Dogs, Adulterers, and the Way of Balaam: The Forms and Socio-Rhetorical Function of the Polemical Rhetoric in 2 Peter (Part I)*

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This article examines the social and rhetorical dimensions of the polemical language in 2 Peter in order to understand its primary function within the epistle. After taking stock of the situation of social conflict, I classify the various pejorative labels and categories used in description of the opponents. Then, I appeal to the sociology of deviance as a tool to help elucidate their contextual function, namely as defamatory devices used to caste aspersion on the opponents and, ultimately, secure the author's own teachings and authority within the congregations.

The polemical rhetoric found in the New Testament is an alluring feature for the general reader, as well as the scholar. This attraction to polemics lies not only in our interest in the heatedness of the rhetoric, but also in the evident friction between groups that was created or perpetuated through its employment. In short, (much of) the polemical rhetoric that has been canonized in the New Testament captures various glimpses of the tenuous and tumultuous circumstances surrounding the emergence of "Christian" groups in the first and early second centuries. As a result, it has drawn interest within multiple scholarly contexts.

Prominent amongst these is the study of early Jewish-Christian relations.[1] Here, the examination of polemics has played an

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important part in the overall analysis of important issues, such as the partings of the ways and anti-Semitism or anti-Judaism in the New Testament.[2] In addition to these larger issues, polemical rhetoric also has received attention in studies that are more limited in scope, such as analyses of the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3,[3] communal identity in the gospels of John and Matthew,[4] and the Pastoral Epistles.[5] Ultimately, interest and scholarship on early Christian polemical rhetoric is wide-ranging.

Yet, with this widespread, scholarly interest in polemics, it is surprising that very little sustained attention has been given to the topic of New Testament polemical rhetoric, as a whole. In short, studies focused solely on the rhetoric of polemics in the New Testament largely have been neglected. The only notable exceptions to this neglect are Luke Johnson's oft cited article, "The New Testament's Anti-Jewish Slander and the Conventions of Ancient Polemic"[6] and Andrie du Toit's lesser known but quite

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[1] See Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians 70-170 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Claudia Setzer, *Jewish Responses to Early Christians: History and Polemics, 30-150 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); and William Horbury, *Jews and Christians in Contact and Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

[2] See James D. G. Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991) and the essays collected in Craig A. Evans and Donald A. Hagner, eds., *Anti-Semitism and Early Christianity: Issues of Polemic and Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), respectively.

[3] See Adela Yarbro Collins, "Vilification and Self-Definition in the Book of Revelation," *HTR* (1986) 308-20.

[4] See Sean Freyne, "Vilifying the Other and Defining the Self: Matthew's and John's Anti-Jewish Polemic in Focus," in *"To See Ourselves as Others See Us": Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) 117-43.

[5] See Robert J. Karris, "The Background and Significance of the Polemic in the Pastoral Epistles," *JBL* 92 (1973) 549-64 and L. T. Johnson, "II Timothy and the Polemic Against False Teachers: A Re-Examination," *JrelS* 6/7 (1978-79) 1-26.

[6] *JBL* 108 (1989) 419-41.

valuable essay, "Vilification as a Pragmatic Device in Early Christian Epistolography."[7] Johnson, in his work, takes up a historical, social, and literary-critical examination of the rhetoric of slander (i.e., polemics) that is directed by Christians against Jewish opponents, as seen in the New Testament. He concludes the following: (1) in view of the contemporary conventions of the rhetoric of slander/polemic (both Hellenistic and Jewish), "the NT's slander against fellow Jews is remarkably mild"[8] and (2) the strongly connotative, rather than denotative, import of the conventional rhetoric of polemics "signifies simply that these are opponents and such things should be said about them."[9] In a conceptual furtherance of Johnson's work, du Toit examines a performative dimension of polemical rhetoric, namely, how some early Christian authors used *vituperatio* as a device by which to attempt to influence their audiences.[10] Here, I aim to extend and expand upon du Toit's work and, thus, build upon Johnson's foundational insights.

In this article I do not intend to address the entirety of the polemical rhetoric in the New Testament. My interest lies with the rhetoric of polemics that emerges out of situations of internal social conflict—i.e., conflict within early Christian groups, as seen in the epistolary

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[7] *Bib* 75 (1994) 403-412. Another fine work on polemical rhetoric in early Christianity and Judaism is G. N. Stanton, "Aspects of Early Christian-Jewish Polemic and Apologetic," *NTS* 31 (1985) 377-92. However, since the focus of Stanton's work falls largely outside the NT (i.e., on Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, the *Testament of Levi*, other non-canonical Christian literature, and only briefly on the canonical gospels), it stands just outside the bounds of this article. Finally, see also Lauri Thurén, "Hey Jude! Asking for the Original Situation and Message of a Catholic Epistle," NTS 43 (1997) 451-465.

