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What Does it Mean to Perish?
A Semantic Analysis of Ἀπόλλυμι in Paul's Letters to the Corinthians

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Introduction

What does it mean to perish? Growing up in a Dutch pietistic milieu, many sermons in church emphasized two ways of life, each leading to a distinct destiny: heaven or hell. On Sundays, the congregation was earnestly warned to live a pious life to avoid perishing in hell. As I progressed in my theological studies and eventually began preaching myself, it became an urgent matter to develop my own view on hell: how am I to relate to this topic, and how am I possibly to preach on it? Considering this personal journey and recent reignition of the discussion on hell in public Dutch theological discourse,[1] I have been prompted to investigate Paul's understanding of hell more closely. It struck me that Paul is often appealed to in defense of divergent views on hell, yet the standard New Testament (NT) terminology for hell (γέεννα or ᾅδης) is entirely absent in his letters. Therefore, if Paul can be said to address this issue at all, previous scholarship has reconstructed his view from diverse ways he speaks about judgment and destruction in his letters.

Problematic Approaches to Ἀπόλλυμι

Paul uses a range of expressions when speaking about eschatological judgment, such as death, vengeance, wrath, punishment, and destruction. The latter is most frequently expressed by the Greek word ἀπόλλυμι.[2] A recurring methodological issue in studies on Paul's 'destruction language' (ἀπόλλυμι) is the tendency to let modern systematic frameworks shape its interpretation. In other words, interpreters have often domesticated or oversimplified Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι to align it with a particular theological or dogmatic view of the afterlife, whether it be eternal punishment, annihilationism, or universalism. For example, Douglas Moo contends that Paul likely assumed eternal punishment as part of his eschatology. He states that "the words Paul uses to speak of hell [including ἀπόλλυμι] make a useful starting point to determine his view on this matter."[3] One can see how this methodological approach risks circularity: by presupposing a developed concept of 'hell' and then using Paul's judgment vocabulary to fill that category, he effectively imports his own theological understanding of 'hell' into Pauline terms that might not themselves bear such semantic load. A similar case is made by Robert Morey who rejects

[1] See the essay of Arnold Huijgen, *Waarom de wereld een hel nodig heeft* (Utrecht: Kok Boekencentrum, 2023) or the popular book of Reinier Sonneveld, *Het einde van de hel: Waarom niemand wordt afgeschreven* (Utrecht: Kok Boekencentrum, 2025).

[2] Other Greek terms in the NT that denote 'destruction' are ὄλεθρος, φθορά, διαφθορά, καταστροφή and σύντριμμα.

[3] Douglas J. Moo, "Paul on Hell," in *Hell under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 92

an annihilationist interpretation of 'hell', asserting that rabbinic usage and lexical evidence indicate that ἀπόλλυμι never means "to pass into non-existence."[4] Yet his claim is scarcely substantiated, relying on a single lexicon definition and a selective citation of NT texts.[5] Likewise, Reinier Sonneveld argues for a universalistic position by translating ἀπόλλυμι as 'to be ruined' [Dutch: 'kapotgaan'] and appealing to Jesus' parable of old wine in new wineskins: the wineskin burst and is ruined, but not completely lost.[6] Ruben van Wingerden critiques Sonneveld's argument, contending that he unjustifiably narrows the meaning of ἀπόλλυμι to support a universalist interpretation of the afterlife.[7]

A closely related problematic approach arises when a single passage or sense of ἀπόλλυμι is treated as a hermeneutical key that governs all other occurrences. Paul Williamson contends that "all Paul's statements about the fate of the wicked should be understood in light of his most detailed description in 2 Thess 1:6-10."[8] This approach risk flattening the diverse context, and rhetorical aims that shape Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι across his letters.[9] Another example is David Garland, who suggests that "Paul *always* uses the verb ἀπόλλυμι to refer to eternal and final destruction."[10] Such an approach, as will be discussed in the present study, may lead to a questionable exegesis in certain contexts in the Corinthian correspondence. This thesis demonstrates that the verb ἀπόλλυμι proves to be a key concept for understanding Paul's eschatological outlook and calls for renewed critical examination.

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[4] Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 90.

[5] Morey cites the definition of Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 36: "ἀπόλλυμι means to be delivered up to eternal misery." Moreover, he draws primarily on occurrences of ἀπόλλυμι in the Gospels to underpin his argument, despite the verb distribution across the whole NT corpus (cf. Rom 2:12; 2 Thess 2:10; Heb 1:11; Jas 4:12; 2 Pet 3:9; Jude 5; Rev 18:14).

[6] Sonneveld, *Het einde van de hel*, 235-6.

[7] Ruben van Wingerden, "Toch niet het einde van de hel?" June 17, 2025, https://www.theologie.nl/toch-niet-het-einde-van-de-hel/.

[8] Paul R. Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on Ultimate Questions*, NSBT 44 (London: Apollos, 2018), 152.

[9] Of less relevance for this study, Williamson's approach is further complicated by the disputed Pauline authorship of *2 Thessalonians*. For an overview of the discussion, see Paul Foster, "Who Wrote 2 Thessalonians? A Fresh Look at an Old Problem," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 35, no. 2 (2012): 154-9.

[10] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), chap. VI.B, Kobo eBook. *Italics* by author. See for authors with a similar approach C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 196; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the Frist Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 149; Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 387-8; and Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, vol. 2.2, EKK (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1991), 265.

A Different Approach to Ἀπόλλυμι

In previous scholarship, the danger of reading Paul's language through dogmatic frameworks and treating single texts or meanings as interpretive keys has already been noted. James Barr has cautioned against the methodological error of importing an entire theological construct into individual linguistic occurrences.[11] E. Earle Ellis points to the problem that several interpreters reject a certain view on the afterlife not on lexical or exegetical grounds, but because their prior theological commitments make such a reading impossible for them.[12] Also, David Kuck argues that Pauline judgment texts are often interpreted through the lens of other theological concepts, such as 'justification by faith', which is highly problematic as "they all in some measure fail to give adequate attention to the specific function of the judgment statements in Paul's argument addressed to the particular situation."[13] This study suggest that research on Paul's judgment statements, such as ἀπόλλυμι, should attend closely to its particular contexts and avoid being governed by prior dogmatic conceptions of the afterlife.

The approach of this study is, therefore, to examine Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι in its specific rhetorical and situational context addressed in his letters to the Corinthian church.[14] In the undisputed Pauline letters, ἀπόλλυμι occurs eleven times, nine of which appear in the Paul's letters to the community in Corinth.[15] This observation invites the question of what circumstances in this community prompted Paul's relatively frequent use of destruction language. Moreover, in the Corinthian correspondence Paul uses the participial form of the verb (οἱ ἀπολλυμένοι) to denote a specific group of people. This research challenges prevailing interpretations of the ἀπολλυμένοι by providing an alternative perspective from those proposed in prior scholarship (see §3.4.1). Rather than approaching ἀπόλλυμι through a dogmatic lens, this study uses semantic domain analysis: it examens the semantic domains of the verb in Greek literature of Paul's time to clarify both his use of the lexeme and its likely perception among his Corinthian

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[11] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 217-19.

[12] Earle Ellis, "New Testament Teaching on Hell," in *'The reader must understand': Eschatology in Bible and Theology*, ed. K.E. Brouwer and M.W. Elliot (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 214.

[13] David W. Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict: Paul's Use of Apocalyptic Judgment Language in 1 Corinthians 3:5-4:5*, NovTSup 66 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 4-5.

[14] In this study, the exact relationship between *1* and *2 Corinthians* is not further discussed. See for a discussion Margaret M. Mitchell, "Paul's Letters to Corinth: The Interpretive Intertwining of Literary and Historical Reconstruction," in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen, HTS 53 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 307-38.

[15] The remaining two occurrences are found in Paul's letter to the Romans (Rom. 2.12; 14.15). Since Paul does not use the noun ἀπώλεια in the Corinthian correspondence, it is not included in the analysis of the present study.

addressees. In other words, it will provide the range of meanings ἀπόλλυμι could evoke within its historical linguistic context, which may also be reflected in Paul's usage. As Kuck observers, "The Jewish background of NT judgment language is incontrovertible. Yet if we are to explore how Christian teachings on judgment were received by pagan converts, we need to see what sorts of ideas about judgment were familiar to them, and we must reckon with the possibility that Paul's knowledge of his readers' way of thinking influenced his use of judgement language."[16] We assume that both Paul and his recipients were culturally shaped by the Greco-Roman world. As will be discussed, even Jewish eschatology in Paul's time cannot be understood apart from its Hellenistic environment (see §2.2).

Research Outline

The objective of this study is twofold: first, to conduct a semantic domain analysis of ἀπόλλυμι in Greek sources of Paul's time; and second, to assess how this analysis can provide more insight in Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι in his epistles to the Corinthian church. To this end, the central research question guiding this thesis is: "What did Paul mean by ἀπόλλυμι in his letters to the Corinthians in light of its use in contemporary Greek sources?" As discussed in chapter 2 (§2.1), 'contemporary' is defined here as referring to texts composed in the first century AD. To answer the central research question, the thesis unfolds in three chapters. Chapter 1 surveys scholarly discussions on the temporality, etiology, quality and finality of eschatological destruction, since these categories shape the interpretation of ἀπόλλυμι. Chapter 2 examines the influence of Greek (philosophical) discourse on Paul's eschatology, laying the foundation for the analysis of the Greek sources. It subsequently establishes four semantic domains of ἀπόλλυμι based on Greek texts from Philo, Josephus, Chrysostom, Plutarch and Epictetus. Chapter 3 identifies the underlying problem in the Corinthian church as the excessive blending of Christian life with pagan Greek practices and interprets the ἀπόλλυμι passages in the Corinthian correspondence against the backdrop of the four semantic domains. This thesis proceeds by placing the semantic domains of Greek discourse in dialogue with Pauline texts, generating interpretive findings that are ultimately evaluated in the conclusion against the scholarly discussions presented in chapter 1.

Overall, the aim of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of ἀπόλλυμι in Paul's letters to the Corinthians by comparing it to the Greek literature of his time. Within its limited scope, this thesis seeks to participate in the broader scholarly effort to reconstruct the

[16] Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict*, 96-7.

meaning of Paul's eschatological judgment language, and to foster further critical reflection on how NT language about destruction relates to doctrinal formulations of 'hell'.

Chapter 1

Eschatological Judgment in Paul

1.1 Introduction

As noted in the introduction, ἀπόλλυμι is approached by most scholars as an eschatological term characterized by a broad spectrum of interpretive and translational possibilities. Its meaning cannot be interpreted independently from Paul's broader eschatology. Indeed, one may argue that virtually every concept of Paul should be interpreted in light of his eschatology, since "eschatology functions like the frame for the spiderweb of Paul's theology; without the frame the web cannot maintain its integrity and collapses upon itself."[17] Any interpretation of ἀπόλλυμι therefore presupposes a position regarding the temporality, etiology, quality and finality of eschatological destruction. These categories are based on the following questions: Should we interpret eschatological destruction as a present reality or as a future event (temporality)? Is destruction executed as the consequence of enslavement to hostile (cosmic) powers, or as the result of divine judicial response to human sin (etiology)? How is destruction qualitatively conceived within Pauline eschatology, and what forms of loss does it include (quality)? And is this destruction irrevocable, or is it disciplinary and potentially restorative (finality)? As we will see, these questions are often interrelated.

The aim of this chapter is to construct a theoretical framework against which the findings of my study on ἀπόλλυμι can be evaluated to determine whether they correspond to established models or call them into question. The chapter proceeds by reviewing the different scholarly positions relevant to each of the aforementioned categories, examining the temporality (1.2), etiology (1.3), quality (1.4) and finality (1.5) of eschatological judgment in Paul. This integrated approach clarifies the framework within which ἀπόλλυμι is used and provides the necessary lens for interpreting its meaning in the Corinthian letters.

1.2 Temporality

Twentieth-century Pauline scholarship was largely concerned with the temporal dimensions of Paul's eschatology.[18] Early studies, often adopting a developmental model, proposed that Paul's

[17] Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 453. Campbell borrows the analogy of the spiderweb from Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Seabury, 1968), 140.

[18] For an overview on the recent history of Pauline eschatology, see Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory*, 9-55.

eschatology evolved from a straightforward future-oriented Jewish apocalyptic framework (as found in 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch) toward a more 'mature' theology with a nuanced awareness of present and future dimensions of God's actions.[19] Given the major difficulties associated with this theory, especially its dependence upon an evolutionary model in which ideas are assumed to develop progressively, contemporary scholarship has largely abandoned it. More recent studies emphasize that Paul's eschatology is characterized by a sustained tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet'. This dialectic runs consistently throughout the Pauline letters. Rather than being understood strictly as Paul's study (*logos*) of 'last things' (*eschaton*), Pauline eschatology is now commonly described as 'the overlap of the ages', 'the already – not yet', a perspective labeled as inaugurated eschatology.[20]

The two-age schema permeates Paul's letters. Because the distinction between the 'two ages' is not merely temporal but also spatial, Constantine Campbell refers to them as the 'two realms.'[21] Paul describes 'the old age' through expressions such as 'this age' (ὁ αιών οὗτος),[22] and 'the present evil age' (ὁ αιών ὁ ἐνεστώς πονηρός).[23] Martinus de Boer observes that references to 'this world' (τούτου κόσμος) may likewise denote 'the old age', illustrating his point with 1 Cor 3:18-19a: "Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become 'fools' so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight" (εἴ τις δοκεῖ σοφὸς εἶναι ἐν ὑμῖν ἐν **τῷ αἰῶνι** τούτῳ, μωρὸς γενέσθω, ἵνα γένηται σοφός. ἡ γὰρ σοφία **τοῦ κόσμου** τούτου μωρία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ἐστιν).[24] Paul depicts 'the old age' as ruled by evil forces, characterized by human enslavement, and defined by death.[25] By contrast, the inauguration of 'the new age' will bring significant change in governance "that

[19] Cf. Charles Harold Dodd, "The Mind of Paul: Change and Development," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 18, no. 1 (1934): 69-110; Charles Buck and Greer Taylor, *Saint Paul: A Study in the Development of His Thought* (New York: Scribner, 1969). See also the article of Richard Longenecker who reconstructed Paul's "early eschatology" based on 1 *Thessalonians*, Richard N. Longenecker, "The Nature of Paul's Early Eschatology," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 85-95.

[20] See for example, Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory*, 5 and James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 466.

[21] Campbell, 57-8.

[22] Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Cor 4:4.

[23] Gal 1:4.

[24] Martinus C. de Boer, *Paul, Theologian of God's Apocalypse: Essays on Paul and Apocalyptic* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 5. All Greek NT citations in this study follow NA28, unless otherwise noted. See Kurt Aland e.a., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th edition (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012). Emphasis by author.

[25] Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory*, 57.

sees to overthrow the evil forces of the 'old age' and liberate humanity from its captivity and death. 'The new age' is also a new realm ruled by Christ and marked by righteousness, life, and peace."[26] Although explicit references to 'the age to come'/'the new age' are relatively rare in Paul,[27] the notion of a coming age is, often implied whenever the present world is described as 'this age'.[28] Moreover, Paul frequently uses related concepts such as 'the kingdom of God',[29] 'eternal life',[30] and 'new creation',[31] all of which presuppose an eschatological transformation.[32] One should note that 'the new age' is a scholarly designation rather than Paul's own terminology.

Although scholars broadly agree that Paul's eschatology is structured by a two-age/two-realm schema, they remain divided over its origin and the timing of the inauguration of 'the new age'. The former is discussed later in this chapter. Some, as Campbell notes, maintain that 'the new age' remains entirely future and will be inaugurated at Christ's Parousia, rendering the present period one of eschatological waiting for the advent of the messianic age.[33] "Others maintain that 'the new age' has already come with the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit, and it coexists alongside 'the old'."[34] This perspective has become the dominant position in contemporary scholarship and is adopted in this study.[35] By grounding eschatology

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[26] Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory*, 57.

[27] Only a probable allusion in 1 Cor 10:11 (τῶν αἰώνων κατήντηκεν). De Boer, *Paul*, 5 also includes two passages from Ephesians (Eph 1:21 τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ μέλλοντι; 2:7 τοῖς αἰῶσιν τοῖς ἐπερχομένοις). The Pauline authorship of this epistle is, however, contested.

[28] Leander E. Keck, "Paul and Apocalyptic Theology," *Interpretation* 38, no. 3 (1984): 234.

[29] Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9, 10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; 1 Thess 2:12.

[30] Rom 2:7; 5:21; 6:22, 23; Gal 6:8.

[31] 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15.

[32] De Boer, *Paul*, 5-6.

[33] Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory*, 57. Campbell cites the work of Schweitzer as a representative of this position. I do not agree with Campbell since Schweitzer explicitly maintains, "that with the resurrection of Jesus the messianic period had actually already begun and that the resurrection of the dead in general was in progress" (*Mysticism of Paul*, 100). Moreover, Schweitzer argues that the resurrection inaugurated a decisive reversal of the natural order and unleashed the activity of supernatural powers (*Mysticism of Paul*, 98-9). Far from postponing the advent of the new age to the Parousia, Schweitzer consistently presents the resurrection itself as the event that sets the eschatological transformation in motion.

[34] Campbell, 57.

[35] Cf. Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993); N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013); Martinus C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5* (London: T&T Clark, 2019).

in the death and resurrection of Christ, Paul reshapes the temporal contours of eschatological expectation.[36] Eschatology is no longer confined to the future but extends into the present and even the past. As Michael Wolter observes:

> The specific distinction of Paul's eschatology can be recognized in how he interrelates firstly the *past*, with Christ's death and resurrection, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the conversion of the believers; secondly, the *present* situation of the Christian communities; and thirdly, the *future*, with the aforementioned expectations as parts of one single eschatological narrative.[37]

If Paul's eschatology spans the entire temporal spectrum, then our interpretation of the verb ἀπόλλυμι may require a correspondingly broad horizon. Rather than restricting the term to a future act of judgment, it must be considered within the interplay of past, present, and future realities that Paul understands as eschatologically charged. In a similar vein, given the two-age schema, we may wonder whether ἀπόλλυμι functions primarily as a category of 'the old age' or whether it also pertains to the realities of 'the new age'. Moreover, Wayne Meeks observes that this temporal duality evokes also a social duality, which is a characteristic for the 'apocalyptic universe': "the sons of light/the sons of darkness, the righteous/the unrighteous, the elect/the world."[38] It is therefore necessary to examine whether or not Paul uses the participle ἀπολλυμένοι to designate those belonging to 'the old age' and to demarcate boundaries between them and those belonging to the sphere of salvation (the σῳζομένοι).

1.3 Etiology

In discussing eschatological destruction in Paul, it is important to distinguish the question of etiology from that of agency. While Paul consistently affirms God as the ultimate and sovereign agent of eschatological judgment, we might consider a variety of causes by which destruction comes about in his thought. De Boer situates this diversity of etiological patterns within Jewish apocalyptic thought. The extent to which Paul's eschatology is rooted in Jewish apocalypticism

[36] Herein Paul clearly deviates from Jewish apocalyptic literature. As Richard Longenecker notes, "Paul's… starting point for all his Christian theology was not apocalypticism but functional Christology." (Longenecker, "The Nature of Paul's Early Eschatology," 93).

[37] Michael Wolter, "The Distinctiveness of Paul's Eschatology," in *Eschatology of the New Testament and Some Related Documents*, ed. Jan G. van der Watt (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 416.

[38] Wayne A. Meeks, "Social Functions of Apocalyptic Language in Pauline Christianity," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 689. Meeks also identifies the cosmic duality of heaven/earth.

remains contested (see §2.2). Nonetheless, it is widely recognized that Paul inherited, and variously adapted, certain Jewish apocalyptic motifs. De Boer develops this line of inquiry and consequently labels Paul's eschatology as 'apocalyptic eschatology'. Whilst one might object to this concept, building upon this concept, De Boer has constructed two distinct 'tracks' within Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. He proposes that the 'tracks' may function as heuristic models for interpreting the eschatological dynamics of the Pauline letters.[39]

In summary, the first cosmological-apocalyptic track, depicts the world as dominated by hostile spiritual powers that have usurped God's rule. There is a faithful remnant awaiting God's imminent intervention, in the final judgment, to overthrow the evil forces and inaugurate a new age of divine sovereignty. The second forensic-apocalyptic track, shifts the focus away from cosmic powers to human responsibility, viewing sin as the deliberate rejection of God. The final judgment is understood as God's evaluation of each person's response to the divine will. God will in the end reward those who have chosen the law, whereas punishment waits for those who have not.[40] Elements of both tracks frequently coexist or overlap in the ancient texts. After the destruction of the temple in AD 70, the forensic perspective became more popular and supplanted the cosmological-apocalyptic framework in some Jewish circles.[41]

De Boer's 'two-track proposal' has drawn substantial criticism. N. T. Wright argues that the diversity of apocalyptic literature resists reduction to a binary opposition between 'forensic' and 'cosmic' perspectives, suggesting that De Boer retrojects the mid-twentieth-century debate between Bultmann and Käsemann onto the ancient sources. In Wright's view, the shift toward a 'forensic' pattern after AD 70 reflects not a theological track but rather historical trauma after the catastrophic destruction of the temple.[42] Jörg Frey similarly maintains that these two forms of apocalyptic are not indigenous to the Jewish sources themselves but represent a retrospective projection of Pauline concerns shaped by the Bultmann-Käsemann controversy.[43] Although the

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[39] De Boer, *Paul,* 24.

