earth. Finally, it reaches heaven, from where the mind—and Seneca—has a divine and cosmic perspective on space and time (20.2):

> Tum peragratis humilioribus ad summa perrumpit et pulcherrimo divinorum spectaculo fruitur, aeternitatis suae memor in omne quod fuit futurumque est vadit omnibus saeculis.
>
> Then, when the lower places have been traversed, it bursts into the upper ones, enjoying the most beautiful spectacle of divine matters. Remembering its immortality, it journeys into everything which has been and will come in all ages.

Consequently, the *Ad Helviam* concludes on a note of cosmic consolation.[26] Seneca's *animus* is free to roam the cosmos, which provides consolation for

25 Ker, *Deaths*, 99; Rita Degl' Innocenti Pierini, "'Ritratto di famiglia': Seneca e i suoi nella Consolatio ad Helviam," in *Gli annei: Una famiglia nella storia e nella cultura di Roma imperiale; Atti del convegno internazionale di Milano-Pavia, 2–6 Maggio 2000* (ed. Isabella Gualandri and Giancarlo Mazzoli; Como: New Press, 2003) 339–356.

26 This is well described by Mireille Armissen-Marchetti, "Sénèque et l'appropriation du temps," *Latomus* 54.3 (1995) 558: "c'est une disposition naturelle et qui honore l'esprit humain—disposition qui lui est commune avec les dieux—que de se plaire à parcourir par la mémoire et par l'imagination l'espace et le temps." The *Ad Marciam*—probably written pre-exile—offers a lyrical cosmic vantage point from the perspective of Marcia's deceased father, Cordus (*Marc.* 26.3–7). As intimated above, the *Ad Polybium* has no such hopeful cosmic outlook; Seneca is, in fact, unable to console: "I have written these things, as best as I could, with a mind (*animo*) which has been dulled and is now worn out

his mother, and by becoming a quasi-divine sage, grief is eliminated by being transcended. Faced with his own exile, Seneca rationalises exile from logical and historical perspectives, and defies the conceit that Rome is the seat of virtue. There are opportunities afforded by exile to roam a borderless cosmos, which transcends exile and grief.

4 Philippians 3

Having seen how consolation can function in a similar and roughly contemporaneous context, we are now better placed to return to Phil 3 and to assess what consolatory elements are operating in this text, recognising both similarities and differences.

4.1 *Consolatory Elements in Phil 3:1–14?*

Although our principal focus will be Phil 3:15–21, we should briefly consider the narrative arc of the chapter, including Phil 3:1–14. The shift from 3:14, where Paul concludes a section predominantly in the first person singular in testament style, to 3:15, where Paul motions again towards the Philippians—"let *us* consider" (φρονῶμεν) is marked. In view of this shift from the personal to the collective, I contend that Phil 3:1–14 focuses more on moral progress than consolation. Nevertheless, there are at least two broad consolatory themes in this section.

Firstly, Paul employs the metaphor of gains and losses in Phil 3:7–8. Although financial hardship was an appropriate reason for consolation in antiquity,[27] the apostle seeks no sympathy for any loss of property, credentials, or status. Instead, in apprehending the surpassing nature (τὸ ὑπερέχον) that comes through knowledge of Christ (3:8), Paul receives divine hyper-consolation[28] for anything which could be termed a loss.[29] Like Seneca rationalising his exile,

through lengthy inactivity" (*Polyb*. 18.9). See, further, Ker, *Deaths*, 103; Liz Gloyn, "Show Me the Way to Go Home: A Reconsideration of Seneca's 'De Consolatione ad Polybium,'" *AJPh* 135.3 (2014) 471–475.

27 See Cicero, *Tusc.* 3.34.81: *paupertas*, *servitutis*, *debilitas* are all mentioned.

28 Rightly: Markus N.A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC 11; London: Black, 1997) 194: "For Paul, Christ is not a consolation prize or a crutch for one who could not hold his own in his former way of life." My language of divine hyper-consolation derives from ὑπερέχω.

29 Some commentators have argued for a loss or abandonment of Paul's Jewish ethnicity. While there is, to be sure, a re-evaluation based on knowing Christ, this is not an indictment of halakhic practice. See, e.g., Matthew V. Novenson, "Did Paul Abandon either Judaism or Monotheism?," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Saint Paul*

Paul rationalises how knowledge of Christ has become his all-encompassing consideration in an appropriation of the Stoic notion of the *summum bonum* ("the utmost good").[30] Having grasped this, the apostle then describes how he seeks to make progress towards that end (3:10–14).