[8] Johnson, "Anti-Jewish Slander," 441. Johnson further notes that the NT's harshest polemic is reserved not for Jews but, rather, for Gentiles and/or other deviant insiders to the messianic movement.

[9] Johnson, "Anti-Jewish Slander," 441. In short, the anti-Jewish rhetoric of slander is designed simply to demarcate "the opponent" and not to provide an objective description of them; it is entirely prescriptive, rather than descriptive, language.

[10] du Toit, "Vilification," 404.

literature of the New Testament.[11] Yet, since this body of material is much too large to address in a brief essay, I will utilize 2 Peter as a heuristic device.[12] Outside of the introduction, the paper is divided into four main sections: (1) taking stock of the situation of social conflict in 2 Peter, (2) a categorization of the forms of polemical rhetoric found in the epistle, (3) an analysis of the socio-rhetorical function of the polemical rhetoric, and (4) some conclusions and observations on studying and reading the rhetoric of polemics in similar instances within the New Testament. Through my analysis of the rhetoric of polemics in 2 Peter, I hope to refine further the scholarly study of the subject and propose a paradigm for reading and assessing this particular subset of polemical rhetoric.

The Situation of Social Conflict in 2 Peter

Based upon the evidence yielded by the author of 2 Peter, the situation of conflict described in the epistle is surely an internal phenomenon. The author of the epistle is attempting to counter a group of teachers who are within the congregations to which the epistle is addressed. Evidence that these opponents were, at least at one time, insiders to the local congregations can be found in many of the author's accusations where he not only expresses his harsh condemnation of them but also implicitly notes their (former) insider status. The author admits that the opponents had once followed "the straight way" (2:15), known "the way of righteousness" (2:21), and "escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," (2:20; cf. 1:9), only later to "have gone astray," "to have turned back," and become "entangled and overpowered by them," respectively.[13]

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[11] E.g., Galatians; 1 Cor 5; 11:17-34; 1-2 Timothy; Titus; 2 Peter; Jude; Revelation 2-3.

[12] As 2 Peter contains an abundance and varied forms of polemical rhetoric, found within a setting of internal social conflict, the letter presents itself as a prime object for the study of such a topic and as a springboard by which to approach polemical rhetoric in various other NT epistles.

[13] It is important to remember that the reader is privy only to the voice of the author in this situation of internal conflict. The fact, then, that the author insinuates that

Furthermore, the author contends that the opponents are "reveling in their deceitful pleasures while they are feasting with you" (2:13) and that they "distort to their own destruction" the letters of Paul and the other scriptures (3:15-16). Here, the author indicates that the opponents were not only former members of the local congregations, but that at least some of them also are currently active insiders, in that they appear to be still involved in the eucharist and in the (public) interpretation of the scriptures.[14] The primary objection expressed by the author against these insiders concerns their eschatological skepticism.[15] The writer of 2 Peter claims that these internal teachers question the parousia, judgement, and power of Jesus Christ (1:16; 3:4, 10; cf. 2:19). As a corollary to this accusation, the author further contends that they deny the cleansing of past sins and, thus, Christ's ability and/or desire to forgive sins (1:9; 2:1, 20). "In sum, these skeptics denied God's past, present, and future involvement in the world and human affairs, divine communication through and control over prophecy, and divine judgment of either sinners or the righteous."[16] The principal product that stemmed from the opponents' eschatological skepticism was their justification of moral libertinism (2:10, 19).[17]

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these "opponents" were once insiders is surprising and revealing because the admission seems to hinder rather than further his argumentative aims. Finally, I will continue to approach the contextual situation from the vantagepoint of the author, not in order to privilege or endorse his account but to attempt to examine what role(s) the polemical rhetoric of the epistle plays in the author's overall efforts at persuasion.

[14] The internal nature of the situation of conflict is further highlighted through various other incidental comments in the epistle (1:16; 2:1, 2; 3:4). Cf. Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco: Word, 1983) 154-5 and Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society: A Study of 2 Peter*, ConBNT 9 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1977) 49-50.