[40] De Boer, 20-24. These two tracks are developed on the basis of the debate on the righteousness of God between Käsemann, who advocated a more "cosmological reading" of Paul, and Bultmann, who favored a more "anthropological interpretation." See Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, volume 1, trans. Kenrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1971) and Ernst Käsemann, "The 'Righteousness of God' in Paul," in *New Testament Questions of Today*, 168-82 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1969).

[41] De Boer, 30.

[42] N.T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 162-4.

[43] Jörg Frey, "Demythologizing Apocalyptic? On N.T. Wright's Paul, Apocalyptic Interpretation, and the Constraints of Construction," in *God and the Faithfulness of Paul: A Critical Examination of the Pauline Theology*

charge of anachronism is not entirely unfounded, De Boer explicitly grounds his two-track distinction in close analysis of Jewish sources.[44] The critiques of Wright and Frey highlight the need for caution, particularly against forcing apocalyptic texts into rigid 'either-or categories'. De Boer himself concedes that his model is a heuristic construct that necessarily simplifies textual complexity, reminding us that his model must be applied with methodological restraint.

For the purposes of this study, the distinction remains analytically useful insofar as it clarifies differing interpretive horizons for Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι. Read within a cosmological-apocalyptic framework, the term may be understood in relation to the defeat or nullification of the hostile powers that characterize 'the old age.' In such passages, ἀπόλλυμι may refer less to the destruction of human beings as such and more of deliverance from the oppressive forces that enslave them. Within a forensic-apocalyptic framework, by contrast, ἀπόλλυμι is more plausibly read as denoting divine judicial action in response to human sin, in which the focus falls on the fate of the individual subject rather than on the overthrow of impersonal powers. We will see that Paul draws on elements of both 'tracks' in the Corinthian correspondence.

1.4 Quality

At first glance, discussing the qualitative nature of eschatological destruction in Paul may seem to anticipate the central research question of this study. It is therefore necessary to clarify the methodological distinction at work. The primary aim of this study is to determine what Paul means by his use of ἀπόλλυμι in specific textual contexts. This section, by contrast, is concerned with identifying the forms of loss that are envisioned within Pauline eschatology more broadly. Its purpose is heuristic: to illustrate how flexible and context-dependent Paul's eschatological vocabulary can be, as will be exemplified by his varied use of 'death' (θάνατος). In this way, we explore the conceptual range within which Paul's destruction language could operate, thereby avoiding the reduction of ἀπόλλυμι to a rigid binary, such as total annihilation versus eternal punishment.

Given the scope of this chapter, the following discussion does not attempt an exhaustive survey of Pauline judgment language. Instead, it highlights representative eschatological motifs that illustrate the qualitative range of loss in Paul's letters. As Moo and Williamson observe, Paul uses a wide array of terms associated with eschatological loss, including death (θάνατος),

of N.T. Wright, ed. Christoph Heilig, J. Thomas Hewitt, and Michael F. Bird (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017), 508.

[44] De Boer, *Paul*, 37, and chapter 3 of *Defeat of Death*.

divine wrath (ὀργὴ), curse (ἀνάθεμα), trouble and distress (θλῖψις καὶ στενοχωρία), not inheriting the kingdom of God (βασιλείαν θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσουσιν), condemnation (all words with the root κρίν), perish/destroy/destruction (ἀπόλλυμι, ἀπώλεια, ὄλεθρος), and punishment (ἐκδίκησις).[45] The range and heterogeneity of this vocabulary indicate that Paul does not use a uniform expression when addressing eschatological loss. This diversity cautions against subsuming Paul's various concepts under a single, comprehensive conception of the afterlife. Rather, his letters employ a range of concepts that articulate distinct, though often overlapping judicial, experiential, relational, and ontological dimensions of 'negative' eschatological outcome. The following section illustrates this semantic diversity by examining Paul's use of θάνατος.

Throughout his letters, particularly in Romans,[46] Paul uses several conceptions of death. First, death denotes the cessation of human life, set in contrast to Christ's resurrection and the future resurrection at Christ's parousia (1 Cor 15:20-23). Second, Paul describes death as an existential, mental, or spiritual state of being, representing "the ultimate degree of alienation between humanity and God" (Rom 7:9-11, 13).[47] Third, death is presented as the consequence and wage of sin (cf. Rom 5:12), opposed to the gracious gift of eternal[48] life (cf. Rom 6:23). Fourth, death is depicted as the tyrannical ruler over the present age (Rom 5:14, 17; 6:9b). Fifth, death appears as an ethical category, describing life according to the flesh in contrast to those who live in accordance with the Spirit (Rom 8:2-8).

Yet death also acquires positive significance, as Paul interprets Christ's physical death within a broader eschatological framework. Clifton Black notes, "Paul asserts that the believer's own existential death with Christ in baptism is a dying that frees the Christian from death for the future hope of resurrection (Rom 6:5, 8; Col 2:12)."[49] For Paul, the existential death of a Christian delivers him from the tyrannic rule of death itself. He emphasizes in Rom 6:6b-7: "that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."[50] In the hymn of Philippians, death further serves a rhetorical function, highlighting the depth of Christ's obedience and self-giving love within God's salvific plan (Phil 2:8).

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[45] Moo, "Paul on Hell," 92-93; Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife*, 152.

[46] For an article on Pauline perspectives on death in *Romans*, see C. Clifton Black II, "Pauline Perspectives on Death in Romans 5-8," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103, no. 3 (1984): 413-33.

[47] Black, "Pauline Perspectives," 426.

[48] The translation and semantic range of αἰώνιος (eternal) will be addressed briefly in the following section.

[49] Black, "Pauline Perspectives," 422.

[50] Rom 6:6b-7 (NIV).

Although Paul's destruction language is not necessarily as multivalent as his 'language of death', the foregoing analysis suggests that ἀπόλλυμι may likewise carry a broad range of meanings. Paul's eschatological discourse spans physical, existential, ethical, and relational dimensions. Moreover, the positive significance Paul attaches to death in Christ suggests that ἀπόλλυμι should not be understood solely as 'negative' but may also carry transformative and redemptive connotations. Attending to the semantic diversity of death thus underscores the need for careful contextual analysis when interpreting Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι as it may encompasses both destructive and constructive dimensions.

1.5 Finality

The question of finality in Paul's eschatological language is often addressed in close connection with issues of temporality. Accordingly, many studies focus on the meaning of αἰώνιος, since Pauline concepts of loss are contrasted to ζωὴ αἰώνιος ('eternal life'), as in Rom. 6.23: "For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is *eternal life* in Christ Jesus our Lord."[51] More recent scholarship interprets the term as referring primarily to an age, epoch, or eschatological order rather than to unbounded duration.[52] As is discussed in §1.2, Paul does not conceive of time as a linear progression but in terms of overlapping ages. Equating eternity (αἰώνιος), or other 'modern concepts of time,' automatically risks imposing a temporal framework foreign to Paul's eschatological imagination. As Campbell notes, "While Paul repeatedly refers to God's wrath and condemnation, he nowhere specifies their duration, neither describing them as eternal nor as temporary."[53] Duration is simply not a category Paul is operating with.

Accordingly, finality of destruction is better assessed in relation to Paul's two-age schema. Destruction associated with 'this age' may be severe but temporary, since 'the present age' will ultimately be superseded by 'the age to come.' By contrast, destruction linked to the 'new age' may carry a more definitive character. In addition, the *telos* of destruction is crucial for assessing its finality: where destruction serves correction, purification, liberation (from sin), or the restoration of communal order, it is unlikely to be terminal; where it participates in the eschatological removal of evil powers and realities belonging to 'the present age,' it more

[51] Rom 6:23 (NIV). *Italics* by author.

[52] Cf. Anna Wierzbicka, ""Eternal Life", "Eternal Punishment": What Did Jesus Really Mean?" *Cognitive Semantics* 10 (2024): 297-326; N.T. Wright, *New Testament for Everyone* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2011); David Bentley Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

[53] Campbell, *Paul and the Hope of Glory*, 398.

plausibly functions as a final act of judgment. Destruction may also function as a boundary-marking concept within Paul's eschatology operating at the intersection of 'the present age' and 'the age to come', acting upon 'the present age', while serving the purposes of 'the age to come.' It should be noted, however, that finality in Paul is not a binary category. Paul often leaves his destruction language ambiguous. It might be that this ambiguity is not accidental but functional and intrinsic to Paul's rhetorical and pastoral aims. Consequently, ἀπόλλυμι should not be forced into a single, fixed category of either irrevocable annihilation or restorative discipline; rather, its meaning must be determined contextually, with careful attention to its rhetorical function, and relation to salvation within each Pauline passage.

Chapter 2

The Semantic Domains of Ἀπόλλυμι

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the use of ἀπόλλυμι in contemporary Greek literature of Paul's time with the aim of delineating its various semantic domains. In her study, Suzan Sierksma-Agteres' defined "contemporary, in this case, as referring to the Hellenistic and imperial Roman period of roughly the first century BC until the second century AD."[54] An analysis of the ancient Greek texts, with aid of the online database Thesaurus Linguae Graece (TLG), reveals an exceptionally high number of ἀπόλλυμι occurrences within this period.[55] To delimit the scope of this project, the analysis is confined to authors who composed their works primarily in the first century AD and to those in whose writings the verb ἀπόλλυμι occurs with relatively high frequency.[56] The authors included are the Jewish Hellenistic philosopher Philo of Alexandria (c. 15-10 BC – AD 45-50) the Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (c. AD 37 – AD 100),[57] the Greek orator Dio Chrysostom (c. AD 40 – AD 120), the Greek historian Plutarch (before AD 50 – after AD 120), and the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (c. AD 50 – AD 135).

Before analyzing Greek literature from Paul's time, it is necessary to consider why engaging these sources is helpful for our understanding of Paul's eschatology. Scholars differ on the extent to which Paul's Greek milieu influenced his eschatology. Some even argue that his eschatology is primarily rooted in Jewish (apocalyptic) thought. This discussion is further examined in this chapter, which adopts the position that Greek linguistic and conceptual contexts remain relevant for understanding Paul's eschatological language (2.2). The chapter then turns to a consideration of the methodological assumptions and reflections guiding the lexical and

[54] Suzan Sierksma-Agteres, *Paul and the Philosophers' Faith: Discourses of Pistis in the Graeco-Roman World*. Ancient Philosophy & Religion 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 1.

[55] Approximately 3000 instances of ἀπόλλυμι.

[56] This approach allows for a more substantial and reliable analysis of the verb's usage, as including authors with only sporadic occurrences would risk overgeneralization and provide insufficient material for meaningful interpretation.

[57] Philo and Josephus are especially relevant for this study as they are Jewish writers engaging with the broader Hellenistic intellectual and cultural milieu. One might also expect that first- to second-century Jewish apocalyptic works, such as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch, would also be included in this analysis, given the influence of Jewish apocalypticism on Paul's eschatology. However, these texts were not originally composed in Greek, and it lies beyond the scope of this study to identify Hebrew or Aramaic equivalents of ἀπόλλυμι.

discourse analysis of this study (2.3), followed by the identification of four semantic domains of ἀπόλλυμι derived from an analysis of the writings of the authors introduced above (2.4).

2.2 Greek Dimensions of Paul's Eschatology

Scholars have long debated which traditions most decisively shaped Paul's eschatology. Three main positions may be distinguished: some argue that Paul's eschatology is primarily rooted in Jewish apocalyptic literature; others emphasize continuity with rabbinic traditions grounded in the Tanach; and a third approach highlights conceptual and linguistic parallels with Greek philosophical thought, allowing for varying degrees of engagement with, or even appropriation of, ideas of Greek philosophy. While most scholars agree that all three traditions exerted some influence on Paul, they differ significantly over which provides the primary framework for his eschatological thinking. For example, some foreground apocalyptic motifs and minimize Greek philosophical influence, whereas others assign greater explanatory weight to Paul's participation in the Hellenistic intellectual world.

As we have seen, Albert Schweitzer's approach to "interpret Paul's eschatology with primary reference not to the eschatology of Jesus nor to that of other early Christians but to the eschatology to be found among Jews of Paul's time"[58] has significantly shaped subsequent scholarship on the Jewish apocalyptic dimensions of Paul's eschatology. In this line of thought, some scholars locate Paul's dualistic contrast between 'this age' and 'the age to come' in Jewish apocalyptic literature.[59] Others, however, have argued that "the two-age schema is simply a widespread feature of Jewish thought throughout the second-Temple period and on into the high rabbinic period…it is not sufficient to affix the label 'apocalyptic' around his [Paul's] neck. One might just as well say 'rabbinic'."[60] G. K. Beale notes that in Jewish apocalypticism 'the end' is typically understood as immanent. In Paul's time, however, alternative models of inaugurated eschatology – rooted in the Tanach – were available:[61] the Qumran community, for example, interpreted the 'latter days' – a concept prominent in prophetic literature of the Tanach

[58] Summary of Schweitzer's (*Mysticism of Paul,* 11) approach by De Boer, *Paul*, 3.

[59] Philipp Vielhauer, "Apokalypsen und Verwandtes: Einleitung," in *Neutestamentlichen Apokryphen in deutscher Uber-setzung, Band II: Apostolisches. Apokalyptik und Verwandtes,* ed. Edgar Hennecker and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1964), 431 and D. S. Russel, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, 200 BC-AD 100* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 269.

[60] Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 158.

[61] G. K. Baele, "The Eschatology of Paul," in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo*, ed. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 199-200.

– as already beginning to unfold on earth.[62] These perspectives suggest that Paul's eschatology cannot be reduced to a single strand of Jewish apocalypticism, but emerges more probably from a broader spectrum of Jewish interpretive traditions.

Philip du Toit also cautions against treating Pauline concepts as directly derived from Jewish apocalyptic texts, noting that prominent works such as 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch postdate Paul. While it is possible that certain apocalyptic motifs were already circulating within Paul's milieu, later developments in apocalyptic thought should not be reprojected into his theology.[63] Henk Tronier further complicates the picture by arguing that apocalyptic ideas should not be examined in isolation from their Hellenistic context since first-century Jewish apocalypticism is intertwined with contemporary philosophical ideas. Tronier concludes that "the basic ideas and structures of meaning in Paul's theology belong to Jewish apocalypticism…But Jewish apocalypticism is itself a particular version and variation of certain basic ideas in the Hellenistic world at large, Jewish as well as non-Jewish."[64] In a similar vein, Howard Kee draws attention to several conceptual parallels between Jewish apocalyptic thought and Stoic philosophy. They both share the concern to discern divine purpose in history and their expectation of a climactic event that brings 'the present age' to its conclusion. This cataclysm renews the world and its inhabitants and are once again brought under divine sovereignty.[65] Kee nonetheless emphasizes significant differences between both worldviews. For example, the role of the Spirit is perceived differently: in apocalyptic thought the spirit effects the cosmic renewal and inaugurates the blessings of 'the coming age', whereas in Stoicism spirit denotes the immanent principle of rationality and natural law operating within this world.[66] In chapter 3 we will see that this Stoic perception of the spirit might be part of the problem causing divisions in the Corinthian church.

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[62] J. Carmignac, "La notion d'eschatologie dans la Bible et à Qumrân," *Revue de Qumrân* 7, no. 25 (1969): 17-31. Cited by Beale, "Eschatology of Paul," 200.

[63] Philip La. G. du Toit, "Paul, Empire and Eschatology," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): a6904, 6.

[64] Henrik Tronier, "The Corinthian Correspondence between Philosophical Idealism and Apocalypticism," in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 167. Tronier builds his essay on the study of David E. Aune who argued strongly against "a dichotomy between Hellenistic anthropologies on the one hand and a Pauline, more genuinely Jewish view of human nature on the other…like several Jewish writers of his time, Paul made use of terms and concepts from a variety of Hellenistic anthropologies" (Tronier, "Corinthian Correspondence," 165). See David E. Aune, "Human Nature and Ethics in Hellenistic Philosophical Traditions and Paul: Some Issues and Problems," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. T. Engberg-Pedersen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 291-312.

[65] Kee, "Pauline Eschatology," 144-5.

[66] Kee, 145-147, other differences between Stoic and apocalyptic thought include the Stoic view of cosmic transformation as an inevitable elemental process with little role for human agency, versus the apocalyptic emphasis on divine intervention, covenantal accountability, and mediation through a divinely appointed royal or priestly figure.

I agree with Tronier and Kee (and others) that it is overly reductive to characterize Paul's eschatology as merely Jewish. Jewish apocalypticism was itself embedded within the broader Hellenistic cultural milieu, as the observed similarities suggest and, indeed, as is typical of texts produced within a shared cultural environment. At the same time, the differences between both worldviews identified by Kee should not be overlooked, and they make us wonder: How Greek was Paul's Eschatology?[67] In the following section, I discuss the respective positions of George van Kooten, Oda Wichmeyer and N. T. Wright on this matter.

Wischmeyer advances the most restrictive position. She cautions against overstating the 'Greekness' of Paul, since Paul never explicitly cites any philosophical or religious Greek non-Jewish source in his eschatological texts. At most, she argues, Paul reflects a "philosophical *koine*, words or even terms that are used in Jewish and non-Jewish Greek philosophical and religious language – 'language' understood in terms of terminology…and, most important, topics that Jewish and 'Greek' authors have in common."[68] While acknowledging that Pauline eschatology and Greek thought share concern for the ultimate fate ('end') of the κόσμος and humanity, Wischmeyer emphasizes that this overlap reflects common language and interest in questions of cosmic and human destiny rather than direct philosophical influence. This shared language allows Pauline ideas about the end of the κόσμος and the soul to be intelligible and meaningful to a pagan audience.[69]

Van Kooten holds the opposite position, stating that "we do not need explicit references by Paul to Greek philosophical texts to show that Greek eschatological expectations are woven into the very substructure of Paul's thought."[70] In his expressions, or so-called 'prepositional metaphysics',[71] Paul uses characteristic Greek language to frame the interference of God in the κόσμος and human destiny. Like Kee, Van Kooten shows several structural parallels between Pauline eschatology and Stoic (and to a lesser extent Platonic) cosmology, such as: the idea that all things originate from God an ultimately return into God, the notion of a temporarily configuration of the present world (τὸ σχῆμα τοῦ κόσμου – 1 Cor 7:31), and Paul's description

[67] The title of the scholarly disputation between N. T. Wright, George van Kooten, and Oda Wischmeyer, "How Greek was Paul's Eschatology," *New Testament Studies* 61, no. 2 (2015): 239-53.

[68] Wischmeyer, "How Greek," 247.

[69] Wischmeyer, 247-8.

[70] Van Kooten, "How Greek," 240-1.

[71] This concept refers to the prepositions 'from' (ἐκ), 'through' (διά) and 'into' (εἰς), which are frequently used in Greek eschatological language. Van Kooten borrows this concept from G.E. Sterling, "Prepositional Metaphysics in Jewish Wisdom Speculation and Early Christian Liturgical Texts," *Studia Philonica Annual* 9 (1997): 219-38.

of the resurrected body as a 'spiritual body' (σῶμα πνευματικόν – 1 Cor 15:44) corresponds to the Stoic conception of the cosmos itself becoming fully pneumatic and identical with divine reason.[72] Paul's eschatology thus reflects Stoic and Platonic ideas which are selectively appropriated by Paul to articulate his own theological aim on both lexical and conceptual levels.

Wright positions himself between Wischmeyer and Van Kooten. He claims that Paul's eschatology is governed by a single controlling narrative: from creation to covenant in exile, from exile to the coming of the Messiah, and from resurrection to new creation. This narrative is fundamentally Jewish, rooted in Scripture. Greek concepts are present in Paul but are always repurposed to serve this greater Jewish narrative. Paul uses Greek terms, such as παρουσία, to challenge pagan philosophy and imperial ideology. Thus, the one major point of confrontation is political-eschatological: "Jesus is Lord and Caesar is not."[73] As Wright concludes, "The evidences of Greek ideas in his writings, including his eschatology, are signs, not that he was borrowing bits and pieces to stitch together a theological patchwork quilt, but that he was expressing his messianically reshaped Jewish narrative in such a way as to take every thought captive to obey the Messiah."[74]

The three scholars agree that Paul was (1) not a Greek philosopher, (2) not insulated from Greek thought, (3) not reducible to either Judaism or Hellenism, rendering any opposition between a 'Jewish' and a 'Greek' Paul misleading, but (4) a Jewish apostle who engages Greek intellectual culture and language at varying depths. These insights are crucial for our lexical-semantic analysis: because Paul's eschatological discourse operates within a shared Hellenistic linguistic environment, the meaning of ἀπόλλυμι cannot be assessed without reference to its wider Greek usage. Examining Paul against the lexical background of his time may help illuminate both "the appeal of Pauline Christianity to non-Jewish contemporaries and the manner in which a message that originated on Jewish soil could be readily transplanted to Gentile territory with fruitful result."[75] In this way, the present study refines the meaning and nuances of destruction in the Corinthian correspondence while contributing to the broader discussion concerning the extent and nature of Paul's engagement with Greek thought. For example, a polemical use of ἀπόλλυμι that subverts imperial claims would support Wright's proposal, whe-

[72] Van Kooten, 241-3.