Secondly, Paul explicitly mentions "participation in sufferings" (κοινωνίαν παθημάτων) of Christ (3:10). This, however, is part of his own apostolic trajectory, in anticipation for the resurrection of the dead[31] that he is exemplifying for the Philippians, rather than consolation. To reach the end goal, viz. resurrection from the dead, the apostle reasons that he should continue and persevere in a race towards Christ. Christ has grasped Paul; but Paul has not perfectly grasped Christ—further progress is still required, which includes participation in suffering. Paul realises that his knowledge of Christ is imperfect: "Not that … I have already attained perfection (τετελείωμαι)" (3:12). This emboldens him to continue in his pursuit. So, while containing some consolatory elements,[32] Phil 3:1–14 is more concerned with the moral progress necessary to attain the ultimate consolation: the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (3:14). At this point in Phil 3, Engberg-Pedersen is right to say that the apostle is developing "a *logic of the call*."[33] This section is focused on Paul and, like the exile Marcellus in the *Ad Helviam*, he functions as an *exemplum* for imitation in hardship. Paul strives to make progress in preparation for this call.[34]

(ed. Bruce W. Longenecker; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 239–259; William S. Campbell, "'I Rate All Things as Loss': Paul's Puzzling Accounting System; Judaism as Loss or the Re-evaluation of All Things in Christ?," in *Unity and Diversity in Christ: Interpreting Paul in Context; Collected Essays* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013) 203–223.

30 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "On Comparison: The Stoic Theory of Value in Paul's Theology and Ethics in Philippians," in *Der Philipperbrief des Paulus in der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (ed. Jörg Frey and Benjamin Schliesser; WUNT 353; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015) 297.

31 Note the similarity between Phil 3:11, "if somehow" (εἴ πως), and 1 Cor 9:27, "lest somehow" (μή πως), regarding the mystical aspect of attaining resurrection status and the shared language of the "prize" (Phil 3:14; 1 Cor 9:24).

32 Holloway, *Philippians*, 145, sees one overall consolatory argument in Phil 3:1–4:1: that of suffering leading to "knowledge of Christ"; cf. Fredrick W. Danker, "Consolation in 2 Cor. 5.1–10," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 39 (1968) 555, on Phil 3: "The condition is that the apostle accepts the share of suffering that falls to his lot. This is a consolation both to the apostle and to the Philippians, who are not to be distressed by Paul's suffering." These sufferings, however, are part of the greater project of moral progress in these verses.

33 Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 94 (emphasis his).

34 Notably, in reflecting on resurrection from the dead, Paul does not desert his Pharisaic roots but reflects thinking in keeping with apocalyptic Judaism. See Holloway, *Philippians*,

4.2 *Phil 3:15–19: Adversity Highlighted and Defied*

At Phil 3:15, the Philippians come into focus and opposition resurfaces. This prepares the ground for Paul's consolation to himself and the Christ-believing community. Recalling how Seneca used Aeneas and Marcellus as *exempla*, it can be observed that Paul uses a similar strategy. Having offered himself and other apostles—notably Timothy (2:19–23) and Epaphroditus (2:25–30)—as positive *exempla* for imitation (3:17), Paul turns to some negative *exempla*: certain "enemies of the cross of Christ" (3:18). An outpouring of emotion follows as the threat posed by these enemies is intensified. Elsewhere, Paul testifies to degrees of grief. The Philippians' being reunited with Epaphroditus will render Paul "less aggrieved" (ἀλυπότερος, 2:28). Here, concerning renewed opposition, Paul weeps (κλαίων)[35] and his prose becomes more halted which is symptomatic of his distress. Syntactically, we might expect something in closer proximity to qualify the phrase "for many walk around" (πολλοὶ … περιπατοῦσιν, 3:18); but this is delayed until these enemies are parenthetically described.