[15] See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 154 and Duane Frederick Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style: Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, SBLDS 104, ed. Charles Talbert (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988) 82.

[16] John H. Elliott, "Peter, Second Epistle Of," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 285.

This moral freedom likely was connected to their compromise with pagan moral standards which, in the author's view, would constitute a transgression of communal norms or limits and, thus, provide a threat to the distinct identity of the group.[18]

The severity of this deviant threat to the limits of the Christian community is quite high, at least in the eyes of the author. The severe character of the threat can be seen in a number of different aspects of the epistle. First, though the author portrays the hearers as being quite firm in the faith and only in need of some reminders (1:12-15; 3:1-2), the looming presence of deviant opponents identifies a situation characterized not primarily by security. The primary impetus behind the writing of the epistle was not simply the desire to affirm the readers or to set out the content of proper teachings. Rather, it was the author's perception of deviance within the congregations that was the primary warrant for the letter. Therefore, the warm affirmations of the hearers' security in the faith serve as a (rhetorical) device that likely is intended to conceal any success the opponents may have been enjoying, thus hiding the severity of the threat.[19] Second, the fact that chapter two is chock-full of polemical rhetoric directed against the opponents reveals not only the intensity of the author's concerns but also the actual

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[17] The moral libertinism of the opponents, along with the references to angels and knowledge, has led some scholars to label them "gnostics"—e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Black's New Testament Commentaries, ed. Henry Chadwick (London: A & C Black, 1969) 231. However, upon a close examination of the letter, it is readily observable that these opponents do not fit precisely that profile. Michel Desjardins, "The Portrayal of the Dissidents in 2 Peter and Jude: Does it Tell Us More About the 'Godly' Than the 'Ungodly'?," *JSNT* 30 (1987) 95 contends that "Gnosticism, in whatever stage or form, had little or nothing to do with these communities." Cf. Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 31.

[18] See Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 120; Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 155-6; and Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 82.

[19] Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 99 notes that the reminding nature of the letter is standard to the farewell discourse genre and also is highly rhetorical in function.

severity of the threat at hand.[20] Finally, the severity of the threat also is evident in the opponents' success in winning followers (2:2-3; 3:17; cf. 2:14, 18).[21] This public dimension of the threat not only indicates its severity but also a possible crisis within the community itself. If people were actually being won over to the opponents' way—which I would contend that they were, since even the author implies that some had been—then the people of the community, not just the author, would be well aware of these conditions of competition and opposition.[22]

In reaction to the severe threat stemming from the opposing group's eschatological skepticism, the author of 2 Peter marshals a hearty response. Initially, the author attempts to counter the claims of the opponents through the employment of specific teachings (3:3-10; cf. 1:20-21) and ethical exhortation (1:3-11; 3:14-15, 17-18; cf. 3:11). In response to the opponents' eschatological skepticism, the author predicts the coming of mockers in ignorance (3:3-6) and mounts a proper defense of the seeming delay of God's judgment (3:7-10).[23] On top of these teachings, the author supplies the readers with much

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[20] This statement is built upon the concept that the closer and more threatening rivals become, the stronger the response needed to rebut and/or refute them. In this line, Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 115 notes that "the length of the *digressio* is indicative of the seriousness of the case."

[21] The pseudonimity of the letter and the author's stress of apostolic teaching are further indicators of the severity of the threat at hand. Cf. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 154.

[22] Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 82 contends that "the audience certainly must also perceive the exigence within its midst, but what interest they have in it, what quality they ascribe to it, and what they see as the consequences of it, are impossible to determine from the content of the epistle."

[23] See Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter," *JBL* 99 (1980) 407-31. This article is a distillation of his doctoral dissertation, *The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter* (Unpublished dissertation: Yale University, 1977). Neyrey has demonstrated convincingly that much of the form and content of the polemic in 2 Peter is modeled after an Epicurean polemic designed to combat the charge of a delay in divine judgment and, thus, a denial of theodicy.

ethical exhortation that not only sets out the substance of "proper" living but, again, counters the position of the opponents.[24] Yet, the author's persuasive intent extends even further. The situation of conflict evident here concerns not only the issues of correct teachings and living but also, and maybe even primarily, that of authority within the group and community. Therefore, in an effort to bolster his own position and authority, and demolish that of his opponents, the author incorporates both a broad-based appeal to outside authority and a severe condemnation of the adversaries into his response.[25]