[73] Wright, "How Greek," 252.

[74] Wright, 253.

[75] Kee, "Pauline Eschatology," 157. Kee originally applies this quote to the study of popular philosophy of Paul's time. I would argue that the same insight is equally applicable to a lexical study.

reas alignment with Greek philosophical discourse would resonate more with Van Kooten's view. This is further explored in chapter 3.

2.3 Methodological Assumptions and Reflections

This study proceeds on the basis of two fundamental assumptions: 1) the meaning of a lexeme is determined by its actual usage within specific linguistic and literary contexts, rather than by its etymological origin or earlier stages of the language (diachronic priority);[76] 2) the range of meanings attested for a word across a corpus represents a set of contextual possibilities, none of which can be presumed to be operative in every individual occurrence (illegitimate totality transfer).[77] The analysis of ἀπόλλυμι does not begin from its morphological composition or earlier meanings in Greek, nor does it assume that the full semantic range of ἀπόλλυμι is present, even implicitly, in any single instance of its use. Instead, the verb is examined on the basis of its attested functions in a range of contemporaneous Greek texts (synchronic approach), allowing its semantic profile to emerge from usage. We will see that the verb participates in multiple semantic domains, however, individual occurrences activate only a subset of these possibilities, as constrained by grammatical form, context, genre, and broader discourse context (see chapter 3).

Another helpful insight to clarify our method is the distinction between two types of word relationships: syntagmatic and paradigmatic. Syntagmatic relations refer to the co-occurrence of words within a sentence (e.g. ἀπόλλυμι + πόλις). Paradigmatic relations, which are particularly relevant for this study, occur when words can occupy the same position in a sentence, competing for selection (e.g. ἀπόλλυμι vs. σῴζω). When an author chooses on word, other potential options are implicitly rejected.[78] The meaning of ἀπόλλυμι, therefore, emerges not only from the concepts it evokes but also from the verbs it contrasts with. However, this structural approach is limited when a single world carries multiple, context-depended meanings (polysemy). Cognitive linguistics complements the structural approach by emphasizing that

[76] This assumption is rooted in a structural approach to language. Ferdinand de Saussure, a key proponent of this approach, states that a linguistic sign consists of a conventional association between a form (French: 'signifiant') and a concept (French: 'signifié'), rather than a natural link to reality; consequently, the meaning of a word is determined by its position within the language system at a given time (synchronic), not by its historical development (diachronic). Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (of *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris: Payot, 1916), ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 67-70.

[77] The fallacies of diachronic priority and illegitimate totality transfer are identified and heavily critiqued by James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 115 and 218.

[78] Sierksma-Agteres, *Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 9.

meaning emerges not only from lexical co-occurrence and substitution but also from "the specific context that determines a word's meaning, that is, a 'semantic domain': a network of knowledge and experiences in which a lexeme is conceptualized."[79] A semantic domain is not, like a semantic field, an abstract set of words related by meaning in a language system (e.g. chair, table, and bed are part of the category 'furniture'). Instead, it is a mental network of knowledge and experiences in which a word is understood. Domains are shared across members of a speech community. As Sierksma-Agteres points out, "The higher the polysemy of a lexeme, the more semantic (sub)domains it participates in, which may be (partly) overlapping."[80]

However, identifying a semantic domain clarifies the type of meaning activated by a lexeme, but it does not in itself determine that meaning.[81] For instance, ἀπόλλυμι may be situated within the semantic domain of judgment, yet this classification alone does not specify agency, causality or whether it is construed positively or negatively. To bridge the methodological gap between linguistic description and historical-theological interpretation, this study follows Sierksma-Agteres' approach to integrate discourse analysis alongside cognitive linguistics.[82] Discourse analysis enables attention to the broader cultural and intellectual frameworks within which lexical meanings are negotiated and contested. This allows for a more nuanced account of the richness and rhetorical force of Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι. In the present study, discourse analysis is employed in a limited and heuristic sense, focusing on the immediate argumentative and evaluative frameworks operative within the Corinthian letters (see chapter 3) rather than on a comprehensive reconstruction of contemporary philosophical traditions.

Lastly, and most importantly, this study is built on the core methodological hypothesis that insight into the semantic, cultural, and philosophical categories operative in the Greco-Roman world contributes significantly to a more nuanced understanding of Paul's destruction language. It can be assumed that Paul composed his letters with the intention of being intelligible and persuasive to his mostly pagan audience. However, it must be acknowledged

[79] Sierksma-Agteres, *Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 12.

[80] Sierksma-Agteres, 12.

[81] This is explained clearly by Ellen van Wolde and Robert Rezetko: "The fact that words belong to the same semantic field, does not imply that they express the same or an interconnected meaning. On the contrary, words that figure in one semantic field construct events – that are referentially related – in different ways. In other words, a semantic domain is the collection of words that refer to an event or to events that are related in reality or in the thought of reality, yet the way these words conceptualize this event, or these events can be completely different. The use of the notion of parallelism in biblical scholarship bears the risk of mixing sense with reference." Ellen J. van Wolde and Robert Rezetko, "Semantics and the Semantics of ברא: A Rejoinder to the Arguments Advanced by B. Becking and M. Korpel," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 11 (2011): 19.

[82] For an elaboration of this approach, see Sierksma-Agteres*, Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 15-29.

that even with shared conceptual frameworks, Paul's message was not necessarily fully comprehended by his public. As Sierksma-Agteres remarks:

> Even if Paul and his audience share a semantic universe, Paul's ideas may have differed considerably from the prevalent views of contemporary pagan authors. And obviously, these views do not function as a fixed limit on what Paul may have said. Especially as Paul also draws from his more particular Jewish inheritance and identity, he may well have been misunderstood either partly or wholly by a largely pagan public that may have had different 'frames' elicited by the word group *pistis* [or *apollymi*].[83]

Given the missionary context of Paul's letters to the Corinthians, it is in my opinion reasonable and methodologically justifiable to assume that he wrote with reference to a set of shared assumptions and expectations.

2.4 The Semantic Domains of Ἀπόλλυμι

In this study, I am not trying to identify a single core meaning or to trace relationships between different individual meanings of ἀπόλλυμι.[84] Instead, I intend to determine the different relevant

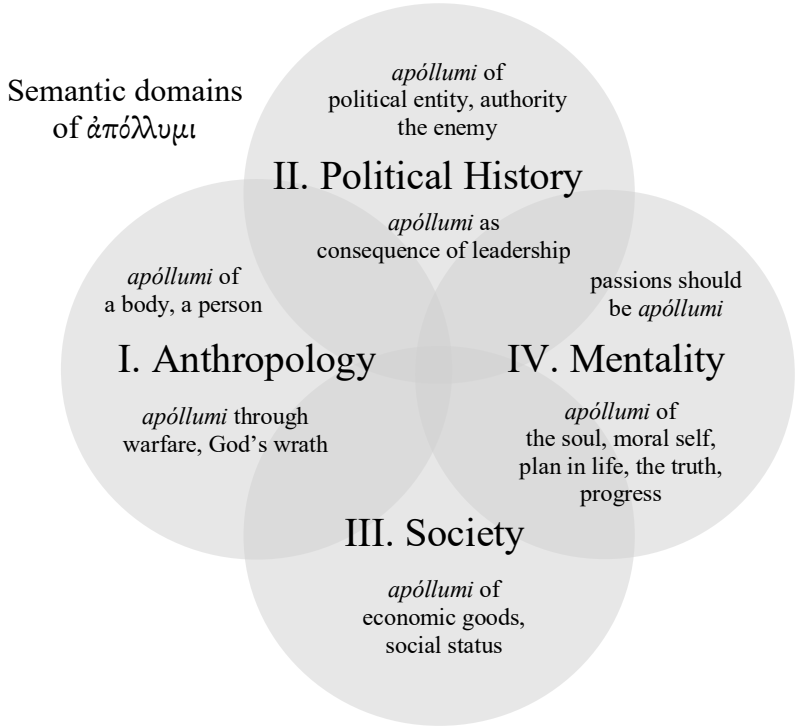

Figure 1. Semantic domains of ἀπόλλυμι

[83] Sierksma-Agteres*, Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 24.

[84] For the different senses of ἀπόλλυμι I refer to Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, fourth edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 101. For a Dutch lexicon, see Johan Murre, *Lexicon Bijbels Grieks*, vol. 1 (Vught: Skandalon, 2016), 209-10.

semantic domains to which a particular usage of ἀπόλλυμι belongs. On the basis of the sources examined, four semantic domains of ἀπόλλυμι may be distinguished (see figure 1). If a structural principle is to be discerned among the domains, the first and fourth may be understood as primarily concerned with the individual. The first domain addresses the finitude of individual life, while the fourth concerns the ethical dimension or the moral life. In Greek anthropological terms, the first domain pertains to the body (σῶμα) and the fourth domain to the soul (ψυχῆς). The second and third domains may be grouped together as far as they contain explicitly communal contexts. The second domain focuses on conflict between communities or on relations between political authorities and their subjects, whereas the third domain concerns the social life within society.

An earlier semantic domains analysis of ἀπόλλυμι, though limited to the NT corpus, is found in the work of Johannes Louw and Eugene Nida. They assign ἀπόλλυμι to four distinct semantic domains: (1) destruction or the causing of destruction (of persons, objects, or institutions); (2) live and die, to experience of the loss of life; (3) learn the location of something, to be lost; and (4) ownership, fail to obtain a valued object or lose something.[85] Although the domains are not identical, there are notable similarities with the categorization adopted in the present study: The first domain in Louw and Nida is distributed across the anthropological, historical-political, and social-material domains of our analysis. Also, their fourth domain is compatible with our social-material domain. One major difference concerns Louw and Nida's delineation of a semantic domain of 'learning a location', which is not significantly attested in the Greek sources outside the NT corpus; moreover, its identification rests on a subjective interpretation of Luke 15:4.[86] An even more fundamental difference is that Louw and Nida exclude the ethical-mental domain from their analysis. Their discussion of ἀπόλλυμι in relation to the soul is framed primarily as a synecdoche for the loss of human life.[87] It is possible that the ethical-mental domain is entirely absent in the NT text. However, Louw and Nida's discussion of Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι is extremely limited, as none of the occurrences in the Corinthian correspondence are included.[88] It will be discussed in the next chapter that the

[85] Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, vol. I (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), the domains are found, respectively, on pages 232, 266, 329-30, and 566.

[86] Louw and Nida themselves acknowledge this limitation: "It is also possible to interpret ἀπόλλυμι in Lk 15:4 as meaning of loss of possession" (*Greek-English Lexicon,* 330).

[87] Louw and Nida, 266.

[88] Louw and Nida only mention Rom 9:22, 232.

ethical-mental domain nevertheless proves to be of considerable importance for the interpretation of Paul.

The following sections will develop the semantic domains in greater detail. This analysis is necessarily selective and does not discuss all instances of ἀπόλλυμι in the Greek authors, but only those deemed to be most relevant for the purposes of this study. The citations of the Greek authors and their translations are taken from the digital Loeb Classical Library (LCL) editions.

2.4.1 The Anthropological Domain

The first semantic domain of ἀπόλλυμι is rooted in the fundamental human experience of mortality. While I considered labeling this domain 'biological', as it includes primarily instances of death in the physical sense, this term would be too restrictive. We will see that this domain is not limited to mere biological mortality; it also includes deaths that are caused by violence, wrath, and passions, reflecting the broader existential vulnerability of human beings. In this sense, the anthropological domain is perhaps the most straightforward of the semantic domains: it deals with the end of existence for an individual beyond human control and it highlights the human condition in its most basic, inescapable form.

Greek anthropology is traditionally characterized by a (Platonic) dualism between body (σῶμα) and soul (ψυχῆς). Chrysostom writes, "when the soul departs, it [the body] cannot endure even a short time, but suffers immediate decay and dissolution" (ὅ γε τῆς ψυχῆς ἀπολιπούσης οὐδὲ ὀλίγον δύναται διαμένειν, ἀλλὰ παραχρῆμα λύεται καὶ ἀπόλλυται).[89] This passage establishes a clear distinction between the body and soul: while the body is subject to destruction (ἀπόλλυμι), the soul is not – it only departs (ἀπολείπω) the body. Chrysostom, therefore, regards the soul as "the more divined and regal part" (ὅμως δὲ θειότερον καὶ βασιλικώτερον).[90] One might conclude that Greek anthropological dualism would exclude the application of the verb ἀπόλλυμι to the soul. In a strict ontological sense this conclusion may be true. However, Chrysostom notes that "when the soul has been taken captive and ruined, we should not dissimulate or underrate it" (τῆς δὲ ψυχῆς ἠνδραποδισμένης καὶ ἀπολωλυίας εἰρωνεύεσθαι καὶ ὑποτιμᾶσθαι).[91] When the soul is captivated by low desires (φαύλης ἐπιθυμίας) it can lose its proper rational function. Ἀπόλλυμι is used to describe such a process of moral corruption. The soul is not annihilated but ethically degraded

[89] Chrysostom, *Discourses 3. On Kingship* 3.68.

[90] Chrysostom, *Discourses 3. On Kingship* 3.69.

[91] Chrysostom, *Discourses 32. To the People of Alexandria* 90.

(domain IV).[92] Thus, for Chrysostom the body is destructible in a literal, ontological sense, whereas the soul can be destroyed in a moral or functional sense.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, people were daily confronted with (bodily) death. Due to the absence of advanced medical care and persisted warfare, the mortality rate was high, and the estimated life expectancy ranges between 20 and 30 years old in the ancient world.[93] Human life often remained at the mercy of nature, and physicians frequently lacked both the knowledge and the means to prevent death or effect a cure. As Philo ironically writes:

> Look at a doctor's reasonings: (ἴδε λογισμὸν ἰατροῦ) "I will purge the patient, I will feed him up, I will prescribe medicines and put him on a diet that will make him well, I will operate, I will cauterize." (κενώσω τὸν κάμνοντα, θρέψω, φαρμάκοις ἰάσομαι <καὶ> διαίτῃ, τεμῶ, καύσω) But many a time has nature either brought recovery without these means being used, or brought death when these have been resorted to, (ἀλλὰ πολλάκις ἡ φύσις καὶ ἄνευ τούτων ἰάσατο καὶ μετὰ τούτων ἀπώλεσεν) proving all the doctor's calculations to be vain dreams, nothing but guesswork in the dark (ὡς τοὺς ἰατροῦ πάντας ἐπιλογισμοὺς ἐνύπνια εὑρεθῆναι ἀσαφείας καὶ αἰνιγμάτων πλήρη). (Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.226)

Philo uses ἀπόλλυμι to describe a patient who dies despite medical intervention to show that human planning, reasoning, and technical expertise are limited and unreliable. The physician functions as the archetype of human control over the body and health. Philo's explicit contrast between ἀπώλεσεν and ἰάσατο establishes a paradigmatic relationship, suggesting ἀπόλλυμι as the opposite of recovery. As recovery is the result of a healing *process*, the contrast may suggest that ἀπώλεσεν denotes not merely an event but a *process* culminating in death

Death is likewise inevitable on the battlefield. In his biographies, Plutarch presents the most powerful, influential men from the Hellenistic period as actors persistently involved in military struggles for power. Although Plutarch stated aim with his work is to portray the character, virtue, and vice of individuals,[94] ἀπόλλυμι regularly appears in historical accounts of warfare and political upheaval (e.g., "the loss of his men" (ἀπολέσας τῶν ἀνδρῶν),[95] "destroyed

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[92] Strictly speaking, this instance should be classified within the fourth domain; however, I discuss it here to examine Chrysostom's body-soul distinction in relation to ἀπόλλυμι.

[93] Karen Cokayne, *Experiencing Old Age in Ancient Rome* (London: Routledge, 2003), 2.

[94] "For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities…so I must be permitted to devote myself rather to the signs of the soul in men, and by means of these to portray the life of each, leaving to others the description of their great contests." (Plutarch, *Alexander* 1.I)

[95] Plutarch, *Agesilaus* 16.3.

so many brave men" (τοσούτους ἄνδρας ἀπολωλεκυίας),[96] and "those who had come out of the city to see the battle were trodden under foot and killed" (οὐκ ὀλίγοι δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐκ τῆς πόλεως ἐπὶ θέαν προελθόντες ἀπώλοντο καὶ κατεπατήθησαν).[97]). While such examples could be assigned to the political domain, they are classified here as anthropological, since in each case ἀπόλλυμι refers to the existential loss of human lives, rather than the destruction of cities or political powers. These passages, nevertheless, clearly demonstrate that the domains can overlap.

Particularly striking is Plutarch's extension of the use of ἀπόλλυμι beyond fallen soldiers and citizens to the deaths of emperors themselves. In *Galba* 2.3, emperor Nero is said to perish after being abandoned by soldiers when he ceases to be profitable, while emperor Galba dies for failing to pay their wages: "This promise was at once the death of Nero, and soon afterwards of Galba: (τοῦτο γὰρ εὐθὺς μὲν ἀπώλεσε Νέρωνα, μετ' ὀλίγον δὲ Γάλβαν) the one the soldiers abandoned to his fate in order to get their reward, the other they killed because they did not get it (τὸν μὲν γὰρ ὡς ληψόμενοι προήκαντο, τὸν δὲ μὴ λαμβάνοντες ἀπέκτειναν)."[98] The soldiers' actions are driven by greed and disappointment instead of loyalty or reverence for imperial authority. Plutarch thus presents death as the result of human motives rather than divine intervention or destiny.[99] Against the backdrop of the imperial cult, the deaths of emperors expose the fragility of imperial authority. Despite their semi-divine status,[100] Nero and Galba remain dependent on the goodwill of others and perish like any other human being once this support is withdrawn.[101]

The anthropological domain is also frequently present in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*. Early in the narrative, Josephus recounts God's admonition to Cain: "I marvel that thou canst not tell what has become of a man whom thou thyself hast destroyed" (θαυμάζω...εἰ περὶ ἀνδρὸς ἀγνοεῖς εἰπεῖν τί γέγονεν, ὃν αὐτὸς ἀπολώλεκας).[102] Notably, Abel is here described as 'destroyed',

[96] Plutarch, *Agesilaus* 16.4.

[97] Plutarch, *Sulla* 29.7.

[98] Plutarch, *Galba* 2.3.

[99] A similar description is found in Josephus, *Jewish war* 2.213 "he would lose the very men who lent lustre to his sovereignty and be left monarch of a wilderness" (ἀπολέσας δι' οὓς τὸ κρατεῖν ἐστι περίοπτον ἐρημίας ἔσοιτο βασιλεύς).

[100] See for example Antipater's proclamation, "Caesar, the lord of the universe" (ὁ τῆς οἰκουμένης προστάτης Καῖσαρ). Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.633.

[101] See for Plutarch on the imperial cult G.W. Bowersock, "Greek Intellectuals and the Imperial Cult in the Second Century A.D.," in *Le Culte des Souverains dans L'Empire Romain* (Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1973), 179-212. He concludes, "Plutarch believed no man, however important or good, was a god…he lived with the cult all around them and simply did not worry about it" (189).

[102] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.57.

although in the NT tradition he is portrayed as δίκαιος (righteous, Heb. 11.4). Apparently, both descriptions can be applied to the same individual, though further discussion would exceed the limits of the Pauline corpus. Another noteworthy example occurs in Josephus' account of the Israelites, who were "dispirited, imagining that Moses had perished beneath the wrath of God and expecting a like fate for themselves" (ἀχθόμενοι καὶ τόν τε Μωυσῆν ἀπολωλέναι νομίζοντες ὑπ' ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ περὶ αὐτῶν ὅμοια προσδοκῶντες).[103] Here, divine wrath (ὀργῆς τοῦ θεοῦ) functions as the instrument of destruction: ἀπόλλυμι is understood not as accidental death but as an event mediated by God's punitive agency, reflecting a view in which destruction results from a disrupted relationship with God. This use of ἀπόλλυμι fits within a forensic-apocalyptic framework in which destruction follows from God's judgment on human sin and unholiness (see §1.3).

2.4.2 The Political-Historical Domain

In the political domain, ἀπόλλυμι denotes not the fate of individual bodies but the ruin of social political constituted entities – cities, armies, regimes, and systems of supremacy. It functions at the level of historical agency, describing destruction as the result of political action, (imperial) power relations, and, at times, divine intervention in historical processes. It also functions as a marker of destructive or ineffective leadership. Although ἀπόλλυμι occurs most frequently in this domain, we should be cautious to drift to conclusions. As is observed by Sierksma-Agteres, "Frequency of use may be indicative of prototypicality, yet this rule is not applicable when dealing with the fragmentary material from antiquity."[104]

Many instances of ἀπόλλυμι in the political-historical domain can be found in accounts of military conquests, for example: the fall of the ancient Greek city Lampsacus,[105] the attempt to destroy the inhabitants of Thebes,[106] the destruction of Egypt,[107] or the near annihilation of

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[103] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.82.