Paul goes on to describe the destination and attitude of these enemies: "their (ὧν) end is destruction, their (ὧν) god is the stomach" (Phil 3:19).[36] This construction mirrors the beginning of Rom 9, where Paul expresses "great grief (λύπη)" and "unceasing anguish (ὀδύνη)" (9:2) concerning Israel's rejection or, at least, stumbling over Christ. For Paul, this is particularly distressing given the privileges belonging to ethnic Israel: "theirs (ὧν) the adoption … theirs (ὧν) the forefathers" (9:4–5). The situations are not identical: Paul is concerned with ethnic Israel in Romans in contrast to Judaizing opponents in Philippians; but there is a similar context of grief.

Here, it should also be recalled that earlier in the letter, Paul had used civic language in exhorting the Philippians: "live worthily as citizens (πολιτεύεσθε) of the gospel of Christ" (1:27); and had comforted them amid opposition, "not being alarmed in any way by those who oppose you (ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων)" (1:28).[37] Philippi was a Roman colony which meant that Roman citizenship was accordingly conferred. Yet, as predominantly lower and middle class in

157 n. 9. On the goal of moral progress, Philo, *Migr*. 133–134 offers a particularly illuminating parallel, exemplified by Abraham: "Or are these not the crowns and prizes (ἆθλα): not to fail in the goal of our labours, but to attain the limits of wisdom which are hard to attain (μὴ ἀτυχῆσαι τοῦ τέλους τῶν πονηθέντων, ἀλλ᾽ ἐφικέσθαι τῶν δυσεφίκτων φρονήσεως περάτων)?"

35 On Paul's tears, see Eve-Marie Becker, *Der Philipperbrief des Paulus: Vorarbeiten zu einem Kommentar* (NET 29; Tübingen: Narr Francke, 2020) 283–297.

36 Note, however, Collman, "Beware the Dogs!," 119: "There is a strong possibility that Paul is using κοιλία and αἰσχύνη euphemistically to refer to his opponents' circumcised genitals."

37 In line with Vollenweider, "Rivals, Opponents, Enemies," 297, 300, I believe that this is a different and distinctly *imperial* opposition from the Judaizing opponents in Phil 3.

status, it can be surmised that little protection would have been afforded the Philippians, who as Christ-believers, were refusing to participate in the imperial cult.[38] This accounts for some of the Philippians' adversity for which they, too, needed consolation.

Having rationalised suffering as concomitant with knowing Christ (Phil 3:10), in Phil 3:15–19, Paul both recognises and defies present sources of adversity. This basic pattern allows for comparison with Seneca's *Ad Helviam*, even if the circumstances are rather different. In Phil 3:19, Paul's weeping is on account of those who thwart the eschatological message of the cross of Christ for Paul's mission to the nations.[39] The aggrieved apostle considers the teleology of the enemies: instead of progressing to know Christ, "their end is destruction (ἀπώλεια)" (3:19). Paul had delivered a similar judgement concerning those who had opposed the Philippians: "this is proof of their destruction (ἀπωλείας)" (1:28).[40] In both judgements, Paul employs apocalyptic discourse that represents a major difference from Seneca. As he weeps in Phil 3:19, Paul is closer to the weeping seer in 1 En. 95 who pronounces woes upon the unrighteous who afflict the faithful[41] than a moral philosopher. This is because the distinction between insider and outsider is far greater for Paul in keeping with his apocalyptic outlook than it was for the moral philosophers.

38 Eva Ebel, "'Unser πολίτευμα aber ist in den Himmeln' (Phil 3.20): Ein attraktives Angebot für viele Bewohnerinnen und Bewohner der römischen Kolonie Philippi," in Frey and Schliesser, *Philipperbrief*, 167. Ebel argues that Paul inveighs against the pride ("Stolz") of deriving too much comfort from this status. Taking Paul's Roman citizenship at face value, she believes that Paul, like Christ, renounces his status in favour of citizenship in heaven—an attitude which the Philippians should imitate. While aspects of this reading have merit, see below for a consolatory reading of Phil 3:20 that does not depend on Paul's Roman citizenship.

39 Holloway, *Philippians*, 178, judiciously describes the enemies as those who do not "embrace his [Paul's] apocalyptic theory of suffering"; cf. Petra von Gemünden, "Der 'Affekt' der Freude im Philipperbrief und seiner Umwelt," in Frey and Schliesser, *Philipperbrief*, 251, on Phil 3 as "Fremdinstruktion zur Freude angesichts des Leids" (unfamiliar teaching on joy in the face of suffering) in opposition to the opponents.