In hopes of solidifying the allegiance of the hearers, the author appeals to an array of authoritative texts, traditions, and figures. One common method of establishing authority used here is an argument based on historical precedence and antiquity. Over against the novel ideas of the false teachers, the author of 2 Peter posits a range of "older, venerable, and more probative testimony of prophetic ["holy prophets" 3:2; OT proverb 2:22; OT and Jewish allusions 2:4-8; cf. 2:16; "commandment of the Lord and Savior" 3:2] and apostolic tradition [Paul 3:15-16; previous letter of Peter 3:1; apostleship of Peter 1:16-18]."[26] Furthermore, the strong

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[24] The reactionary character of the ethical exhortation can be seen in that it consistently espouses teachings that are diametrically opposed to those touted by the opposing teachers. For example, the author's denunciation of the opponents includes the accusation (in 2:13) that they are "spots and blemishes" (σπίλοι καὶ μῶροι), implying a corrupt moral character. In opposition, the author exhorts the readers/hearers in 3:14 to be "without spots and without blemishes" (ἄσπιλοι καὶ ἀμώμητοί). The diametric opposition in these two commands lends credence to the thesis that the author is setting out the substance of "proper" ethical living in light of the teachings and claims of the opponents. This tendency of the author can be further observed by comparing the polemical charges against the opponents in 2:18-20 with the ethical exhortation to the congregations in 1:3-4. Cf. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 276-7.

[25] See Elliott, "Peter, Second Epistle Of," 286. I will reserve a treatment of the author's severe condemnation of the opponents, via polemical rhetoric, for the next section.

[26] Elliott, "Peter, Second Epistle Of," 286. Cf. Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 84 on the role of tradition as constraints in the rhetorical argument of the author and Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 21-7 on the authority of Paul's letters for the author of 2 Peter and the wider community.

(literary) dependence and reliance upon the epistle of Jude is a further attempt by the author to establish his base of authority.[27] Finally, the author further attempts to bolster his position and authority by relying upon "the Word of God" (3:5), other traditional forms of teaching/instruction, such as the "way of truth" and the "way of righteousness" (2:2, 21; cf. 1:12; 2:15),[28] and his own reminders (1:12-13; 3:1) that hearken back, pseudonymously, to the figure and authority of Peter. Ultimately, the pseudonymous author has lined up multiple historical figures and sources of authority in an attempt to establish further his own authority and solidify the allegiance of the hearers to his position (over against that of the opponents).

Now I will turn to take-up a more in-depth analysis of the various forms of polemical rhetoric used by the author in condemnation of the opponents.

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[27] As has been recognized by many, Jude and 2 Peter share a close literary relationship, especially in their employment of polemical rhetoric. Following current scholarly consensus, I assume the priority of Jude. Thus, I contend that the author of 2 Peter knows of and uses Jude as a source in the construction of his epistle. Furthermore, the large amount of borrowing that occurs not only highlights the indebtedness of 2 Peter to Jude, but possibly also the prominence and/or current authoritative status of Jude within (at least parts of) Asia Minor.

[28] In 2 Peter, the author utilizes ὁδὸς and ὁδὸν to represent an ethical way of life. The term is employed not only when referring to the "proper" (that is, proper according to the author) way of life (e.g., "way of truth" 2:2; "the straight way" 2:15; and "the way of righteousness" 2:21), but also to "the way of Balaam" (2:15), an "improper" and "unethical" (again, according to the author) way of life. The use of the term/phrase, "the way" or "the way of life," was quite common in OT, Jewish, and early Christian literature. See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 241-2. Bauckham notes that the metaphor did not represent a specific body of doctrine, but "a whole moral and religious way of life." Therefore, though this body of ethical guidelines most likely would not have been codified, in a formal sense, it would have been known informally and observed as traditional teachings/instructions.

2 Peter, along with Jude, appear to be the most densely packed polemical documents in the New Testament.[29] Yet, in this abundance, very little, if any, of the rhetoric possesses even a measure of objective accuracy.[30] Therefore, the polemical rhetoric in the epistle should be taken not as descriptive but prescriptive rhetoric, in that it is intended solely to prescribe negative qualities to these opposing teachers. I now will attempt to categorize these various forms of polemical rhetoric found within 2 Peter, while also citing similar forms that appear elsewhere in the New Testament.[31]

I. Moral Depravity[32]

A common strategy utilized by the author of 2 Peter to denigrate the adversaries was to call into question their moral character. The two most prominent forms of this strategy are that of "sexual imagery" and "greed," which will be highlighted below.