[104] Sierksma-Agteres*, Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 12-3.

[105] Plutarch, *Lysander* 9.4, "Meanwhile the Athenian fleet…just arrived at Elaeus in the Chersonese, and learning that Lampsacus had fallen" (ὁ δὲ τῶν Ἀθηναίων στόλος...ἄρτι καθωρμισμένος εἰς Ἐλαιοῦντα τῆς Χερρονήσου, πυνθανόμενοι δὲ ἀπολωλέναι τὴν Λάμψακον). Cf. Plutarch, *Sulla* 16.5, "But Sulla, though chafing and fretting while cities were destroyed before his eyes, would not suffer his soldiers to be idle" (Ὁ δὲ Σύλλας, ἐν ὄμμασιν αὐτοῦ πόλεων ἀπολλυμένων, δυσανασχετῶν καὶ λυπούμενος, οὐκ εἴα τοὺς στρατιώτας σχολάζειν).

[106] Plutarch, *Agesilaus* 26.4, "that he sought to destroy the Thebans" (καὶ φιλονεικίᾳ τοὺς Θηβαίους ἀπολέσαι ζητῶν).

[107] Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.122, "Then those in authority…approached the king and said: "'How long will you refuse to grant these men leave to depart? Do you not yet understand that Egypt is destroyed?'" (προσελθόντες ἔλεγον τῷ βασιλεῖ· "μέχρι τίνος οὐκ ἐπιτρέπεις τὴν ἔξοδον τοῖς ἀνδράσιν; ἢ οὔπω μανθάνεις ἐκ τῶν γινομένων, ὅτι ἀπόλωλεν Αἴγυπτος").

the Amalekites.[108] In such contexts, ἀπόλλυμι denotes not merely the killing of individuals but the collapse of a community's capacity to continue as a historical and political actor. Evidently, most cities, armies or empires may be rebuilt or reconstituted after suffering ἀπόλλυμι; they can re-emerge as renewed political entities. The verb nevertheless does carry a sense of finality. This is especially evident in Philo's citation of an ancient poem from the Septuagint (LXX) (Num 21:27-30):

> Their sons were given up as fugitives, and their daughters as prisoners of war to Sihon, king of the Amorites, (ἀπεδόθησαν οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτῶν σῴζεσθαι, καὶ αἱ θυγατέρες αὐτῶν αἰχμάλωτοι τῷ βασιλεῖ Ἀμορραίων Σηών) and their seed shall perish, Heshbon unto Dibon, and their women yet further kindled a fire against Moab (καὶ τὸ σπέρμα αὐτῶν ἀπολεῖται Ἐσεβὼν ἕως Δεβών, καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες ἔτι προσεξέκαυσαν πῦρ ἐπὶ Μωάβ). (Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.225)[109]

On a semantic level, this passage is particularly striking. When read carefully, ἀπόλλυμι is not opposed here to biological survival as such, but to the possibility of continuity. The translated Greek expression "given up as fugitives" reads literally "they were given back (ἀπεδόθησαν) in order to be saved (σῴζεσθαι)." The sons may be 'saved',[110] albeit as fugitives, but the community, understood genealogically, is extinguished. Since progeny in antiquity ensured both dynastic survival and social security, the destruction of one's seed signified total eradication – the loss of a people's future and their disappearance from the historical stage. Thus, ἀπόλλυμι operates in this passage on a different semantic level than σῴζεσθαι: it denotes not immediate death (as in domain I) but the annihilation of communal continuity. This usage is mostly common in the narratives of rival communities' destruction, which is often portrayed as expected, acceptable or even preferable.

The rival community is often labeled as the 'enemy' (ἐχθρός), a term closely associated with ἀπόλλυμι. In our technology-driven culture the most difficult reality to confront may be the inevitability of aging and death. In the shame-honor culture of Greco-Roman society, public disgrace (by your enemy) was a far greater threat. Philo, reflecting on the story of the Hebrews

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[108] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.54, "The Hebrews inflicted a crushing defeat on the Amalekites, who would all have perished" (καὶ τούτου γενομένου κατὰ κράτος ἐνίκων τοὺς Ἀμαληκίτας οἱ Ἑβραῖοι, καὶ πάντες ἂν ἀπωλώλεισαν). Cf. Josephus, *Jewish Anitquities* 3.60, "and he predicted that the Amalekites were to be utterly exterminated and not one of them should survive to after ages" (προεφήτευέ τε πανωλεθρίᾳ τοὺς Ἀμαληκίτας ἀπολουμένους καὶ μηδένα αὐτῶν ὑπολειφθησόμενον).

[109] Cf. Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.233.

[110] Notably, the daughters, who are designated as prisoners of war, are not said to be saved. This indicates that σῴζω is not a suitable predicate for the status of captivity.

trapped between Pharaoh's army and the sea, imagines some preferring death to dishonor: "they believed it to be better to perish by the elements of nature than to become a laughing-stock to their enemies" (οἱ δ'ἄμεινον εἶναι νομίζοντες ὑπὸ τῶν τῆς φύσεως ἀπολέσθαι μερῶν ἢ γέλως ἐχθροῖς γενέσθαι ῥίπτειν).[111] The labeling of adversaries as ἐχθρός also reinforces in-group identity as it distinguish the community that triumphs from the one that is destroyed. This is reflected in Josephus' account, wherein ἀπόλλυμι is explicitly linked to the condition of the enemy, of Moses reassuring the embittered mob:

> He then enumerated everything…how through the waters of the sea retiring far before them they had departed by a new road, (πῶς τε διὰ τῆς θαλάσσης ἀναφυγούσης αὐτοῖς πορρωτάτω καινὴν ὁδὸν ἀπελθόντες) finding therein salvation for themselves while seeing their enemies perish (αὐτῇ ταύτῃ σωθείησαν μὲν αὐτοί, τοὺς δὲ ἐχθροὺς ἐπίδοιεν ἀπολωλότας). (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.18)

Ἀπόλλυμι is set in direct contrast to salvation (σωθείησαν). The destruction of the enemy becomes meaningful when witnessed by those who are saved. Together these terms reinforce an in-group /out-group distinction, with ἀπόλλυμι functioning as a boundary-setting marker: designating the fate of the out-group, to *them*.[112] Remarkably, I found no instances in which ἀπόλλυμι is explicitly applied to the in-group, to *us*.

Greek and Roman political culture permitted extreme harsh punishments for enemies. Plutarch's account of the warlord Lysnader illustrates this severity: "the sole punishment that could satisfy his wrath was the death of his enemy; not even exile was allowed" (θυμοῦ δὲ μία πλήρωσις ἀπολέσθαι τὸν ἀπεχθόμενον· οὐδὲ γὰρ φυγεῖν ἐξῆν).[113] Here ἀπόλλυμι is linked with θυμός[114] (rage or wrath), which demands the most radical sanction. Whereas exile removes an enemy from the civic body while preserving life, ἀπόλλυμι effects total elimination. Within the historical-political domain, the verb thus functions as an instrument of power, most dangerous in the hands of mighty rulers who want to enforce absolute control.

Finally, I discuss the relationship between ἀπόλλυμι and leadership. Chrysostom links tyranny (τυραννίς) with ἀπόλλυμι. Tyranny is the form of government "where one man's high-handed use of force is the ruin of the others" (ἑνὸς ὕβρει καὶ βίᾳ τοῦ κακίστου τῶν ἄλλων

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[111] Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.249.

[112] It should be noted that the term 'enemy' is not always used as a marker of an in-group/out-group distinction. In some historical accounts, 'enemy' is used more neutrally to denote on of the opposing parties in a conflict or war.

[113] Plutarch, *Lysander* 19.1.

[114] Cf. ὀργῆς in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.82.

ἀπολλυμένων).[115] The participial form of the verb denotes the people as 'the ruined ones', referring to those who suffer under de tyrant's oppression. The ἀπολλυμένοι are a category of persons characterized by their social political order. Chrysostom refers to a good monarch as a shepherd of people (ποιμένα λαῶν) who protects and guards his flock; the tyrant, by contrast, is a butcher (μάγειρος) who leads his people to slaughter.[116] However, tyranny is an inherently precarious condition. Chrysostom warns that without courage, self-control, and prudence even tyrants will "speedily perish" (τάχιστα ἀπολοῦνται).[117] Thus, ἀπόλλυμι marks both the ruin of a community under tyrannic rule and the inevitable downfall of the tyrant himself when he neglects the necessary virtues. The verb denotes failed leadership and the collapse of just order.

Both Plutarch and Josephus use ἀπόλλυμι to describe the collapse of political authority and communal stability. Plutarch recounts how the Spartan ephors, high magistrates, persist in organizing a major civic festival despite the loss of numerous warriors on the battlefield: "But the ephors, although it was at once apparent that their cause was ruined and their supremacy lost, (οἱ δὲ ἔφοροι, καίπερ εὐθὺς ὄντος καταφανοῦς ὅτι διέφθαρται τὰ πράγματα καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀπολωλέκασιν) would not allow…the fashion of the festival to be changed by the city" (εἴασαν οὔτε τὸ σχῆμα τῆς ἑορτῆς μεταβαλεῖν τὴν πόλιν).[118] The ephors remain alive and in office, yet their dominion (ἀρχή) or legitimacy to rule is lost among the people as their political cause is ruined (διαφθείρω). It appears plausible to regard διέφθαρται as a synonym to ἀπολωλέκασιν, both marking the collapse of political agency within a community.

Josephus marks ἀπόλλυμι as a state of ruin for the community because of (good) leadership being absent: "All…besought me, with tears, not to abandon them to the ruin which awaited them if deprived of my leadership" (παρεκάλουν τε κλαίοντες μὴ ἐγκαταλιπεῖν αὐτοὺς ἀπολουμένους εἰ τῆς ἐμῆς στρατηγίας ἀποστερηθεῖεν).[119] The participle ἀπολουμένους refers to 'the

[115] Chrysostom, *Discourse on Kingship* 3.48.

[116] Chrysostom, *Discourse on Kingship* 4.45, illustrates this with the example of "Xerxes and Darius marching down from Susa driving a mighty host of Persians, Medes, Sacae, Arabs, and Egyptians into our land of Greece to their destruction (ἀπολούμενον), were they functioning as kings or as butchers in driving this booty for future slaughter?"

[117] The whole fragment reads, "he considers courage, self-control, and prudence necessary even for those who disregard justice and wish to play the tyrant, if they are not speedily to perish" (καὶ τοίνυν τὴν μὲν ἀνδρείαν καὶ τὴν ἐγκράτειαν καὶ τὴν φρόνησιν ἀναγκαίας νομίζει καὶ τοῖς ἀμελοῦσι τοῦ δικαίου καὶ βουλομένοις τυραννεῖν, εἰ μὴ τάχιστα ἀπολοῦνται). Chrysostomus, *Discourse on Kingship* 3.58.

[118] Plutarch, *Agesilaus* 29.3.

[119] Josephus, *Life of Josephus* 205-6.

ruined ones', that is, the community left behind without competent leadership. Both in Josephus and in Plutarch, denotes the breakdown of collective political life – whether through eroded political legitimacy or the loss of competent leadership. It underscores how Hellenistic authors link political collapse to both structural and relational factors, capturing not merely the cessation of rule but a community's broader vulnerability when governance falters.

2.4.3 The Socio-Material Domain

Whereas the first two domains concern the destruction of individuals (domain I) or political entities (domain II), the third domain applies ἀπόλλυμι applied to the loss of what a person or community (society) deems valuable. These valued goods may be material or social in nature. Since political entities are constituted by and dependent upon such goods, overlap with the historical-political domain is expected. This is illustrated by Plutarch's account of the loss of Spartan control over Messene, "which stood first among Hellenic lands for its fertility, the possession and fruits of which they had enjoyed for so long a time" (καὶ πρωτεύουσαν ἀρετῇ τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς ἔχοντες καὶ καρπούμενοι χρόνον τοσοῦτον).[120] The land's fertility and recourses constitute valuable goods that both exacerbate the impact of Spartan loss of authority over a key strategic region and illustrate the overlap between the loss of political agency (domain II) and the deprivation of socio-material goods (domain III), which are essential for sustaining power.

The socio-material domain may be further subdivided into two sub-domains: material and economic goods and social and relational goods. An example of economic loss appears in the observation of Plutarch that the Romans "held in equal opprobrium those who lost an inherited wealth and those who forsook an ancestral poverty" (εἰς ἴσον ὅμως ὄνειδος ἐτίθεντο τοὺς ὑπάρχουσαν εὐπορίαν ἀπολέσαντας καὶ τοὺς πενίαν πατρῴαν μὴ διαφυλάξαντας).[121] We see that in Greco-Roman society, wealth and poverty are both treated as inherited conditions carrying moral expectations; to lose either violates the norm of continuity and self-control. Economic loss is inseparable from social judgement, illustrating the label 'social-material domain' and the close overlap between both sub-domains.

Before turning to the second subdomain, I discuss two representative examples from the loss of material/economic goods in Josephus. In his account of the occupation of Tiberias, "They [the Tiberians] besought me at the same time to recover what still remained of the plunder for those who had lost their property" (τὰ δ' ἐκ τῆς διαρπαγῆς περισσεύσαντα σῶσαί με τοῖς ἀπολέσασιν

[120] Plutarch, *Agesilaus* 34.2.

[121] Plutarch, *Sulla* 1.3.

ἐδέοντο).[122] Here, ἀπόλλυμι denotes material loss as a consequence of military conquest (overlap with domain II), and is, as in earlier contexts, explicitly contrasted with σῴζω. Those who have lost their property are not beyond restoration; rather, what is requests is the saving of what remains of the plunder so that it may be returned to them. The opposition between ἀπόλλυμι and σῴζω is, in this context, therefore not absolute. A second example occurs in Josephus' account of the Israelites wandering through the wilderness:

> That good land which he had persuaded them to quit was now lost to them, (καὶ ὅτι γῆς αὐτοὺς ἀγαθῆς πείσαντος ἀπαναστῆναι τὴν μὲν ἀπολέσειαν) but, instead of the felicity which he had promised to procure, here they were wandering in these miseries, lacking water and, should the manna happen to fail, doomed to utter destruction (ἀντὶ δὲ ἧς ὑπέσχετο παρέξειν εὐδαιμονίας ἐν ταύταις ἀλῶνται ταῖς ταλαιπωρίαις, ὕδατος μὲν σπανίζοντες, εἰ δὲ καὶ τὴν μάνναν ἐπιλιπεῖν συμβαίη τέλεον ἀπολούμενοι). (Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.296)

In this passage, ἀπόλλυμι occurs twice: First it reflects the loss of the fertile lands in Egypt which had sustained the community for ages. The second designates the Hebrews as 'the ones on their way to be doomed to utter destruction' (τέλεον ἀπολούμενοι). The use of τέλεον in combination with the participle is significant, as it indicates that being among the τέλεον ἀπολούμενοι means to be at the ultimate outcome of a miserable condition. As we have discovered by now, ἀπόλλυμι is not neutral but tied to expectations, fulfillment, trust, and decision-making consequences.

Besides wealth, social status was a highly valued good in Greco-Roman society. Status conferred not only social esteem but also concrete privileges such as influence, protection, and access to power. This is reflected by the Roman poet Horace (65 BC – 8 BC) in his satirical portrayal of the Roman populace as "stupidly enslaved to fame and dazzled by titles of honor and waxen masks."[123] In a shame-honor culture, public opinion could therefore destroy status. Chrysostom illustrates this in the downfall of the mythical figure Prometheus as he writes:

> And Prometheus, whom I take to have been a sort of sophist, he found being destroyed by popular opinion; (τὸν δὲ Προμηθέα, σοφιστήν τινα, ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, καταλαβὼν ὑπὸ δόξης ἀπολλύμενον) for his liver swelled and grew whenever he was praised and shrivelled again when he was censured (νῦν μὲν οἰδοῦντος αὐτῷ καὶ αὔξοντος τοῦ ἥπατος ὁπότε ἐπαινοῖτο, πάλιν δὲ φθίνοντος ὁπότε ψέγοιεν). (Chrysostom, *Discourses 8. On Virtue* 33)

In Greek thought, the liver is associated with the deepest emotions, contrasting with the rational mind. Whereas praise temporarily inflates one's standing, blame destroys it, and one's well-

[122] Josephus, *Life of Josephus* 333.

[123] Horace, *Satires I.VI*, line 16-17.

being is at the mercy of the people. Chrysostom indirectly criticizes those who seek honor that is externally grounded rather than secured through internal virtue. He presents ἀπόλλυμι as social and reputational ruin brought about by crowd's judgment. Such social destruction is not only confined to myth but characterizes ordinary social life: "And yet how many here have met destruction because of these allurements? Loss of reputation, at any rate, everyone has suffered" (Καίτοι πόσοι διὰ ταῦθ' ὑμῶν ἀπολώλασιν; ἀδοξοῦσι μέν γε πάντες).[124] Shameful reputation, the loss of honor is both the most common and the most feared form of deprivation in Greco-Roman society.

The fragility of social status is likewise evident in the courtroom, where it could collapse rapidly and irreversibly once challenged or subjected by judicial scrutiny. Josephus recounts how Antipater, brought to trial on suspicion of attempting to murder his father, Herod the Great, laments: "It was you, father, who involuntarily brought about my ruin, (σὺ δέ με, πάτερ, ἄκων ἀπώλεσας) by compelling me to give my envious foes an opportunity for calumny" (ἀναγκάσας καιρὸν διαβολῆς δοῦναι τῷ φθόνῳ).[125] Here ἀπόλλυμι denotes the collapse of social standing and relational security. Antipater's ruin is caused by public accusation, even worse, by his envious foes, which in a shame-based society effectively dismantles one's status.[126] The modifier ἄκων (involuntarily/unwilling) is significant, as Antipater attributes his ruin to unintended paternal action rather than personal guilt. In a few sections earlier of the same account, a related use of ἀπόλλυμι appears. The widowed wife of Pheroas – whom Antipater had entrusted with administering the poison to Herod – confesses: "After all, why should I longer guard these secrets, now that Pheroras is dead? (ἔτι φείδομαι τῶν ἀπορρήτων, Φερώρα τεθνεῶτος) Merely to save Antipater who has been the ruin of us all?" (σώζουσα τὸν ἀπολέσαντα πάντας ἡμᾶς Ἀντίπατρον).[127] Spoken by a widowed woman – already among the most socially vulnerable figures in ancient society – the term acquires additional force. Widowhood entailed the loss of male protection, legal security, and public standing; Antipater's intrigue exacerbates this vulnerability by exposing her household to suspicion, torture, and disgrace. Once again, ἀπόλλυμι appears in contrast to the verb σώζω, implying that a person who caused social ruin is undeserving of being saved from judgment.

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[124] Chrysostom, *Discourses 32. To the People of Alexandria* 47.

[125] Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.634.

[126] Cf. Philo, *Life of Moses* 2.249 (cited in §2.4.2).

[127] Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.595.

2.4.4 The Ethical-Mental Domain

How should on live? Which mentality is desired in daily life? In the ethical-mental domain, ἀπόλλυμι denotes the ruin of the inner capacities that constitute proper moral agency. The verb marks the collapse of rational judgment, ethical orientation, and self-governance – faculties that are regarded by ancient philosophers as the core of human personhood. Since virtue and vice are understood as states of the mind and will, their destruction or preservation is both a moral and mental event. Because the authors considered in this study write from distinct philosophical traditions, they will be discussed separately in this section.

Epictetus ranks among the most prominent Stoic philosophers of the first centuries after Christ.[128] His teachings were collected and recorded by his pupil Arrian of Nicomedia. In his *Encheiridion*, a short handbook of practical philosophy, Epictetus offers his view of the goal in life: "Be content, therefore, in everything to be a philosopher."[129] For Epictetus, a philosopher is one who exercises control over what lies in his power. He states in the opening lines of the *Encheiridion*: "Under our control are conception, choice, desire, aversion, and, in a word, everything that is our own doing; not under our control are our body, our property, reputation, office, and, in a word, everything that is not our own doing."[130] Epictetus warns that whenever one turns to matters beyond one's control, one abandons the proper orientation in life. As he puts it, "If it should ever happen to you that you turn to externals with a view to pleasing someone, rest assured that you have lost your plan of life" (Ἐάν ποτέ σοι γένηται ἔξω στραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ βούλεσθαι ἀρέσαι τινί, ἴσθι ὅτι ἀπώλεσας τὴν ἔνστασιν).[131] The verb ἀπόλλυμι denotes the forfeiture of one's fundamental orientation in life as a self-controlled, rational and moral agent.