40 I agree with Kathy Ehrensperger, "The Politeuma in the Heavens and the Construction of Collective Identity in Philippians," *JJMJS* 6 (2019) 25, that ἀπώλεια is used by Paul "only for non-Jews outside of the Christ-movement"; but I maintain that the instances in Phil 1:28 and 3:19 refer to two distinct, pagan groups: imperial opposition and Judaizing gentiles, respectively.

41 See further: Angela Standhartinger, "Apocalyptic Thought in Philippians," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Tradition and the Shaping of New Testament Thought* (ed. Benjamin E. Reynolds and Loren T. Stuckenbruck; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017) 237. Here, also, Standhartinger overlooks the consolatory aspect of apocalyptic prophecy for those who are within the believing community.

At the end of 3:19, we encounter the delayed phrase in apposition to πολλοὶ … περιπατοῦσιν: "many walk around … *who consider earthly things* (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες)." Paul's verdict is that these enemies are located merely on an earthly, horizontal plane.[42] Instead, in 3:15, these enemies "consider (φρονεῖτε) [matters] differently" because they do not act in conformity to revelation. We can relate the earthly attitude of the enemies to those whom Seneca vituperates in Rome, particularly regarding luxury and the body. These indictments serve as assurances for Seneca and Paul amid their affliction that they are on a virtuous path. Paul, however, goes further than Seneca by arguing that without revelation and repentance, those serving the body will be destroyed. This attitude is further attested within the Jewish apocalyptic tradition. For example, the angel reveals to Ezra that for those who did not follow Moses or the prophets "there shall not be grief at their destruction, so much as joy over those to whom salvation is assured" (4 Ezra 7:131 NRSV).[43] Therefore, those who aggrieve Paul and threaten the lives of the Christ followers in Philippi are defied and judged. This revelation forms part of Paul's defiant consolatory strategy for himself and Christ-believers in Philippi, paving the way for the climax to his narrative in Phil 3:20–21.

4.3 *Phil 3:20–21: Adversity Transcended*

We recall that at the end of the *Ad Helviam*, through a cosmic perspective upon his exile, Seneca sought to console his mother that by being away from nefarious practices in Rome, his mind was free to transcend the apparent disadvantage of his exile. There is a similar progression in these final verses of Phil 3. Having recognised and defied various sources of adversity (3:15–19), Paul transcends them through a consolatory climax about presently possessing citizenship in heaven. This will come in full at the *parousia* of Christ in addition to permanent transformation (3:20–21).

42 The language of consideration (φρονήσις) appears frequently in Philippians, notably in Phil 2 in directing the community to mutual love and unity of mind (2:2), before introducing the example of Christ, who incarnates φρονήσις (2:5). Along with other linguistic resonances between Phil 2 and 3, this repeated language hints at a unified letter. See further below about the place of φρονήσις in Stoic civic discourse.

43 Although not an apocalyptic text, the execution of Flaccus—who had been chiefly responsible for the pogrom against Jews in Alexandria—in Philo, *Flacc.* 191 merits mention here: "That Flaccus suffered such things was undeniable proof (πίστις) that the race of Judeans had not been deprived (μὴ ἀπεστερῆσθαι) of the aid of God." For *In Flaccum* as *Trostschrift*, see Pieter Willem van der Horst, *Philo's Flaccus the First Pogrom: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series 2; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 2.

Although "citizenship" is a fitting translation for πολίτευμα, other possibilities for the semantic range of the word should be considered. Peter Oakes has drawn attention to the civic and municipal function of the πολίτευμα. He argues for its meaning being closer to "the governing institution."[44] While Oakes notes that πολίτευμα was an important notion for ethnic Jews living in the Diaspora—such as the ones at Herakleopolis—he argues for "taking *politeuma* in broader terms of governing institutions rather than specifically those of an ethnic community in a city."[45]

Conversely, Kathy Ehrensperger maintains that πολίτευμα is a topos drawn from the struggle of ethnic Jewish Diaspora communities to belong in the Roman Empire. For Ehrensperger, πολίτευμα connotes "a familiar Jewish affirmation of belonging under imperial domination."[46] Her argument runs along ethnic lines: on account of their suffering for belonging to the Christ-movement (chiefly in Phil 1:28–29), the gentile Philippians are now added to the Jewish Diaspora network, identified by Israel's deity. The ethnic borders in accessing heavenly πολίτευμα are traversed by belonging to Christ.