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[29] Elliott, "Peter, Second Epistle Of," 284 highlights this point in noting that the style of the epistle is "marked by excess rather than economy of expression."

[30] The author's charge in 2:1, that the opponents are "denying the Master who bought them," however, seems to be an exception to this claim. On the methodology of mirror-reading polemics, see John M. G. Barclay, "Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case," *JSNT* 31 (1987) 73-93. Yet, in this article, I do not intend to re-construct the identity of the opponents in 2 Peter. Rather, I am interested primarily in the rhetoric used by the author in his response to them, whoever exactly they may be.

[31] Here, I will group the various forms of polemical rhetoric in an inductive fashion, based on the type of image being employed. Though I could have utilized Greco-Roman (or Jewish) rhetorical categories to systematize these forthcoming examples of early Christian rhetoric, I have opted not to in order to stress the synchronic dimension of the rhetoric (over against its diachronic aspect). The background behind these forms of early Christian polemical rhetoric is definitely an important issue but one I have chosen to leave for a later essay, allowing the rhetoric of early Christianity to function first on its own terms.

[32] See du Toit, "Vilification," 408-9.

A. Sexual Imagery (μοιχαλίς; ἀσέλγεια; ἐπιθυμία)

One of the most prevalent and striking forms of polemical rhetoric found in 2 Peter is that of sexual depravity. Here, the author characterizes the opponents as "adulterous" (μοιχαλίδος 2:14), "licentious" (ἀσέλγεια 2:2, 18; cf. 2:7), and as indulging in and/or following their own "lust" (ἐπιθυμία 1:4; 2:10, 18) or "lusts" (3:3). Although these terms can refer to specific actions and emotions relating to sexuality, they likely are not intended to do so here.[33] Rather, the polemical rhetoric is used metaphorically to describe behavior that, for the author, is on par with sexual depravity. The metaphorical notion of these terms is well established. The usage of the metaphorical sense of "adultery" goes as far back as the prophets description of Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh and extends to James' polemical outburst against the rich (Jas 4:4).[34] The final two terms, though too having specific referents in sexuality, also convey a less literal sense in their New Testament usage. ἀσέλγεια came to describe not only sexual debauchery, but debauchery in general, hence its frequent employment in New Testament vice lists (e.g., Mark 7:22; Rom 13:13; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19).[35] Similarly, ἐπιθυμία has come to mark lust of the flesh not simply in sexual terms (e.g., Rom 1:24) but also in a broader sense, such as in coveting (e.g., Rom 7:7-8) or that which came naturally to believers prior to their conversion (e.g., Eph 2:3; 4:22).[36] The prevalence of the charge of "sexual depravity," including but not

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[33] Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 48 contends that the author of 2 Peter borrowed the polemical rhetoric relating to sexual immorality from Jude but that it is not the center of interest in 2 Peter (as it is in Jude).

[34] The figurative sense of the term is found in a vice list at 1 Cor 6:9 and in the gospel writers respective responses to the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 12:39), Pharisees and Sadducees (Matt 16:4), and the disciples and a crowd (Mark 8:38).

[35] Cf. Eph 4:19; Jude 4.

[36] Although the term most often conveys a negative sense, it also can be utilized in a positive light (e.g., 1 Thess 2:17). Other examples of the figurative use of the term can be found in Jude 16, 18.

limited to these three terms, indicates that it may have been a stock image of polemics.[37]

B. Greed (πλεονεξία)

A second image of moral depravity employed by the author of 2 Peter is "greediness." Here, the author warns his readers/hearers that the opponents, in their greed, will exploit them with deceptive words (2:3). He, then, extends the polemical accusation to the character of the opponents by claiming that they have "hearts trained in greed" (2:14). Along with the rhetoric of sexual depravity, πλεονεξία (i.e., greed) also appears to be a stock image of polemical caricature since it too is found frequently in New Testament vice lists (e.g., Mark 7:22; Rom 1:29; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5).[38] As a stock image of polemics, the charge of πλεονεξία would be recognized widely as an indicator of moral depravity, surely bringing the moral character of the opponents into question.