How should one conduct oneself as a philosopher in the most intense moments of life, particularly in moments of loss? Epictetus writes, "Never say about anything, 'I have lost it,' but only 'I have given it back'" (Μηδέποτε ἐπὶ μηδενὸς εἴπῃς ὅτι "ἀπώλεσα αὐτό," ἀλλ' ὅτι "ἀπέδωκα").[132] External goods, Epictetus argues, cannot truly be lost in the strict sense, since they never belong to one's moral self or sphere of control; to speak of 'to lose something' (ἀπόλλυμι) is therefore a mistaken evaluative judgment. What lies within one's power is not events themselves but one's

[128] Theodore Scaltsas and Andrew S. Mason, eds., *The Philosophy of Epictetus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

[129] Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 23.

[130] Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 1.

[131] Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 23.

[132] Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 11.

judgment about them.[133] This way of life does not admit any delay. Epictetus urges his readers to make progress toward the philosophical life because "without realizing it you will make no progress, but, living and dying, will continue to be a layman throughout" (λήσεις σεαυτὸν οὐ προκόψας, ἀλλ' ἰδιώτης διατελέσεις καὶ ζῶν καὶ ἀποθνήσκων).[134] The layman, the unlearned person (ἰδιώτης) is the opposite of the philosopher (φιλόσοφος). It is of utmost importance that each day be approached as an opportunity to make progress toward becoming more fully a philosopher:

> And if you meet anything that is laborious, or sweet, or held in high repute, or in no repute, remember that now is the contest, and here before you are the Olympic games, (τι ἢ ἡδὺ ἢ ἔνδοξον ἢ ἄδοξον προσάγηται, μέμνησο, ὅτι νῦν ὁ ἀγὼν καὶ ἤδη πάρεστι τὰ Ὀλύμπια) and that it is impossible to delay any longer, and that it depends on a single day and a single action, whether progress is lost or saved (καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀναβάλλεσθαι οὐκέτι καὶ ὅτι παρὰ μίαν ἡμέραν καὶ ἓν πρᾶγμα καὶ ἀπόλλυται προκοπὴ καὶ σῴζεται). This is the way Socrates became what he was, by paying attention to nothing but his reason in everything that he encountered (Σωκράτης οὕτως ἀπετελέσθη, ἐπὶ πάντων τῶν προσαγομένων αὐτῷ[Z] μηδενὶ ἄλλῳ προσέχων ἢ τῷ λόγῳ). (Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 51)

Epictetus uses ἀπόλλυμι to describe the loss of moral progress (προκοπὴ) which is the danger for one's ethical formation. By juxtaposing the verbs ἀπόλλυται and σῴζεται, Epictetus regards the ethical life as dynamic and reversible: one may be on the path toward loss and yet recover his or her progress or fall back after having advanced. In the athletic metaphor, ἀπόλλυμι signifies the loss of an athlete's training progress toward the Olympic games. Epictetus denotes ἀπόλλυμι not as a fixed state but a mutable condition within an ongoing moral process.

For Epictetus, the loss of moral progress amounts to the destruction of the self. To be a man is to be rational, distinguished from the wild beasts. "See to it, then, that you never act like a wild beast; if you do, you will have destroyed (ἀπώλεσας) the man in you, you have not fulfilled your profession. You will also destroy the man (ἀπώλετο ὁ ἄνθρωπος) in you if you act like sheep, surrendering to your belly or sex-organs."[135] Epictetus concludes, "So modest acts preserve the modest man, whereas immodest acts destroy him (οὕτως τὸν μὲν αἰδήμονα σῴζει τὰ αἰδήμονα ἔργα, ἀπολλύει δὲ τὰ ἀναιδῆ); and faithful acts preserve the faithful man while acts of the

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[133] Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 11, "What concern is it of yours by whose instrumentality the Giver called for its return? So long as He gives it you, take care of it as of a thing that is not your own, as travelers treat their inn" (τί δὲ σοὶ μέλει, διὰ τίνος σε ὁ δοὺς ἀπήτησε; μέχρι δ' ἂν διδῷ, ὡς ἀλλοτρίου αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελοῦ, ὡς τοῦ πανδοχείου οἱ παριόντες). Cf. Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 16.

[134] Epictetus, *Encheiridion* 51.

[135] Epictetus, *Discourses* II.9.

opposite character destroy him (τὸν δὲ πιστὸν τὰ πιστὰ καὶ τὰ ἐναντία ἀπολλύει)."[136] The antithesis σῴζει/ἀπολλύει (save, preserve/destroy) presents moral identity as something actively constituted and undone by habitual practice. Virtue is sustained through corresponding actions, whereas vice entails a process of self-dissolution. Thus, ἀπόλλυμι denotes the erosion of the rational and ethical self, just as σῴζω denotes its ongoing preservation. Once again, ἀπόλλυμι is not presented as a fixed destiny or an irreversible state. It can be actively resisted by practicing the actions proper to a virtuous person. Through faithful conduct, one may prevent one's own destruction and preserve one's moral self.

Chrysostom cannot be assigned to a specific philosophical school but may be best understood as the ultimate sophist: a philosopher who combines diverse philosophical traditions and enacts his thought in the public and civic sphere.[137] Chrysostom criticizes those who turn to philosophy only in times of distress, or when they experience severe misfortune, such as the loss (ἀπολέσας) of relatives or property.[138] Instead, one should strive to be a philosopher in every circumstance of life. Chrysostom identifies idleness and greed as the most destructive vices in human life: "For idleness and lack of occupation are the best things in the world to ruin the foolish" (ἡ γὰρ ἀργία καὶ τὸ σχολὴν ἄγειν ἀπόλλυσι πάντων μάλιστα τοὺς ἀνοήτους ἀνθρώπους);[139] and "At greed, the worst of deities, my son, why grasps thou? (τί τῆς κακίστης δαιμόνων ἐφίεσαιπλ-εονεξίας, παῖ; μὴ σύ γ'. ἄδικος ἡ θεός) …for what is more necessary than life (καὶ γάρ τοι τί τοῦ ζῆν ἀναγκαιότερόν ἐστιν) …but nevertheless men will destroy even that for money" (ἀλλ' ὅμως καὶ τοῦτο ἀπολλύουσι χρημάτων).[140] In these passages, ἀπόλλυμι functions as the unifying term for moral self-destruction. In the context of idleness, it denotes the gradual ruin of character through neglect, while in the context of greed it names the extreme outcome of ethical disorder – the deliberate sacrifice of life itself for wealth. The verb thus spans both passive erosion and active annihilation, suggesting that vice operates not merely as moral failure but as a force that undoes the conditions of human flourishing. For Chrysostom, like Epictetus, ἀπόλλυμι marks the point at which misguided desire undermines the conditions of properly human life governed by nature and reason.

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[136] Epictetus, *Discourses* II.9.

[137] See the study of Nir Y. Stern, "Dio Chrysostom: a Philosopher in Civic Space" (PhD diss. Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, 2021).

[138] Chrysostom, *Discourses 27. On Symposia* 9.

[139] Chrysostom, *Discourses 10. On Servants* 7.

[140] Chrysostom, *Discourses 17. On Covetousness* 9-11.

Arguing from the platonic tradition,[141] Plutarch uses ἀπόλλυμι in a manner similar to that of Epictetus[142] and Chrysostom. He writes about the terrors of the soul (ψυχῆς) when the body (σῶμα) is asleep: "When grief overtakes me as I close my eyes, I'm murdered by my dreams" (ὅταν δὲ νυστάζοντά μ' ἡ λύπη λάβῃ, ἀπόλλυμ' ὑπὸ τῶν ἐνυπνίων).[143] The verb expresses the way vicious passion, such as envy, fear, and anger, overwhelm and dismantle the soul. While the body may rest, the soul is ruined through tormenting images and anxieties; thus, ἀπόλλυμι signifies in this context for Plutarch the collapse of inner order and rational self-control.

Philo presents in his allegorical interpretation of Genesis 35 the philosophical ethical ideas as embedded within the Jewish tradition. In this story, Jacob commands his household to get rid of all the foreign gods before traveling to Bethel to build an alter for the Lord. Philo emphasizes, "And Jacob is not said to receive them, but to hide and destroy them" (ὁ δὲ Ἰακὼβ οὐ λέγεται λαμβάνειν, ἀλλὰ κρύπτειν καὶ ἀπολλύναι).[144] Earlier in the treatise, Philo clarified the allegorical meaning of the destruction of these gods:

> For we have made our own, if so be that we are under virtue's training, a study absolutely vital which was Jacob's study also (μεμελετήκαμεν γάρ, εἴ γε ἀρετῆς ἐσμεν ἀσκηταί, μελέτην ἀναγκαίαν, ἣν καὶ Ἰακὼβ ἐμελέτησεν), to consign to death and destruction the gods that are alien to the soul (ἀπολλύναι καὶ διαφθείρειν | τοὺς ἀλλοτρίους τῆς ψυχῆς [τοὺς] θεούς), the gods molded in metal, the making of which Moses has forbidden (τοὺς χωνευτοὺς θεούς, οὓς ἀπηγόρευκε Μωυσῆς δημιουργεῖν). (Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.22)

Philo's point is that the biblical narrative symbolically describes the ethical task of the virtuous person: the foreign gods are a metaphor for false beliefs, passions, and corrupt habits, while Jacob signifies the rational soul, or the person committed to virtue. That Jacob does not accept these objects but hides and destroys them signifies that the truly good person does not merely refrain from profiting from vice but actively eradicates it from the soul. In this passage, Philo exploits the semantic layering of ἀπόλλυμι. Jacob is said to destroy material objects – foreign idols. Yet this literal usage functions effectively for Philo's readers because ἀπόλλυμι already carries an established ethical sense in ancient Greek discourse. The physical destruction of idols

[141] In our modern division of Platonism, Plutarch belongs to the Middle Platonists.

[142] Despite this agreement, the Stoic tradition differed from Middle Platonism in several respects, see Franco Ferrari and Gretchen Reydams-Schils, "Middle Platonism and its Relation to Stoicism and the Peripatetic tradition," in *The Routledge Handbook of Neoplatonism*, ed. Svetla Slaveva-Griffin and Pauliina Remes (London: Routledge, 2014), 40-51.

[143] Plutarch, *Moralia. Virtue and Vice* 100 F.

[144] Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.23.

thus readily signifies, at the allegorical level, the moral eradication of false beliefs and passions from the soul. For Philo, the truly wise person does permanently eradicate the passions: "But in the case of the wise man the passions perish and are destroyed, not for some short period but "even to this day," that is, always (*ἀπόλλυται δὲ καὶ διαφθείρεται παρὰ τῷ σοφῷ, οὐ πρὸς βραχύν τινα χρόνον*).[145] Philo shares the understanding of *ἀπόλλυμι* as moral destruction. However, he does not construe it as a condition resulting from immoral behavior but as an intentional ethical task to purify the soul from its false 'gods'.

Lastly, I discuss two instances in which *ἀπόλλυμι* denotes the collapse of intellectual and moral integrity. In Philo, this is vividly illustrated in his allegorical reading of the Israelites' encounters with Sihon and Moab, where reliance on autonomous human reasoning rather than divine wisdom leads to the "construction of the city of Mind that corrupts the truth," (*καὶ οἰκοδομήσομεν τὴν πόλιν τοῦ διαφθείροντος τὴν ἀλήθειαν νοῦ*).[146] When Philo exclaims, "Woe to thee, Moab…thou hast lost truth" (*οὐαί σοι, Μωάβ...ἀπολώλεκας ἀλήθειαν*), [147] the verb marks the ruin of epistemic and moral orientation: judgment becomes captive to false reasoning, and ethical discernment collapses. A similar usage appears in Josephus, were Tiro, an old soldier, laments that "justice had been trampled underfoot, truth was dead, the laws of nature confounded, the world full of iniquity" (*καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ἐβόα περιιὼν πεπατῆσθαι τὸ δίκαιον, ἀπολωλέναι τὴν ἀλήθειαν, συγκεχύσθαι τὴν φύσιν*).[148] Here *ἀπόλλυμι* denotes the loss of the inner faculties upon which moral life depends. The loss of truth entails the loss of the capacity to judge and act rightly, showing that epistemic corruption and ethical disintegration are inseparable.

2.4.5 Conclusion

Across the Greek sources surveyed, *ἀπόλλυμι* consistently denotes forms of ruin that range from bodily death to the collapse of political agency. These uses cluster into four domains whose boundaries occasionally overlap yet reflecting distinct loci of destruction: the individual body, communal structures, valued goods, and inner moral agency. Notably, none of the authors use *ἀπόλλυμι* in an explicitly eschatological context; the verb functions within the horizons of embodied life, social relations, and historical processes rather than as a term describing final

[145] Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.25.

[146] Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.228.

[147] Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 3.231.

[148] Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.544.

judgment, an otherworldly destiny or any future reality. This aligns with Kuck's analysis that "the vast majority of moral philosophers make no use of postmortem judgment in their extant writings."[149] Semantically, the force of ἀπόλλυμι is sharpened by recurring contrasts, above all with σῴζω, which frames ἀπόλλυμι as the negation of rescue, preservation, or continuity. This semantic profile provides the necessary framework for the final chapter, which turns to Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι in the Corinthian correspondence. We may ask what semantic world was evoked for the Corinthians when the word ἀπόλλυμι was read aloud repeatedly in their congregation.

[149] Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict*, 119.

Chapter 3

The Corinthian Crisis

3.1 Introduction

The frequent use of destruction language by Paul in his letters to the Corinthian church invites to a closer examination into both the (pastoral) circumstances of the letters and the specific literary and rhetorical contexts in which references of ἀπόλλυμι occur. Paul is generally assumed to have authored both 1 and 2 Corinthians, possibly as part of a longer epistolary exchange with the Corinthian church.[150] Paul's relationship with the Corinthians was frequently strained. After founding the church (cf. Acts 18), Paul adopted a paternal role toward the Corinthians (1 Cor 4:14-15). This role became increasingly tense as he confronted internal divisions (1:10-17), moral abuse (1 Cor 5), and theological confusion (1 Cor 15). At the same time his apostolic authority was repeatedly challenged (2 Cor 10-13), and rival figures, whom he labels 'super apostles', emerged within the community (2 Cor 11:5).

Despite the strained nature of his relationship with the Corinthians, Paul's letters attest to his deep emotional attachment to the community (2 Cor 2:4; 7:3) and to its importance for his ministry. Historians, like Donald Engels, have also emphasized the strategic importance of Corinth for early Christianity, "for its numerous trade connections would assure the rapid propagation of the new religion."[151] After its rebuilt in 44 BC, Corinth developed into a major trading center, controlling key routes between the Corinthian Gulf and the Saronic Gulf. As the Greek historian Strabo (ca. 64 BC – AD 24) writes, "Corinth is called 'wealthy' because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbors."[152] The city attracted a wide range of merchants as well as individuals seeking rapid social advancement and increased wealth. Yet, the sophist Alciphron observes of Corinth, "I learned in a short time the nauseating behavior of the rich and the misery of the poor."[153] Such testimony indicates that prosperity was largely confined to the social elite and successful traders, while poverty

[150] John Hurd deals extensively with this matter and argues that *1 Corinthians* was the fourth stage in the longer dialogue, see John C. Hurd, *The Origin of I Corinthians* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1965). Gordon Fee states that "1 Corinthians is the third in an exchange of letters between Paul and Corinth." See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 7-8.

[151] Donald Engels, *Roman Corinth: An Alternative Model for the Classical City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 20.

[152] Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20.

[153] Alciphron, *Epistles* 3.60.

remained widespread among the citizens. One may assume that Corinth, in Paul's time, was home to "a mixed ethnic population of Roman freedman, indigenous Greeks, immigrants from far and wide,"[154] and a well-established Jewish community.[155] Although Corinth was situated in Greek territory, it was profoundly shaped by Roman cultural values. As a colony of Rome, the city was dominated by Roman architecture, civic institutions, and cultural practices. Religious life in Corinth reflected the same diversity as its inhabitants (cf. 1 Cor 8:5).[156] The pinnacle of religious expression, however, was the temple of Aphrodite, which occupied a prominent position in society, functioning both as a major religious and economic institution. As Strabo notes, "And the temple of Aphrodite was so rich that it owned more than a thousand temple-slaves, courtesans, whom both men and women had dedicated to the goddess."[157] It was in this city that a small Christian community emerged, to which Paul addressed his letters.

Paul's eschatology belongs to the theological core of the Corinthian correspondence. Apart from the issue of headdress (1 Cor 11:2-16), Paul approaches every problem within the church from an eschatological framework. Gordon Fee labels this eschatological outlook as one of the major theological contributions of the letters to the Corinthian.[158] The aim of this chapter is to map the semantic domains onto Paul's eschatological texts involving ἀπόλλυμι, to assess the interpretive implications of such an approach. This chapter proceeds as follows: First, I argue that the nature of the problems in the Corinthian church stems from its entanglement with the social and cultural values of Corinthian society (3.2). Second, the chapter outlines two scholarly positions regarding Paul's understanding of σοφία in Corinth (3.3). Finally, the ἀπόλλυμι passages are examined through the lens of semantic-domain analysis (3.4).

3.2 The Issue in Corinth

For several decades, scholars have discussed the precise nature of the underlying issue in the Corinthian church that Paul addresses in his letters. In *1 Corinthians*, Paul confronts numerous concerns within the community, including factions (1:10-17), sexual misconduct (5:1-13), legal

[154] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), intro., Kobo eBook.

[155] Craig S. de Vos, *Church and Community Conflicts: The Relationships of the Thessalonian, Corinthian, and Philippian Churches with Their Wider Civic Communities* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 1999), 187-88.

[156] Fee, *Corinthians*, 3.

[157] Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20.

[158] Fee, *Corinthians*, 17-18.

disputes (6:1-11), marital matters (7:1-40), food sacrificed to idols (8:1-11:1), headdress in public worship (11:2-16), the Lord's supper (11:17-34), and the use of spiritual gifts such as tongues and prophecy (12:1-14.40). In view of this wide array of pastoral and ethical concerns, many scholars question whether Paul's argument on the resurrection (15:1-58) should be understood as an isolated theological excursus at the conclusion of the letter. As N.T. Wright observes, "it would be unusual for Paul to address this topic in purely abstract theological terms without relating it to the community's practical concerns."[159]

Scholars have sought to explain the underlying problem of the Corinthian church which connects chapter 15 with the rest of the corpus by identifying conceptual parallels with Gnosticism, Hellenistic Judaism, Stoicism, Cynicism, and Epicureanism. These attempts have proven unconvincing,[160] not least because their reliance on the problematic method of mirror-reading: reconstructing the Corinthians' view by inferring them from Paul's responses in his letters. This process can fall into circular reasoning and easily shaped by prior assumptions as the interpreter first assumes what the Corinthians believed based on Paul's statements and then uses that reconstruction to explain those same statements.[161] Others locate the source of the Corinthian problems in aspects of Paul's theology itself: the issue could stem from confusion about Paul's ongoing modifications of his own theology.[162] Another hypothesis is that the issue is rooted in a misunderstanding of Paul's message. This became the dominant explanation for the conflicts in the Corinthian church in twentieth-century scholarship.

The central claim of the hypothesis is that the Corinthians held a so-called 'over-realized eschatology' – they "are behaving as if the age to come were already consummated…for them there is no 'not yet' to qualify the 'already' of realized eschatology."[163] This suggests that Paul's

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[159] N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), chap. 6.2, Kindle.

[160] For a discussion on these proposals see David G. Horrell and Edward Adams, eds., *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 16-23.

[161] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, intro. For an earlier study on this issue, see John M.G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73-93.

[162] Horrell and Adams (*Christianity at Corinth*, 23) discuss in this regard the study of John Hurd who reconstructs the Corinthian issue based on Paul's reprimands in his letters (see footnote 150).