Paul, himself an ethnic Jew, presents this narrative about heavenly πολίτευμα to the gentile Philippians and expresses it as shared consolation in language that resonates to them. Neither Oakes nor Ehrensperger conceive of Phil 3:20 as consolation in keeping with ancient philosophical practices. Both, however, mention a passage of Philo, *Opif.* 143, which refers to "those inscribed in the greatest and most perfect πολίτευμα" (τῷ μεγίστῳ καὶ τελειοτάτῳ πολιτεύματι ἐγγραφέντες). Philo has been describing the founder of humanity (ἀρχηγέτης) as a cosmopolitan; but, here, he refers to the citizens who were "before man" (πρὸ ἀνθρώπου). He describes them in Stoic materialist terms (*Opif.* 144, LCL):

44 Peter Oakes, "The Christians and their *Politeuma* in Heaven: Philippians 3:20 and the Herakleopolis Papyri," in *In the Crucible of Empire: The Impact of Roman Citizenship upon Greeks, Jews and Christians* (ed. Katell Berthelot and Jonathan Price; Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 21; Leuven: Peeters, 2019) 161. See also Standhartinger, "Apocalyptic Thought in Philippians," 239 nn. 38–39, for extensive bibliography on the meaning of πολίτευμα.

45 Oakes, "*Politeuma* in Heaven," 163. In terms of non-Jewish documents citing *politeuma*, he notes P.Tebt. 1.32 referring to Cretans in Arsionites (ibid., 152). See also Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 234, for Heraclitus in *Letter of Aphidamas* 5 and his belief that after death he would become a citizen of heaven among the gods.

46 Ehrensperger, "Politeuma in the Heavens," 44. She derives this principally from Philo, *Spec.* 4.112 regarding the path of self-mastery regarding dietary requirements leading "towards heaven" (εἰς οὐρανὸν). See also Philo, *Conf.* 78 regarding wise travellers, like Abraham and Moses, belonging to "the heavenly region in which they are citizens (ἐν ᾧ πολιτεύονται)."

> Who should these be but spiritual and divine natures (φύσεις), some incorporeal and visible to mind only, some not without bodies, such as are the stars?

This passage of Philo, then, refers to the founder of humanity living within a Stoic cosmological framework; ethnic and civic considerations are not so patent here. We can and should also approach Phil 3:20 from this perspective.[47] In his ground-breaking *The Stoic Idea of the City*, Malcolm Schofield cites the first century BCE Epicurean philosopher, Philodemus, who summarises the third century BCE Stoic philosopher Chrysippus' position about access to the cosmos thus (*On Piety*, 7.12–8.4):

> [T]he universe of the wise (φρονίμ[ω]ν) is one, citizenship of it being held by gods and men together (συνπολειτευ[ό]μενον θεοῖς καὶ ἀνθρώποις).[48]

Like Seneca at the close of the *Ad Helviam*, but in contrast to the enemies whose mindset is earthly, Paul and the Philippians can possess heavenly πολίτευμα. This represents a source of present consolation and future hope for the Philippians. Writing with relation to Dio Chrysostom's 36th *Oration* to the defeated Borystheneans, Schofield comments that "the dispossessed prefer the prospect of heaven to political thought."[49] A similar dynamic is at work in Phil 3:20. Although the Pauline *hapaxes* of "saviour" (σωτήρ) and πολίτευμα highlight earthly and civic concerns, what matters presently is the heavenly location of both saviour and citizenship. George van Kooten, therefore, rightly sees Schofield's findings about the Stoics as transferrable to Paul here: "Paul, like the Stoics, speaks about a present differentiation between an earthly and a heavenly city."[50]

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47 Here I depart from Ehrensperger, "Politeuma in the Heavens," 45, who argues that "Greek and Roman philosophical discourses of belonging … are secondary analogies and echoes." Instead, they conceivably form part of Paul's Jewish *and* Hellenistic matrix.

48 Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 73. Note also Clement of Alexandria's comments on the Stoic city, *Strom.* 4.26: "The Stoics say that the universe (οὐρανός) is in the proper sense a city" (trans. Schofield, op. cit., 61).