[163] C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 109. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 49-50; E. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today*, trans. W.J. Montague (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1969), 125; and J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1959), 165. The development of this interpretive consensus can be traced through a series of influential studies. Wilhem Lütgert first broke from the older view [advocated by Ferdinand C. Bauer, "Die Christuspartei in der korinthischen Gemeinde, der Gegensatz des paulinischen und petrinischen Christentums in der ältesten Kirche, der Apostle Petrus in Rom," *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie* 4 (1831): 61-206] that Paul's opponents were primarily Judaizers, proposing instead that he faced libertine pneumatics who exaggerated their spiritual freedom (Wilhelm Lütgert, *Freiheitspredigt und*

emphasize on future resurrection sought to challenge the Corinthians' premature boasting, insisting that the full reality of God's kingdom had not yet arrived. Central to Paul's critique are passages such as, "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign – and that without us!"[164] Although widely accepted, this interpretation should not be regarded as a fully complete paradigm for interpreting the Corinthian correspondence. As Anthony Thiselton, one of the principal advocates, states, "I am not suggesting that an over-realized eschatology provides a *necessary* cause for each individual problem, but that it does provide a *sufficient* cause."[165]

The 'over-realized eschatology' model has been widely criticized and is no longer considered as persuasive as it once was, since it is primarily based on the speculative premise of Gnostic influence on the Corinthian church.[166] For instance, the prominent Rudolf Bultmann viewed Hellenistic Christianity as deeply marked by Gnostic eschatology[167] that obscured the

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Schwarmgeister in Korinth: Ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik der Christuspartei (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1908), 10-157). Adolf Schlatter further developed this view by suggesting that the Corinthians held a form of perfectionism, believing they already possessed future blessings. As a result, their anticipation of future glory removed any sense of ethical restraint in their present pursuit of spiritual fulfillment (Adolf Schlatter, *Die korinthische Theologie* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1914), 28-9. Karl Barth, and later Rudolf Bultmann, then argued that all the issues in *1 Corinthians* are unified by on theological problem: denial of the resurrection (see Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.J. Stenning (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1933), 5-6; and Rudolf Bultmann, "Karl Barth, 'Die Aufersethung der Toten,'" in *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1961), 38-51). This trajectory was strengthened by Hans von Soden and Julius Schniewind, who argued that the Corinthians believed the resurrection had already occurred spiritually (see Hans F. von Soden, "Sakrament und Ethik bei Paulus: Zur Frage der literarischen und theologischen Einheitlichkeit von 1 Kor. 8-10," in *Marburger Theologische Studien: Rudolf Otto-Festgruss*, ed. Heinrich Frick, vol. 1 (Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1931), 1-40; and Julius Schniewind, "Die Leugner der Auferstehung in Korinth," in *Nachgelassene Reden und Aufsätze*, ed. Ernst Kähler (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1952), 110-39. Some scholars, like Walter Schmithals and Ulrich Wilckens identified the Corinthians as proto-Gnostics who saw resurrection as purely spiritual, and therefore already reigning in the heavenly realm (see Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians* (Nashville & New York: Abingdon, 1971; and Ulrich Wilckens, *Weisheit und Torheit: Eine exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu 1. Kor. 1 und 2* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1959). James Robinson advances the "realized eschatology" view by arguing that 1 Cor 8:4 and 15:12 reveal a Corinthian belief in having already attained resurrection glory, linking this to early Gnostic thought (James M. Robinson, "Kerygma and History in the New Testament," in *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, ed. James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1971), 33-44. Ernst Käsemann connected the "realized eschatology" to an overemphasis on present spiritual experience, contrasting it with Paul's apocalyptic "eschatological reservation" (Ernst Käsemann, *New Testament Questions*, 132-4). Finally, Anthony Thiselton systematized the consensus, proposing that an over-realized eschatology expressed in charismatic enthusiasm lay at the root of Corinth's problems (Anthony C. Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology at Corinth," *New Testament Studies* 24, no. 4 (1978): 510-26). For an extensive overview of the development of the realized-eschatology hypothesis, see Kuck, *Judgment and Community Conflict,* 16-25.

[164] 1 Cor 4:8 (NIV).

[165] Thiselton, "Realized Eschatology," 512.

[166] Thiselton (525), however, argues independently of any assumed Gnostic influence: "Firstly, our hypothesis about the situation at Corinth makes it unnecessary to resort to theories about gnostic influences there."

[167] Cf. Barrett, *A Commentary*, 55; Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 146.

distinction between 'the present age' (αἰὼν οὑτος) and 'the age to come' (αἰων μέλλων). Therefore, Paul's argument in 1 Cor 15 is primarily a polemic against a Gnosticizing party within the Corinthian church.[168] Matthew Malcolm traces this interpretive trajectory back to Ferdinand Bauer's influential distinction between "Petrine Hebraic/Judaising Christianity, and Pauline "Hellenistic" Christianity."[169] Baur understood Paul's gospel as a liberation from the constraints of Judaism, and as introducing a moderated realization of eschatological hope.[170] This sharp distinction between Petrine and Pauline Christianity has significantly be undermined by modern scholarship on the so-called 'New Perspective on Paul'/'Paul within Judaism'.[171]

Richard B. Hays is often regarded as the primary proponent in developing an alternative hypothesis concerning the Corinthain issue. He remarks:

> Many interpreters have argued that the Corinthian error was based on "overrealized eschatology," … Indeed, most of the evidence of the letter suggests that the Corinthian problem was almost exactly the reverse: They *lacked* any definite eschatology, with the result that they were heedless of God's future judgment of their actions. It is far more likely that their "boasting" was caused not by an excess of eschatological enthusiasm but by their infatuation with popular philosophical notions of how the wise person can transcend the ordinary limitations of human existence.[172]

The problem in Corinth did not stem from an overly enthusiastic appropriation of Jewish eschatology, but rather from the fusion of Christian conviction with prevailing pagan philosophical ideas.[173] A few years prior to Hays' thesis, E. Earle Ellis had already challenged the eschatological reading of 1 Cor 4:8, arguing that the kind of boasting Paul condemns in 4:7-8 would be inappropriate both before and after the Parousia.[174] Moreover, he suggested that 1 Cor

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[168] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1952), 169.

[169] Matthew R. Malcolm, "Premature Triumphalism in Corinth," *The Expository Times* 128, no. 3 (2016): 116.

[170] Ferdinand C. Bauer, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Works, His Epistles and Teachings*, 2 vols., translated from the original German edition published in 1845 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), vol. 2, 223.

[171] E. P. Sanders is seen as the initiator of this major shift in NT scholarship. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1977).

[172] Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 70.

[173] N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (London: SPCK Publishing, 2019), 480; N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection*, chap. 6.2.

[174] E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1978), 77.

15 addresses not an 'over-realized eschatology', but a Platonic view of the soul's immortality that renders bodily resurrection unnecessary.[175] We see that the breakdown of the 'over-realized eschatology' model had longer been anticipated in scholarship than Hays' argument. Even so, Thiselton subsequently revised his emphasis to allow for greater influence from the wider cultural environment of Corinth.[176]

With the growing recognition of the role of Corinth's intellectual milieu and the decline of the 'over-realized eschatology' hypothesis,[177] other explanations for the Corinthian problems gained prominence. David Garland notes that recent scholarship attributes the Corinthian issue to forms of 'personality-centered politics'.[178] The several divisions within the church were not primarily theological in nature but emerged around competing leaders. Some individuals within the church, probably of higher socioeconomic status, were strongly influenced by contemporary cultural values (worldly wisdom) and used their social position to shape and control communal worship.[179] While Garland's analysis is compelling, I regard his position as one concrete manifestation of the root problem in the Corinthian church.[180] This problem is summarized by Lyle Vander Broek as follows:

> Each of the community problems Paul needed to address grew out of the Corinthians' inability to let the gospel message fully reshape their gentile, Greco-Roman lives, whether because they misunderstood that message or because they rejected it outright. They were Hellenists through and through, and this eschatological, cross-centered, body-affirming Jewish sect called Christianity demanded that they enter another theological and ethical world.[181]

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[175] E. Earle Ellis, "Christ Crucified," in *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament Essays in Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L.L. Morris*, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 73.

[176] Craig S. Keener, "Overrealized Eschatology or Lack of Eschatology in Corinth?" in *Scripture, Texts, and Tracings in 1 Corinthians*, ed. Linda L. Belleville and B.J. Oropeza (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019), 44.

[177] Cf. Oh-Young Kwon, *1 Corinthians 1-4: Reconstructing Its Social and Rhetorical Situation and Re-Reading It Cross-Culturally for Korean-Confucian Christians Today* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 19-20.

[178] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, intro. Cf. Andrew D. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1-6* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 93; Margaret M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 67.

[179] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, intro.

[180] I do not exclude the possibility that Garland himself understands his position in this way.

[181] Lyle D. Vander Broek, *Breaking Barriers: The Possibilities of Christian Community in a Lonely World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 27.

If conformity to Greco-Roman culture lay at the root of the Corinthian problems, it is no surprise that believers sought status through allegiance to prominent leaders (1:10-17), tolerated sexual immorality (5:1-13), pursued public litigation to defend their honor (6:1-11), struggled to negotiate marriage and sexuality within Paul's ethic (7:1-40), negotiated worship practices according to social conventions (8:1-11:1), reproduced class divisions at the Lord's Supper (11:17-34), and treated spiritual gifts as means of self-promotion and distinction rather than communal edification (12:1-14:40). Chapter 15 thus supplies the eschatological horizon for Paul's critique of Corinthian behavior. By insisting on the future resurrection of the body and the transformation of believers into the likeness of Christ, Paul directly challenges the Corinthian tendencies toward status-seeking, moral permissiveness, social stratification, and spiritual elitism. With the logic of the cross and the coming resurrection, Paul reorients identity away from present honor and cultural prestige toward participation in the coming age.

3.3 Paul and the Σοφία of the World

In the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians, Paul sets out the contrast between the 'wisdom of the world' (σοφία τοῦ κόσμου) and the 'wisdom of God' (σοφίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ). In confronting the divisions at Corinth, he challenges prevailing notions of wisdom which has prompted considerable debate over the conceptual background of the word σοφίᾳ. As Timothy Brookins notes, interpretations of σοφίᾳ often function as hermeneutical key for explaining the Corinthian crisis; for example, identifying σοφίᾳ with Gnosticism underlies the 'over-realized eschatology' theory.[182] Having argued that the Corinthian problem is rooted in the community's entanglement with Greco-Roman culture, this section is limited to a discussion of two scholarly interpretations of σοφίᾳ that proceed from this premise: the 'rhetoric hypothesis' and the 'Stoic hypothesis'.

The textual basis for the 'rhetoric hypothesis' is 1 Cor 2:1-5. In this passage, Paul states that he did not come to the Corinthians "with eloquence or human wisdom…and my message and preaching were not with wise and persuasive word, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power"[183] (καθ' ὑπεροχὴν λόγου ἢ σοφίας…καὶ ὁ λόγος μου καὶ τὸ κήρυγμά μου οὐκ ἐν πειθοῖς σοφίας [λόγοις] ἀλλ' ἐν ἀποδείξει πνεύματος καὶ δυνάμεως). Paul seems to adopt an anti-rhetorical stance, deliberately refusing to persuade his audience in the manner of Greco-Roman sophists. Recent

[182] Timothy A. Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Corinthians: Paul, Stoicism, and Spiritual Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2024), 15-6. This study draws primarily on Brookins' most recent work; for his earlier work (dissertation) on the topic, see Timothy A. Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

[183] 1 Cor 2:1, 4 (NIV).

scholarship typically presents the rhetorical thesis in two closely related strands. One holds that Paul deliberately distances himself from persuasive rhetorical techniques, locating the efficacy of proclamation entirely in the work of the Spirit. The other stresses the Paul contests the Corinthian valuation of eloquence as a basis for honor and social distinction.[184] Since the thesis has been developed by numerous scholars,[185] the present discussion will limit itself to the position of one of its principal advocates, Bruce Winter.

The core argument of Winter is that "Paul deliberately adopts an anti-sophistic stance and thus defends his church-planting activities in Corinth against the backdrop of sophistic conventions, perceptions and categories."[186] In Paul's time, the term 'sophist' referred to "those rhetoricians whose ability in oratory was such that they could both secure a public following and attract students to their schools."[187] There were many sophists (and their students) active in Corinth, including Epictetus and Plutarch.[188] Sophists were socially prominent figures who pursued honor and wealth, often charging high fees for their instruction and enjoying elite status. They attracted students through carefully staged public performances that emphasized impressive delivery and outward form. There was much rivalry between the pupils of different teachers, often engaging in *synkrisis*, which frequently resulted in factionalism.[189] George van Kooten interprets the factionalism in the Corinthian church in light of this phenomenon, where disciples claimed loyalty to either Paul, Apollos, Cephas or Christ (1 Cor 1:12).[190]

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[184] Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom*, 17-8.

[185] Cf. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*; Larry L. Welborn, "On the Discord in Corinth: 1 Cor. 1-4 and Ancient Politics. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 (1987): 85-111; Stephen M. Pogoloff, *Logos and Sophia: The Rhetorical Situation of 1 Corinthians* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1992); and Duane Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rethoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See for the nuances between these positions, Corin Mihăilă, "The Greco-Roman Rethoric Background of *Sophia* in 1 Corinthians 1-4," *Perichoresis* 17.SAS 2 (2019): 15-26.

[186] Bruce W. Winter, *Philo and Paul Among the Sophists: Alexandrian and Corinthian Responses to a Julio-Claudian Movement*, second edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 141.

[187] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 3-4.

[188] Winter, 114, 138. Winter also regards Dio Chrysostom as a prominent sophist and cites his references to sophistic activity in Corinth (*Orationes* 6 and 8), though it is uncertain whether Dio visited the city in Paul's time (Winter, 7). Brookins charges Winter with circular reasoning: since his evidence for sophists in Corinth dates to the second century, he reconstructs the first-century situation from 1 Corinthians and then uses it to interpret the letter. Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom*, 316.

[189] Winter, 55-58.

[190] George H. van Kooten, "Paul versus the Sophists: Outward Performance and Rhetorical Competition within the Christian Community at Corinth," in *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity*, WUNT 232 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 249.

As a full discussion of Winter's interpretation lies beyond the scope of this study, I focus on his interpretation of 1 Cor 1:17b-31 insofar as it is relevant to my analysis of ἀπόλλυμι in 1 Cor 1:18-19. Winter argues that in this passage Paul critiques sophistic rhetoric and its culture of social boasting. The phrase οὐκ ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου (17) refers to the polished rhetorical techniques prized by the sophists, which Paul rejects because the "cross of Christ would be emptied of its power."[191] Sophistic rhetoric in Corinth functioned as a means of self-promotion and social legitimation. Sophists and orators belonged to the urban elite, as Paul writes in verse 26: "the wise (σοφοὶ), the powerful (δυνατοί), and the well-born (εὐγενεῖς)." Paul's argument in 1:17b-31 directly subverts this aristocratic system. God chooses 'the foolish' (τὰ μωρὰ), 'the weak' (τὰ ἀσθενῆ), 'the despised' (τὰ ἀγενῆ), and 'the nobodies' (τὰ ἐξουθενημένα) of the world.[192] In his choice for the weak, God nullifies sophistic claims that wisdom and authority are demonstrated through rhetorical brilliance and social success. Paul therefore refuses persuasive rhetorical techniques, not because rhetoric is sinful, but because in Corinth they would redirect attention from the crucified Messiah to the preacher and reinforce elite values.[193] "Therefore…let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."[194]

Although Winter's thesis has decisively reshaped the scholarly understanding of Paul's polemic and adversaries in Corinth, it was met with considerable criticism. Sierksma-Agteres argues that Winter is right to situate Paul within a rhetorical culture and anti-sophistic discourse, but that he overstates the specificity of 'the sophists' as a distinct social group. In the first century, especially among the common people, the labels sophist, rhetor, and philosopher were fluid and functioned as discursive categories, not defined social groups.[195] But even if no neatly defined group of 'sophists' existed in Corinth, Paul could still employ widely recognizable anti-sophistic stereotypes, such as boasting, self-promotion and status display. Sierksma-Agteres

[191] 1 Cor 1:17b (NIV).

[192] 1 Cor 1:27-28.

[193] Winter, *Philo and Paul*, 187-95.

[194] 1 Cor 1:31 (NIV), Paul cites here Jer 9:24.

[195] Sierksma-Agteres (*Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 412-14) builds her criticism on the studies of Duane Litfin and Mark Given. Although the former is a prominent advocate of the 'rhetoric hypothesis', he argues that Paul condemns rhetorical strategies in general and that Winter's limitation of the background to sophistry is unjustified, given his failure to define 'sophistic' in clear distinction from merely 'rhetorical'. Duane Litfin, *Paul's Theology of Preaching: The Apostle's Challenge to the Art of Persuasion in Ancient Corinth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015). For an earlier study of Litfin on the matter, see footnote 185. Mark Given states, "In the eyes of 'the mob', hard and fast Platonic distinctions between philosophers and sophist were ambiguous at best." See Mark D. Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning, and Deception in Greece and Rome* (London: A&C Black, 2001), 15.

claims that the precise historical identity of Paul's 'targets' is less important than the fact that the cultural discourse contrasting true wisdom with deceptive eloquence existed and would have been intelligible to the Corinthians. She criticizes Duane Litfin on this point, "What Litfin does not seem to grasp is that non-existence of the 'real sophists' does not necessarily entail the non-existence of the polemical discourse."[196]

Brookins criticizes Winter for drawing too sharp of a distinction between rhetoric and philosophy, between form and content, and fails to demonstrate that σοφία pertains exclusively to rhetorical practice.[197] He argues instead that σοφία should be interpreted primarily in terms of Stoic physics or anthropology. He characterizes the 'rhetoric hypothesis' as a relatively recent categorical shift in scholarship on σοφία as the term originally pertained to religious or philosophical content.[198] According to Brookins' stoic thesis,[199] the σοφοί in the Corinthian church interpreted Paul's message through a Stoic framework which rests on a sharp anthropological dichotomy between the wise person (σοφός) and the foolish person, the inferior (φαῦλος), allowing no intermediate state. This distinction in ethical class corrupted the church in Corinth as some regarded themselves as σοφοί while viewing others as inferior or immature (νήπιοι).[200] This acquired status of the σοφοί is understood in ontological terms: "the Stoic σοφός is wise, rational, perfect, and so on not because these qualities are ascribed to him socially but because he or she is filled with the Divine Spirit/reason."[201] These 'spiritual qualities' were treated as the basis for social standing within the church and had, therefore, ethical implications. The indwelling of the Spirit conferred αὐτάρκεια (self-sufficiency), which entitled them to boast in what they viewed as their own. The primary criterion of human value became spiritual capacity rather than moral behavior. Brookins characterizes this Corinthian system as 'sub-Stoic', that is not purely Stoic, but an adaptation subordinate to faith in Christ.[202]

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[196] Sierksma-Agteres, *Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 413.

[197] Brookins, *Corinthian Wisdom*, 137-39.

[198] Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom*, 19.

[199] Cf. Robert M. Grant, "The Wisdom of the Corinthians," in *The Joy of Study*, ed. S. E. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 51-55. Terrence Paige, "Stoicism, *Eleutheria*, and Community at Corinth," in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and Terrence Paige (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 180-93.

[200] Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom*, 248.

[201] Brookins, 269-70.

[202] Brookins, 30.

The constraints of this study do not permit a full treatment of Brookins' many nuances and gradations of Stoic philosophical influence on the Corinthian community. The contrast with the rhetorical thesis is evident as Brookins interprets ἐν σοφίᾳ λόγου (1 Cor 1:17) not as a reference to rhetorical techniques but to an 'account',[203] that is a philosophical framework or a value system. This system is structured around the pursuit of social distinction and a hierarchy of status based on perceived value. Paul counters this with the 'wisdom of the cross', which embodies an ethic of humility and operates according to a principle of incongruity.[204] It may be asked, however, whether Brookins' thesis is vulnerable to the same critique as Winter's, namely that it defines 'Stoic' as a clearly bounded group identity in ancient Corinth. It might be that this category was far more fluid. Timothy Milinovich also points out that Brookins' philosophical reading in his earlier work relies on scant evidence and an overly speculative reconstruction of Corinthian social demographics.[205] It remains to be seen how the revisions in Brookins' most recent publication will be received.

The next section will show that the interpretation of σοφία in 1 Cor 1-4 significantly shapes our understanding of ἀπόλλυμι. Hence, it is necessary to determine which approach to σοφία proves most fruitful for the analysis of ἀπόλλυμι. Corin Mihăilă distinguishes between the broader semantic domain covered by σοφία and the more specific expression σοφίᾳ λόγου which refers to rhetoric.[206] She adds, "Thus Paul responds to both wisdom as persuasive speech and wisdom as human theology…one can see that rhetoric is only one of them, though, a central one."[207] This study adopts a more radical 'both/and approach'. I argue that Paul's language can only be understood within the framework of his polemical discourse against the σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου (1 Cor 1:20), a discourse that evokes a semantic field in which human exaltation is grounded in rhetorical skill, intellectual or spiritual superiority, noble birth, and social status. This polemical discourse does not target a single practice or school of thought but a Greco-Roman culturally embedded mode of self-understanding and social valuation that corrupts the Corinthian community and stands in fundamental opposition to the logic of the cross.

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[203] Brookins basis his argument on a study of Joop F.M. Smith, "Epideictic Rhetoric in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians 1-4," *Biblica* 84 (2003): 184-201.

[204] Brookins, *Rediscovering the Wisdom*, 93.

[205] Timothy Milinovich, Review of *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and Ancient Economy*, Timothy A. Brookins, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 81, no. 1 (2019): 130.

[206] Mihăilă, "The Greco-Roman Rethoric Background," 23.

[207] Mihăilă, 24.

3.4 Ἀπόλλυμι in the Corinthian Correspondence

In this section, semantic-domain analysis is applied to the nine occurrences of ἀπόλλυμι in Paul's epistles to the Corinthians. Since the primary aim of this study is to achieve a more precise understanding of ἀπόλλυμι, the exegesis is limited to those aspects of the relevant contexts that bear directly on its meaning. The first paragraph seeks to identify the ἀπολλυμένοι (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15, 4:3, 4:9). It will be argued that these are, most probably, people at the margins of the Corinthian community who reject Paul's message of the cross and continue to uphold status hierarchies grounded in σοφία. The analysis then proceeds in literary order (1 Cor 8:11; 1 Cor 10:9-10; 1 Cor 15:18) to examine Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι in his correspondence with the church in Corinth. We will see that Paul draws on different semantic domains to reinforce his message, showing that ἀπόλλυμι does not carry the same meaning in every context.

3.4.1 The Ἀπολλυμένοι in Corinth

All of Paul's references to the ἀπολλυμένοι are found in his correspondence with the Corinthians. This section seeks possible explanations for the identity of the ἀπολλυμένοι: What kind of people does Paul have in mind? When does one belong to the ἀπολλυμένοι? Does it refer to people inside or outside the community? In his letters to the Corinthian church, Paul refers four times to the ἀπολλυμένοι (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 2:15, 4:3, 4:9). In recent scholarship, the ἀπολλυμένοι in 1 Cor 1:18 (cf. 2 Cor 2:15, 4:3) are often understood to denote all people who reject the gospel of Christ. Paul is often viewed to have reshaped the human categories by contrasting the ἀπολλυμένοι with the σῳζομένοι. As Wolfgang Schrage puts it, "Und doch fällt hier und nirgendwo anders die Entscheidung über eschatologisches Heil und Unheil der Menschen."[208] I label this perspective as the 'human reclassification thesis'. Its argument entails that whereas Paul had in earlier letters conceptualized humanity primarily in terms of the distinction between the Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι) and the Gentiles (Ἕλληνες or ἔθνη), he now regards "a person's relationship to Jesus the Messiah as the factor determining the ultimate grouping of human beings."[209] Or in the words of Garland, "One's response to this message [of the cross] reveals whether a person is headed toward immortal horrors or everlasting splendours."[210] Fee adopts a similar position,

[208] Wolfgang Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther,* vol. 2.1, EKK (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1991), 172.

[209] Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), chap I.C., Kobo eBook. Others arguing for this view are Fee, *Corinthians*, 71-2; George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), chap. II.B., Kobo eBook; and Philip Esler, *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2022), 100.

[210] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. III.B.

arguing that the ἀπολλυμένοι are those who will experience eternal loss,[211] whereas the σῳζομένοι constitute the *us* (ἡμῖν), by which Paul includes himself and the Corinthians.[212] Sociologically, the ἀπολλυμένοι represent the outgroup, while the σῳζομένοι form the ingroup.[213] We now turn to the discussion of the passages on the ἀπολλυμένοι, considered in their literary order within the epistles.

In 1 Cor 1:18-19 Paul writes, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (Ὁ λόγος γὰρ ὁ τοῦ σταυροῦ τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν) but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (τοῖς δὲ σῳζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστιν).[214] Paul underpins this statement with a citation from the LXX (Isa 29:14): "for it is written: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the discernment of the discerning I will hide" (γέγραπται γάρ· ἀπολῶ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν ἀθετήσω).[215] The use of the present participle (middle or passive) of ἀπόλλυμι indicates that Paul understands the ἀπολλυμένοι as those presently undergoing a process of destruction or loss. Hence, Paul envisions destruction thus not merely as a future event, but as a condition already manifested within the present age.[216]

Paul's appeal to Isa 29:14 suggests that ἀπόλλυμι is used in the ethical-mental domain (§2.4.4), since the verb marks the destruction of σοφία, the intellect or skill that makes one live a moral life – and in the mind of some superior to others. For Epictetus, Chrysostom, and Plutarch, ἀπολλυμένοι refers to persons whose fundamental orientation in life is destroyed through the loss of self-control and rationality. By contrast, the σῳζομένοι are those who amid the risk of losing self-control and allure of passions, preserve their rational and moral agency. If both Paul and his addressees shared this understanding of the ἀπολλυμένοι, Paul likely used the participle to denote those who had lost their fundamental orientation in life. For Paul, this orientation consists in living according to the logic of the cross: living a humble life in imitation of the crucified Messiah, grounded in God's choice of what is weak in this world (1 Cor 1:23-30). Paul contrasts this logic (λόγος) in 1 Cor 1:17b-31 with the σοφία τοῦ κόσμου (wisdom of

[211] Fee, *Corinthians*, 71, footnote 96.

[212] Fee, 72.

[213] J. Brian Tucker, *1 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2024), 60.

[214] Eng. trans. 1 Cor 1:18 (NIV).

[215] I use the Septuagint translation of Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: A New Translation of the Greek into Contemporary English – An Essential Recourse for Biblical Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[216] Harris, *The Second Epistle*, chap. I.C.

the world) in which noble lineage, possession of rhetorical skill, and being endowed with divine reason confer social superiority. Those who lived according to the standards of the worldly σοφία, most probably 'the elite faction' within the Corinthian church, evidently regarded the message of the cross as foolishness. Paul designates this group as the ἀπολλυμένοι, those who have lost their ethical orientation in life by grounding it in worldly wisdom rather than in the gospel. Paul thus overturns the moral world of the Corinthians: to be a moral person is no longer grounded in philosophical self-mastery, but in the conformity to the humility of the cross.

According to Epictetus, belonging to the ἀπολλυμένοι is neither a fixed destiny nor an irreversible state; through rigid action one may preserve one's moral self and save (σῴζεται) the progress toward becoming a philosopher. In this light, Paul's sharp distinction between the ἀπολλυμένοι and the σῳζομένοι need not denote fixed human categories. Rather, it should be read as Paul's exhortation addressed to some 'superior wise people' in the church to embrace the reality of the cross, to refrain from self-boasting, and to participate as equals in the communal life of the church. This reading fits perfectly in Paul's eschatological framework throughout the epistle, according to which the 'new age' has been inaugurated by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. The Corinthians are therefore called to live in accordance with the principles of the 'new age'. Persisting in their behavior is adopting a mode of life, which belongs to the 'old age', that is indeed destructive for oneself, and for the community (the latter becomes evident when Paul, later in his letter, exposes several disorders within the church).

Paul also makes the distinction between the ἀπολλυμένοι and the σῳζομένοι in 2 Cor 2:15: "For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (ὅτι Χριστοῦ εὐωδία ἐσμὲν τῷ θεῷ ἐν τοῖς σῳζομένοις καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις).[217] Most scholars agree that in this passage (2 Cor 2:14-17) Paul draws on the imagery of the triumphal procession (θριαμβεύειν) of a victorious Roman general.[218] Such a procession featured a victorious Roman general processing through the city, preceded by spoils of war and chained captives from the defeated enemy, followed by his soldiers. The spectacle was further embellished by the music of trumpeters and flute players, the smell of incense, and featured oxen led along for sacrifice in the temple."[219] Although this imagery would have strongly appealed

[217] Eng. trans. 2 Cor 2.15 (NIV).

[218] Cf. L. Williamson, "Led in Triumph: Paul's Use of *Thriambeuō*," *Interpretation* 22 (1968): 317-32; Peter Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame: θριαμβεύειν in 2 Cor. 2.14," *Novum Testamentum* 25, no. 4 (1983): 302-17; Harris, *The Second Epistle*, chap. I.C.; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, chap. II.B.; and Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 98-9.

[219] Harris (*The Second Epistle*, chap. I.C.) based his description in part on Plutarch, *Life of Aemilius Paulus* 32.1-36.6 and Josephus, *Jewish War*, 7.153-55.

to the imagination of the Corinthians,[220] its precise meaning within Paul's argument is debated. Christoph Heilig defines the causative verb θριαμβεύειν as "to cause somebody or something to move (before oneself) in a triumphal procession to display sb. or sth. to the watching crowd."[221] The question, then, is who or what Paul understands to be led in this triumphal procession. The prevailing position, also defended by Heilig, is that Paul represents himself as a defeated captive whom God leads in triumph through the world.[222] Others interpret the image primarily as emphasizing the public and exposed character of apostolic ministry.[223] George Guthrie says that τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις alludes to the captured enemies in the parade, those who actively reject Paul's message, for whom the gospel constitutes a 'smell of death' (verse 16). Paul does not include himself among this group, making it more plausible that he understands his role not as that of a captive but as that of an incense bearer within the procession.[224] Based on similar reasoning, Philip Esler contends that Paul depicts himself as a soldier of the triumphant general's army, sharing in the honor of his victory.[225]

A reading based on semantic-domain analysis shows that ἀπόλλυμι here belongs to the historical-political domain (§2.4.2). Within the triumphal imagery, the Corinthians would naturally have understood the ἀπολλυμένοι as the defeated captives, publicly displayed by their conquerors as vanquished and dishonored. This reading differs from the prevailing view that Paul depicts himself in this context as a captive of Christ and instead aligns more closely with the interpretations of Guthrie and Esler. Yet Guthrie's interpretation of the ἀπολλυμένοι as an analogy for those who actively reject Paul's gospel sits uneasily with a consistent reading of the triumphal imagery. The captives were not agents free to choose their response, but, as in Chrysostom's use of the participle, 'the ruined ones', deprived of social honor and suffering under a power that stands above them. The image points to the defeat of the 'ruined ones', or 'the conquered ones', rather than to the human refusal of the gospel. This reading of τοῖς

[220] As over three hundred processions accounts are present in ancient Greco-Roman literature, see Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame," 304.

[221] Christoph Heilig, *Paul's Triumph: Reassessing 2 Corinthians 2:14 in its Literary and Historical Context* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 101.

[222] Heilig, *Paul's Triumph*, 217. Cf. Harris, *The Second Epistle*, chap. I.C. and Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 367-8.

[223] Marshall, "A Metaphor of Social Shame," 302-17.

[224] Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, chap. II.B.

[225] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 99.

ἀπολλυμένοις would fit more closely within a cosmological-apocalyptic framework in which Christ appears as the victorious general who defeats the hostile powers. In the Corinthian context, these powers are manifested as the worldly σοφίᾳ that legitimates social hierarchies and the subjugation of church members. This aligns with Paul's citation in 1 Cor 1:19 that "God will destroy (ἀπολῶ) the wisdom (σοφίαν) of the wise." Notably, God's object of destruction is wisdom, not the wise themselves, which might cohere with Paul's portrayal of the conflict in Corinth between the σοφία τοῦ κόσμου and the λόγος τοῦ σταυροῦ as an apocalyptic battle. Paul depicts the fate of those who keep persisting in their obduracy, τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοι, as to be defeated by Christ. In this respect, Heilig observes that Paul, in his use of triumphal imagery, "actively engages with his Roman environment."[226] Paul uses this familiar imagery as a rhetorical devise to subvert imperial claims, presenting Christ rather than the Roman emperor as the true victorious general.

In 2 Cor 4:3-4, Paul identifies the ἀπολλυμένοι with the ἀπίστοι. He writes, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing" (εἰ δὲ καὶ ἔστιν κεκαλυμμένον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν, ἐν τοῖς ἀπολλυμένοις ἐστὶν κεκαλυμμένον).[227] Sierksma-Agteres notes that this passage operates within an epistemological domain, since the ἀπίστοι of verse 4 are defined by the mental inability to perceive that Christ is the reflection of God.[228] This is similar to our discussion of Philo and Josephus, within the ethical-mental domain, where ἀπόλλυμι signifies the loss of epistemic discernment as the truth becomes ruined. This supports our present position that the ἀπολλυμένοι denotes a specific group in the Corinthian church whose adherence to worldly wisdom distorts their moral judgment and leads them to misinterpret the gospel. As Sierksma-Agteres argues, "In this passage, *apistoi* is reminiscent of a label for a general social-religious category to many. Yet, if we compare it to 'the perishing' of the preceding verse, a similar case could be made…therefore, the ἀπίστοι most probably refer to skeptical Corinthians who were present at the church meetings yet remained unconvinced."[229] This description closely corresponds to our understanding of who the ἀπολλυμένοι are. In the next section, Paul addresses the hardships of the apostolic ministry, which he constructs in an antithetical structure. Esler notes that Paul uses the rhetorical device *peristasis* catalogue "to lay out a series

[226] Heilig, *Paul's Triumph*, 276.

[227] Eng. trans. 2 Cor 4:3 (NIV).

[228] Sierksma-Agteres, *Paul and the Philosophers' Faith*, 771.

[229] Sierksma-Agteres, 771-2.

of contrasting present participles that contrast lesser with greater adversity, but which exhibit increasing seriousness."[230] This is illustrated in the schema below:

ἐν παντὶ (in every way)

(8a) θλιβόμενοι (afflicted)	ἀλλ' οὐ στενοχωρούμενοι (but not crushed)
(8b) ἀπορούμενοι (perplexed)	ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐξαπορούμενοι (but not in despair)
(9a) διωκόμενοι (persecuted)	ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐγκαταλειπόμενοι (but not abandoned)
(9b) καταβαλλόμενοι (struck down)	ἀλλ' οὐκ **ἀπολλύμενοι** (but not destroyed)[231]

In the context of 2 Cor 4:8-9, it is difficult to maintain the position that the ἀπολλυμένοι refer to the part of humanity that is perishing. As Guthrie remarks, "Paul has already used ἀπολλυμένοι twice in the letter, both times speaking of those lost without the gospel. The sense here may also be eschatological…more likely, however, given the verses that follow the apostle refers to the martyrdom for the faith, since the term can refer to dying."[232] Guthrie is correct that ἀπόλλυμι can denote physical death (see §2.4.1),[233] and this sense might fit the immediate context of 2 Cor 4:9. I also assume that the Corinthians were familiar with the various semantic domains of ἀπόλλυμι and could have certainly recognized Paul's shift in meaning. Since Paul, however, throughout his letters consistently uses the ἀπολλυμένοι as a designation for a particular group – whether it be universal or a specific faction – it is at least striking that he would abruptly shift to a different semantic domain. This is even more so given that only a few verses earlier (2 Cor 4:3) Paul uses ἀπολλυμένοι to denote a group of people. Is there another possible explanation?

The interpretation of the present study – the ἀπολλυμένοι are a specific group within the Corinthian church who claim elevated status based on their σοφία – may also fits this context. Read as a coherent literary unit, verses 8-9, might suggest that ἀπολλυμένοι is here used in the ethical-mental domain. Paul structures this passage as a series of antithetical parallelisms which are typical literary devices in LXX poetry. Verse 8a parallels verse 9a as both 'afflicted' and 'persecuted' refer to experiences of external pressure and hostility encountered in Paul's missionary activity, whereas verse 8b and 9b focus on inner disorientation. The verb ἀπορέω

[230] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 142.

[231] The English translations are from the NIV. For a similar figure, see Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 142-3.

[232] Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, chap. II.B. Cf. Ralph Martin who interprets ἀπολλυμένοι as "they are not able to subvert his apostleship or destroy his work." Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, second edition, WBC 40 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), chap. V.E., Kobo eBook. Both Harris and Esler do not give their explanation for ἀπολλυμένοι in this context.

[233] As will be shown in § 3.4.3, Paul does use ἀπόλλυμι in this semantic domain in 1 Corinthians.

(and its intensified form ἐξαπορέω) denotes a state of psychological loss or to be in great difficulty, doubt or embarrassment.[234] Paul thus refers to the mental and emotional strain that the ministry entails. For the Greek philosophers, the threatened outcome of such disorientation would be moral and existential collapse, that is, becoming one of the ἀπολλυμένοι.

Paul thus maintains that, even when he and his co-workers are struck down, they do not belong to those who suffer existential or moral ruin, namely the ἀπολλυμένοι. Whereas for Paul the ἀπολλυμένοι ground their identity and status in self-boasting derived from σοφία, the apostles, instead, do "always carry around the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in their body."[235] In other words, they embody the logic of the cross (1 Cor 1:18), perusing a way of life defined by humility, which is characteristic of the σῳζομένοι. This reading suggest that Paul may use ἀπολλυμένοι consistently throughout his epistles to designate a particular group within the Corinthian church. I regard such consistency as more compelling than Paul abruptly shifting between semantic domains. Guthrie's proposal lacks adequate argumentation to argue for a sudden semantic shift. This shows that the 'human reclassification thesis' as an interpretation of the ἀπολλυμένοι cannot be properly sustained in this verse.

The most plausible conclusion is that Paul does not construct abstract anthropological categories but addresses concrete abuses in Corinthian church. He depicts the community as divided between the ἀπολλυμένοι, whom he exhorts to recover sound moral judgment,[236] and the σῳζομένοι, which are those who already seek to live in accordance with the ethical logic of the cross, the *us*. Ἀπόλλυμι thus functions as boundary marker between both groups, without implying that the former stand outside the community. Rather, the ἀπολλυμένοι are best understood as people within or at the margins of the community – the so-called deviants in sociological terms – who lack a proper understanding of Paul's message. Paul frames his call to change within an eschatological framework in which worldly wisdom is defeated and Christ emerges victorious.

3.4.2 1 Cor 8:11

In 1 Cor 8:11, Paul addresses the communal consequences of disputes concerning food offered to idols. He warns certain members, who possess the knowledge (γνῶσις) of freedom that idol food is not truly offered to a real god, not to become a stumbling block to the weak (ἀσθενὴς),

[234] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 305. Cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, chap. II.B.

[235] 2 Cor 4:10 (NIV).

[236] Schrage (vol. 2.1, 172) likewise entertains the possibility that Paul's intent is to warn the church: "wahrscheinlich eine implizite Warnung and die Korinther, die Weisheit an die Stelle des Kreuzes zu rücken."

whose conscience (συνείδησις) still regards such food as sacrificial. If the weak are led by the freedom of 'the knowledgeable' to eat against their conscience, Paul concludes, "So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge"[237] (ἀπόλλυται γὰρ ὁ ἀσθενῶν ἐν τῇ σῇ γνώσει, ὁ ἀδελφὸς δι' ὃν Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν). The identity of 'the weak' is disputed. The dominant view holds that they are Christ-believers who remain insecure in their faith; by contrast, Mark Nanos argues that they are polytheistic idolaters who interact with the Corinthian church. They continued to eat idol food according to long-standing practice. Paul fears that, if Christ-believers also participate in eating idol food, 'the impaired' will persist in idolatry which leads to their own destruction.[238] Nanos offers several suggestions regarding the nature of the 'ruin' that Paul might befall the 'the impaired': they may fail to grasp the exclusivity of faith in Christ, may not take the Christ-message seriously, may perceive Christ-believers as lacking integrity, or may come to regard faith in Christ as compatible with the worship of other gods.[239] Others, who regard 'the weak' as a recent convert, likewise interpret ἀπόλλυμι in this context as "existential destruction consisting in grief and deep self-deprecation,"[240] "moral ruin from a lapse into paganism,"[241] "a person is led to sin,"[242] or "one's stagnation in the Christian life."[243] As Peter Borgen summarizes, "This may lead him to attempt a syncretistic fusion of Christianity and polytheistic worship. According to Paul the convert is in this way destroyed."[244]

Other interpreters hold the position that ἀπόλλυμι in this context denotes eternal loss or final destruction.[245] Fee contends that interpreting ἀπόλλυμι as denoting internal moral collapse

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[237] 1 Cor 8:11 (NIV).

[238] Mark D. Nanos, "The *Polytheist* Identity of the "Weak," and Paul's Strategy to "Gain" Them: A New Reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1," in *Reading Corinthians and Philippians within Judaism. Collected Essays of Mark D. Nanos* 4 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 13.

[239] Nanos, "The *Polytheist* Identity," 15-7.

[240] Judith M. Gundry-Volf, "Destruction of the Weak," in *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 95.

[241] Frederik W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 197.

[242] David A. Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness: Astheneia and its Cognates in the Pauline Literature*, revised edition (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 68.

[243] Frederick F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 82.

[244] Peter Borgen, "'Yes,' 'No,' 'How Far?': The Participation of Jews and Christians in Pagan Cults," in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 45.

[245] Cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. VI.B.; Fee, *Corinthians*, 428; and Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the Frist Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 149 n. 38.

resulting from acting against one's conscience reflects a too modernistic perspective.[246] He is right that the ancient concept of conscience does not correspond to the modern notion of a feeling of gnawing guilt. However, Anthony Thistelton's study of συνείδησις shows that conscience in ancient Greek thought functioned as a moral compass that guided one's judgments of right and wrong and played a significant role in moral discourse, including in authors such as Seneca (c. 4 BC – AD 65).[247] In that sense, the idea that one's conscience could be 'ruined' was not entirely foreign to ancient Greek thought. Moreover, if 'the weak', as Fee argues, refers to a recent convert, it is difficult to see how, in Paul's theology, one believer's irresponsible behavior could negate another's share in the saving effects of Christ's death. How can such contingency be reconciled with Paul's theology of grace?

Hans Conzelmann notes that in Epictetus ἀπόλλυμι is used in an ethical sense to denote the destruction of one's own humanity.[248] Despite this right observation, he concludes: "In Paul however, ἀπόλλυται must not be taken in a weakened sense as moral ruin; here as elsewhere it means eternal damnation."[249] Conzelmann's argument reflects a methodological reductionism that overrides contextual semantics in favor of a single theological definition.[250] I agree with his initial observation that ἀπόλλυμι here is used, like in Epictetus (and Chrysostom), within the ethical-mental semantic domain to denote moral self-destruction. As Paul concludes, "because the weaker brother is led into sin through acting against his conscience. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall" (σκανδαλίσω).[251] In this verse, the verb σκανδαλίζω stands in paradigmatic relation to ἀπόλλυμι, functioning as a near equivalent. As Danker notes, σκανδαλίζω is primarily used in moral-ethical contexts, meaning "'to cause to fall, to cause to sin,' where the sin may consist in a breach of the moral law."[252] Therefore, it is most likely that Paul warns against moral depravity in the Christian life rather than eternal destruction.