49 Schofield, *Stoic Idea*, 63.

50 George H. Van Kooten, "Philosophical Criticism of Genealogical Claims and Stoic Depoliticization of Politics: Greco-Roman Strategies in Paul's Allegorical Interpretation of Hagar and Sarah (Gal 4:21–31)," in *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites: Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Perspectives on Kinship with Abraham* (ed. Martin Goodman et al.; Themes in Biblical Narrative 13; Leiden: Brill, 2010) 381. This dynamic applies to "the Jerusalem above" (ἡ … ἄνω Ἰερουσαλήμ) at Gal 4:26 as well as Phil 3:20. In a more straightforwardly

Consequently, the primary emphasis is on the awaited cosmic transformation that comes through the saviour Lord Jesus Christ, who resides in the heavens. Despite the similar cosmic perspective to the end of the *Ad Helviam* and the texts cited above, eager expectation of a heavenly vice-regent, Christ, represents a departure from Stoic notions. The apostle, therefore, narrates a vision of a final and climactic consolatory event: the transformation which comes through Christ[51] (Phil 3:21):

> ὃς μετασχηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν σύμμορφον τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ δύνασθαι αὐτὸν καὶ ὑποτάξαι αὑτῷ τὰ πάντα.
>
> [Christ], who will transform the body of our destitution, making it conformable to the body of his glory, on account of his agency by which he is able to subject all things to himself.

This represents the eschatological completion of the inaugurated transformation of "shining as stars in the universe" (Phil 2:15) amid earthly opposition. Paul also builds on the lengthier description of markedly pneumatic transformation in 1 Cor 15; but, here, describes a fully transformed physical body of glory, not merely an image.[52] As in the Christ-encomium in Phil 2:8, where Christ underwent voluntary destitution (ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν), destitution (ταπείνωσις) was a condition for which consolation was appropriate. A transformed body of glory and defeat of earthly and cosmic powers are the ultimate symbols of heavenly citizenship. Paul consoles himself and the Philippians in the face of present earthly opposition with these visions. Therefore, Phil 3 concludes with consolation in the form of heavenly πολίτευμα: Christ will come to transform wise believers *fully* in and through the *pneuma*.

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depoliticised and consolatory context, cf. 2 Cor 5:1: "we have an edification from God, an eternal home not made from human hands in the heavens (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς)."

51 In the case of the gentile Philippians, not wrought through circumcision or other means; cf. 2 Cor 11:13–15 regarding the pseudo-transformation of pseudo-apostles: μετασχηματίζω occurs in all three verses.

52 See Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 236, for the distinction between mere image (εἰκών) and full conformity (σύμμορφον).

5 Conclusion: Comparing Paul's and Seneca's Narratives of Consolation

We can, therefore, see a continuation of the consolatory themes from earlier in the letter that culminates in Paul's narrative of heavenly πολίτευμα. This is logical given the affliction facing Paul, on account of the potential threat from Judaizing opponents in Philippi, and the Philippians, in belonging to the Christ-movement amid opposition. To analyse Paul's consolatory strategy in Phil 3, we have appealed to comparative material, primarily from Seneca's *Ad Helviam*. Although Seneca and Paul write for different audiences and purposes, the situations in the two texts are similar: both write from their own restricted circumstances to beloved people. In both cases, sources of adversity are acknowledged and rationalised in some way. Then, they are defied: that both writers use rhetorical comparisons and *exempla* in this process to problematise earthly concerns is highly significant. Finally, any grief is transcended through cosmic notions. At this point, there is considerable overlap, particularly regarding philosophical notions of a common fatherland and a heavenly city. There are, however, differences stemming from Paul's apocalyptic Jewish context and his mission to the nations concerning Christ. Paul believes that Christ enables access to heavenly πολίτευμα, as the agent of transformation through the *pneuma*.

By reading the end of Phil 3 as consolation, we account for the apostle's sudden grief concerning certain opponents who threaten his mission to gentiles in Philippi, who are themselves facing opposition for belonging to Christ. Having engaged in autobiographical reflection that adds to the central theme of exemplarity of the letter, Paul consoles himself and the Philippians with a narrative about possessing citizenship in heaven and pneumatic future transformation through Christ. Although Phil 3:15–21 should also be considered in terms of ethnic and Jewish apocalyptic notions, Stoic cosmological notions in exile, typified by Seneca's *Ad Helviam*, provide relevant comparative material to explain Paul's chosen narrative of a heavenly πολίτευμα, whose purpose is to console.