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[246] Fee, *Corinthians*, 428.

[247] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), chap. IV.B.b., Kobo eBook.

[248] Epictetus, *Discourses* II.9. See for a discussion of this fragment §2.4.4 of this study.

[249] Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 149 n. 38.

[250] Cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. VI.B.

[251] 1 Cor 8:12-13 (NIV).

[252] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, σκανδαλίζω, 823. Cf. Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 88.304.

3.4.3 1 Cor 10:9-10

In 1 Cor 10:1-13, Paul retells Israel's past experiences in a way that helps his audience see themselves in the story and relate to the people involved. God's judgement fell on many of the Israelites in the desert. This functions as a warning in which Paul calls his addressees to turn away from idols and to order their lives according to the principles of 'the new age'. Paul starts in verse 9, "We should not test Christ" (μηδὲ ἐκπειράζωμεν τὸν Χριστόν). Most interpreters agree that Paul refers to the Corinthian habit of combining participation in the Lord's Supper with the ongoing consumption of food offered to idols.[253] In Paul's allegorical reading, the Israelites' testing of God is also a testing of Christ, insofar as the rock that accompanied them and provided water in the wilderness was Christ (verse 4). Paul alludes to Num 21:5-6 to illustrate the consequences of such testing: "and some of them did – and were killed by snakes" (καθώς τινες αὐτῶν ἐπείρασαν καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ὄφεων ἀπώλλυντο).[254] In the next verse, Paul build further on the imagery of the Hebrews in the wilderness to characterize the Corinthians' grumbling against him and their refusal to heed his counsel: "And do not grumble, as some of them did – and were killed by the destroying angel" (μηδὲ γογγύζετε, καθάπερ τινὲς αὐτῶν ἐγόγγυσαν καὶ ἀπώλοντο ὑπὸ τοῦ ὀλοθρευτοῦ).[255]

In both verses, Paul appears to use ἀπόλλυμι in the anthropological domain (§2.4.1) to denote the physical death of the rebellious Israelites because of God's judgment.[256] Neither the text in Numbers nor Paul's allusion to it provides any indication that more than biological death is in view. Of particular importance is that in both passages death denotes punishment resulting from divine judgment. The destroyer (ὀλοθρευτής) "may be the destroying angel (Exod 12.23) who carries out any divine sentence of punishment, or it may refer to Satan."[257] For Josephus, ἀπόλλυμι likewise denotes punishment resulting from divine judgment, as the Israelites expect

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[253] Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2010), chap. IV.A.3.b., Kobo eBook. Cf. Fee, *Corinthians*, 505; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. VI.B; Schrage, *Korinther*, vol. 2.2, 401.

[254] Eng. trans. 1 Cor 10:9 (NIV).

[255] Eng. trans. 1 Cor 10:10 (NIV). Garland (*1 Corinthians*, chap. VI.D., footnote 24) remarks that Paul also compares himself to Moses in 2 Cor 3:7-18.

[256] Philo interprets the snakes in the wilderness of Num 21:6 as destructive pleasures, whose indulgence brings ethical and spiritual ruin to the soul. See Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation* 2.77. Given Paul's allegorical reading of elements of the wilderness narrative, one might infer an ethical-mental sense of ἀπόλλυμι here; however, I find it difficult to see how such a reading would cohere with the broader argument of the passage.

[257] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. VI.D.

destruction under God's wrath.[258] Similarly, Paul ultimately attributes destruction to God's punitive action. In the desert narrative, ἀπόλλυμι is thus situated within a forensic-apocalyptic framework, in which divine judgment follows upon human failure. We have already seen that Paul used in the triumphal imagery (2 Cor 2:14) ἀπόλλυμι within a cosmological-apocalyptic framework. Paul can therefore be placed in both trajectories of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology as outlined by De Boer. This illustrates the diverse semantic range of ἀπόλλυμι in Paul's letters.

3.4.4 1 Cor 15:18

First Corinthians 15 is the most extensively discussed and intensively researched chapter of the Corinthian corpus. For the sake of focus, the present analysis is limited to Paul's statement in 1 Cor 15:18 and its surrounding sections. Paul writes, as Christ has not been raised "then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost" (ἄρα καὶ οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ ἀπώλοντο).[259] This verse belongs to a series of consequences if the resurrection of the dead is not true (15.13-19). Garland further locates it within a larger ABA' structure, in which 15:29-34 (A') mirrors the present section, while the central section 15:20-28 (B) addresses the consequences since the resurrection of the death is true.[260] We will, therefore, also integrate the parallel section 15:29-34 in our analysis.

In the previous sections (§3.2-3) of this chapter, we have identified that the underlying problem in the Corinthian church was not a specific theological error but a broader conformity to Greco-Roman values. Throughout his epistle, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to conform their moral life to the likeness of Christ rather than to ground it in worldly σοφία. However, if there is no resurrection of the dead, such 'Christ-like living' is futile, and hedonist self-indulgence[261] becomes legitimate: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."[262] Even Paul's own struggles as an apostle would be in vain: "I face death every day…if I fought wild beasts in Ephesus with no more than human hopes, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised" [263] (καθ' ἡμέραν ἀποθνῄσκω...εἰ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον ἐθηριομάχησα ἐν Ἐφέσῳ, τί μοι τὸ ὄφελος; εἰ νεκροὶ οὐκ ἐγείρονται).

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[258] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 3.82.

[259] Eng. trans. 1 Cor 15:18 (NIV).

[260] Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. X.B. Cf. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter*, chap. V. intro.

[261] I borrow this phrasing from Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. X.D.

[262] 1 Cor 15:32b, Paul cites here Isa 22:13. Translation from Pietersma and Wright, *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*.

[263] 1 Cor 15:31a and 32a (NIV).

"Fighting with wild beasts" (ἐθηριομάχησα) was commonly used in Cynic-Stoic discourse to describe a moral struggle against passions or false ideas. This phrase may be read figuratively as referring to Paul's struggle with morally corrupted antagonists in Ephesus.[264] This sense is also present in Epictetus as he warns: "See to it, then, that you never act like a wild beast (θηρίον), or you will have destroyed the man in you".[265] In other words, "do not become morally corrupted." We may conclude that for Paul the Christian ethical living is embedded in the eschatological belief in the resurrection. Since Paul views Christ's death and resurrection as the inauguration of 'the new age', it matters how life is ordered in the present.

The eschatological framework of 'the old age' and 'the new age' may function as our hermeneutical lens for interpreting the use of ἀπόλλυμι in 1 Cor 15:18. Fee notes that it is crucial to understand 1 Cor 15:18 as a continuation of verse 17.[266] "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (εἰ δὲ Χριστὸς οὐκ ἐγήγερται, ματαία ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν, ἔτι ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν).[267] Thiselton interprets this verse primarily from a soteriological perspective: "without Christ's resurrection, his death has no atoning or redemptive effect with respect to human sin."[268] In Paul's eschatological framework this statement may read: if Christ had not been raised, then 'the new age' has not dawned, the power of sin has not been broken, and the Corinthians necessarily remain in 'the old age'. The phrase ἔτι ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν refers not only to guilt but to continued participation in 'the old-age realm' dominated by sin. As a result (ἄρα), the ones who have fallen asleep in Christ (οἱ κοιμηθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ), are lost (ἀπώλοντο). The verb ἀπώλοντο stands in paradigmatic relation to the phrase ἔτι ἐστὲ ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν. Paul thus argues that if Christ has not been raised, even those who have died in him[269] remain bound to the order of 'the old age'. Ἀπόλλυμι denotes here the utter futility of their hope and existence. Notably, Paul does not further specify ἀπώλοντο, he neither describes its concrete form nor depicts it as an eternal state after death. Rather, it functions rhetorically –

[264] Abraham J. Malherbe, "The Beasts at Ephesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 87, no. 1 (1968): 80.

[265] Epictetus, *Discourses* II.9. See §2.4.4.

[266] Fee, *Corinthians*, 824.

[267] Eng. trans. 1 Cor 15:17 (NIV).

[268] Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, chap. VI.B.1. Cf. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter*, chap. V.B.

[269] Ciampa and Rosner state that the phrase "falling asleep" was also a common euphemism among the Greeks (cf. Homer, *Iliad* 11.241) to describe death. Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter*, chap. V.B., footnote 77. In Paul, however, the phrase (1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; cf. 1 Thess 4:14) is not used as a euphemism but it designates the Christian hope that Christ has conquered death, and this last enemy has lost its sting (15:55).

like Paul's use of θάνατος in Phil 2:8 (see §1.4) – to expose the absurdity of denying Christ's resurrection.

In this regard, ἀπόλλυμι may be read against both the anthropological and ethical-mental domain. Since Paul in 1 Cor 15:18 articulates the implications of the Corinthians' denial of the resurrection (15:12), ἀπόλλυμι most likely reflects their view of death as final. Accordingly, the term carries overtones of definitiveness and irreversibility associated with the anthropological domain. Paul's argument, however, reframes the Corinthians' assumption. If ἀπόλλυμι stands in parallel to "you are still in your sins," Paul points with ἀπόλλυμι not to death but to continued subjection to 'the old age order'. He subverts the concept by recasting it in ethical and soteriological terms. Within Paul's resurrection framework death itself has become provisional, the last enemy to be abolished (ἔσχατος ἐχθρὸς καταργεῖται ὁ θάνατος).[270] And 'dying' should not be understood literally but denotes the ethical struggle of a disciple following Christ, verse 31a: "I face death every day."[271] This, in turn, aligns with the broader call throughout the letter to conform one's life to the way of the cross. Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι in this context thus exhibits semantic layering, holding together ethical misorientation and eschatological finality. For Paul, our moral life and ultimate hope depend on Christ's resurrection and the inauguration of his 'new age'.

[270] 1 Cor 15:26.

[271] 1 Cor 15:31a. Ciampa and Rosner (*The First Letter*, chap. V.D.) mention in this regard Luke 9:23-24 "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it" (NIV). See also Schrage, who argues that θάνατος "Todesgefahr sein kann, oder noch angemessener als Sterben in der Nachfolge des Gekreuzigten, was sich nicht ausschließt." Schrage, *Der erste Brief an die Korinther*, vol. 2.4, 241, footnote 1169. Others maintain that Paul refers to a literal sense of death, alluding to life-threatening risks associated with his ministry, see Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*, SPS 7 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 539. Cf. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, chap. X.D.

Conclusion

By comparing Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι with its usage in Greek sources of the first century AD, this study has sought to deepen our understanding of the lexeme in the epistles to the Corinthian church. We have proceeded from the premise that Paul framed his message in ways that would be intelligible and persuasive to an audience largely shaped by a Hellenistic cultural context. Moreover, Paul's eschatology is grounded in Jewish (apocalyptic) traditions, which themselves took shape within a broader Hellenistic environment. These considerations highlight the need to interpret Paul's eschatological terminology within its wider linguistic and cultural setting. Accordingly, the central research question of this study was: "What did Paul mean by ἀπόλλυμι in his letters to the Corinthians in light of its use in contemporary Greek sources?" The four categories (temporality, etiology, quality, and finality) outlined in chapter 1 provide the guiding framework for answering this question in our conclusion.

Paul's eschatology, in terms of temporality, is not framed as a linear sequence (time – eternity) but rather in a two-age schema: 'the old age', this present world under the power of sin, is gradually being displaced since Christ's resurrection by 'the new age', characterized by the principles of the logic of the cross. This temporal duality also entails a social duality, which is expressed in the Corinthian correspondence as the distinction between the ἀπολλυμένοι and the σῳζομένοι. We concluded that the ἀπολλυμένοι are the deviants in the community of Corinth who continue to shape their lives according to the principles of 'the old age', that is, worldly wisdom (σοφία τοῦ κόσμου). We also observed that in 1 Cor 15:18, ἀπόλλυμι denotes the ultimatly tragic state of remaining bound to the order of 'the old age'. In other words, within Paul's eschatology ἀπόλλυμι is a category of 'the old age'. Paul urges those who live according to the standards of the present world to reorient their lives *now* according to the logic of the cross and so belong to the σῳζομένοι.

In his letters to Corinth, Paul draws on both 'tracks' of Jewish apocalypticism (see §1.3 'Etiology'): ἀπόλλυμι is portrayed both as the result of God's punitive response to human disobedience (1 Cor 10:9-10) and as the defeat of hostile powers – manifested in the Corinthian context as the wisdom of the wise/world (2 Cor 2:15). Therefore, ἀπόλλυμι should not be confined to a single category. Notably, Paul does not portray ἀπόλλυμι as a future act of divine judgment on human sin or evil powers. Rather, he understands it as a present reality: God's judgment already rests on those who put Christ to the test in attending idolatrous cultic meals (1 Cor 10:9-10), and in the imagery of the triumphal procession (2 Cor 2:15), Christ is already

leading hostile powers captive. The lexeme thus fits within Paul's 'inaugurated dimension' of his eschatology.

Chapter 1 showed that Paul's eschatological discourse spans a broad range of meanings (see §1.4 'Quality'). The same holds for his use of ἀπόλλυμι, that functions as a layered concept carrying multiple meanings across different semantic domains. Figure 2 maps Paul's complex

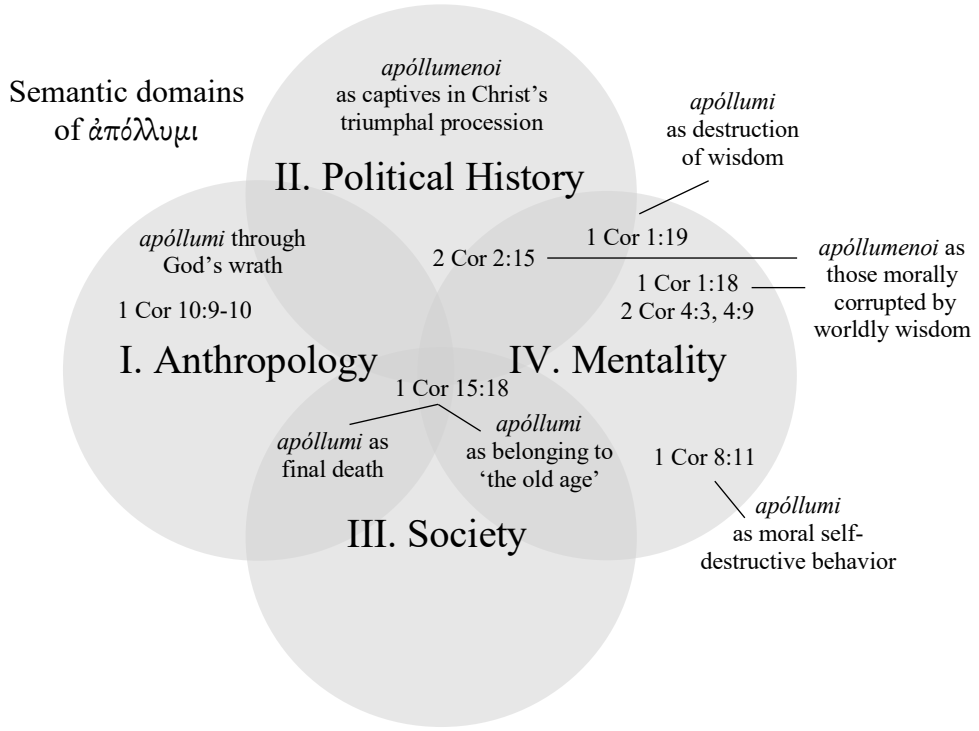

Figure 2. Semantic domains of ἀπόλλυμι in the Corinthian correspondence

use of ἀπόλλυμι across the semantic domains in his letters to the Corinthians. Paul primarily uses ἀπόλλυμι in the ethical-mental domain, where it may indicate: those who uphold Greek social standards based on σοφία whom Paul views as morally corrupted (1 Cor 1:18; 2 Cor 4:3, 4:9); the act of God destroying the wisdom of the wise (1 Cor 1:19); the morally self-destructive behavior (influenced by others) of eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:11); and the ultimate state of loss, death as a continued belonging to 'the old age' (1 Cor 15:18). Two instances of ἀπόλλυμι belong to the anthropological domain: the death of the Hebrews under divine judgment (1 Cor 10-9-10) and the view of the Corinthians in 1 Cor 15:18 who denied the resurrection and thus regarded ἀπόλλυμι as final death. The latter overlaps with the ethical-mental domain (see §3.4.4). Only in 2 Cor 2:15 does Paul use ἀπόλλυμι in the political-historical domain, describing the ἀπολλυμένοι as captives in Christ's triumphal procession. Read within a cosmological-apocalyptic framework, the ἀπολλυμένοι may also refer to the powers of worldly wisdom which

Christ has overcome (cf. 1 Cor 1:19). This usage overlaps with the ethical-mental domain. In contrast to the Greek authors discussed, Paul never explicitly uses the verb in the socio-material domain to denote the loss of social status or material goods. It could be argued, however, that the loss of social status underlies the problems in the Corinthian community. In light of this semantic analysis, we may conclude that (1) Paul consistently uses ἀπόλλυμι in a negative sense; ἀπόλλυμι is never in itself purgative or redemptive.[272] It denotes rather a state of corruption from which one must repent; (2) treating one sense of ἀπόλλυμι as a hermeneutical key for all other occurrences is highly problematic, since each instance of the verb must be read in its rhetorical context; and (3) the claims that ἀπόλλυμι always carries the same meaning are untenable.

In terms of finality, Paul's destruction language is ambiguous. On the one hand, we saw that belonging to the ἀπολλυμένοι is not an irreversible destiny, as one may still come to belong to the σῳζομένοι by conforming one's life to the ethic of the cross. Also, whereas the Corinthians probably viewed death as final loss (ἀπόλλυμι, 1 Cor 15:18), Paul reframes this perspective in light of the resurrection and regards 'being lost' as a corruptive moral condition to be overcome. However, when related to God's punitive action, Paul uses ἀπόλλυμι in an irreversible sense, as in the death of the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:9-10) and the destruction of the wisdom of the wise (1 Cor 1:19). This indicates that for Paul the finality of ἀπόλλυμι is dependend on the context. It remains consistently the case that, in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul never further defines ἀπόλλυμι or specifies the verb as referring to an eternal post-mortem state, whether a temporary state of purification, eternal punishment, or annihilation. He simply depicts ἀπόλλυμι as present reality rather than a future event after death or at Christ's parousia. This shows that we should be cautious about deriving a dogmatic position on the afterlife from Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι in his letter to the Corinthians.

Still, Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι in the Corinthian correspondence does offer insight into the ongoing discussion about Paul's engagement with Greek thought (§2.2). This study indicates that Paul's use of ἀπόλλυμι interacts with both imperial (Wright) and philosophical discourses (Van Kooten): the term functions polemically to subvert imperial claims by portraying Christ – not the Roman emperor – as the victorious general who in his power has overcome all things and exercises authority over all. At the same time, Paul appropriates ethical-mental discourses familiar from Greek philosophy yet redefines them according to the wisdom of the cross. This underscores that Paul should not be confined to a purely Jewish framework that casts his

[272] As is the case with Paul's 'death-language' in Rom 6:7 "because anyone who has died has been set free from sin" (NIV). See §1.4.

writings as merely polemical reactions against Greek thought, nor reduced to a Greek framework that portrays him as uncritically adopting Hellenistic ideas.

It is important to note that the conclusions above are based on a limited semantic domain analysis restricted to the works of Philo, Josephus, Chrysostom, Plutarch, and Epictetus. While a broader corpus across a wider timeframe might add nuance to the definition of the semantic domains, the selected sources provide a representative cross-section of Greek discourse relevant to Paul's context. Further insight could also be gained from examining ἀπόλλυμι in Romans and the noun ἀπώλεια across the undisputed Pauline letters. Moreover, future research on ἀπόλλυμι should also incorporate the LXX and Second Temple literature, since Paul's eschatology is likewise shaped by Jewish tradition. This would provide a more complete picture of his use of ἀπόλλυμι. The present study does only partly account for this dimension by including Philo and Josephus, both of whom stand within Jewish tradition and draw on the LXX. Yet as a Greek translation, the LXX functions within Greek linguistic discourses, which calls into question whether its analysis would truly reflect distinct semantic domains for ἀπόλλυμι.

Ultimately, this thesis demonstrates that a semantic domain analysis of the verb ἀπόλλυμι in Greek authors contemporary with Paul can make a valuable contribution to the discussion of its meaning. The study shows that ἀπόλλυμι is a complex, layered term whose nuance depends on context and Paul's rhetorical aims in his letters. While it does not disclose Paul's concept of 'hell', it sharpens the force of his appeal to align our present life with the logic of the cross.

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