II. Destined for Destruction (ἀπώλεια; φθορά)[39]

Common to the polemical rhetoric found in situations of social conflict is the contention that the "opponents" are destined for destruction. The destruction assigned to the adversaries in 2 Peter connotes both physical destruction and that which will come from eschatological judgment. In 2:12 the author predicts the physical death of the opponents by comparing them, via simile, to creatures who are born to be "captured and killed (φθορὰν)." Again, in the same verse, the author notes that "in their [i.e., the creatures] destruction (φθορᾷ), they [i.e., the opponents] also will be destroyed

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[37] These terms used by the author of 2 Peter do not exhaust the category. For instance, in 1 Tim 1:10; Rev 2:14, 20-21 πορνεία marks the charge of sexual depravity. Cf. 1 Cor 6:9; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Col 3:5, where πορνεία is found in vice lists.

[38] cf. Luke 12:15; Eph 4:19; 1 Thess 2:5; Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 37; and Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 109.

[39] Du Toit, "Vilification," 410 also notes this category but in a broader sense than I undertake here.

(φθαρήσονται)." While the precise timing of this physical death is left ambiguous by the author, indicating that it likely would not be an imminent event, the charge of physical destruction is made plain nonetheless.[40] A further branding of the opponents via this charge is found in 3:7, where the author marks the destruction (ἀπωλείας) of the opponents, who are implied within "the godless," to be on "the day of judgment (ἡμέραν κρίσεως)." Additionally, ἀπώλεια also is employed by the author to characterize the opponents' αἱρέσεις (2:1), the type of punishment that they will bring upon themselves (2:1), and that which awaits them having been pronounced long ago (2:3), namely, eschatological judgment and destruction (cf. 3:16). As seen here, and elsewhere in the New Testament, ἀπώλεια often signifies destruction that is punishment for the wicked.[41] The insinuation, then, that the opponents are destined for destruction (both physical and eschatological) reflects an attempt to caricature them as wicked.

III. Blasphemy (Βλασφημέω; ἐμπαίκτης)[42]

One of the most conspicuous and potentially forceful forms of the rhetoric of polemics is that of blasphemy. The charge of blasphemy, though gaining precise meaning based on the specific contextual circumstances, carries a strong denigratory force, in that it connotes a violation of the majesty of God.[43] In 2 Peter, however, the author does not charge the adversaries, directly, with blasphemy

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[40] Cf. 2 Pet 2:19 and Rom 8:21. For other NT examples of φθορά and its varied uses see 1 Cor 15:42, 50; Gal 6:8; Col 2:22; as well as 2 Pet 1:4.

[41] Cf. BAGD 103 and Phil 1:28; 3:19.

[42] du Toit, "Vilification," 408 includes a brief discussion of the charge of blasphemy under the category entitled, "Inflated self-esteem." Cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus: A Philological-Historical Study of the Key Jewish Themes Impacting Mark 14:61-64*, WUNT II 106, eds. Martin Hengel and Otfried Hofius (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 30-112, which contains an extensive discussion of what "blasphemy" meant in ancient Jewish texts.

[43] See du Toit, "Vilification," 408 who further notes that "it surely was one of the gravest labels which could be attached to anyone."

against God. Rather, he contends that the opponents blaspheme or, more appropriately, slander (Βλασφημέω) "the way of truth" (2:2), "the glorious ones" (2:10), and "in ignorance" (2:12). The first charge here (i.e., 2:2) insinuates that the adversaries are blasphemous in that they are slandering a traditionally-held ethical way of life. However, in the other two instances of the term, this type of overt force behind the charge is not as readily observable. Following Bauckham (and others), these teachers appear to be slandering some group of evil angels (the referent of "the glorious ones" in 2:10) to whom even the stronger and more powerful (good) angels do not bring a "slanderous judgment" (Βλάσφημον κρίσιν) from the Lord (2:11).[44] Ultimately, though the opponents are not being charged here with slandering God or God's holiness, the written and/or oral employment of the Greek term Βλασφημέω, would still ring of a firm and readily recognizable accusation, namely, that that the opponents are blasphemous and their character should be known as such.[45]

Connected with the notion of blasphemy (i.e., the set of those who speak out against or scoff at God) is the label "mockers" (ἐμπαῖκται), a hapax legomenon in the New Testament.[46] The author of 2 Peter indirectly applies this label to his opponents by predicting that in the last days "mockers" (ἐμπαῖκται) will come "mocking" (ἐμπαιγνομῇ) (3:3), thus identifying the opponents as "people who scorn and despise God's revelation, both moral and prophetic."[47] These two labels, then, can be seen to possess a

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[44] See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 261-3, who also contends that the accusation in 2:12, that the opponents slander in ignorance (ἀγνοοῦσιν), also refers back to these evil angels.

[45] For other NT evidence where this charge and/or label is applied to opponents see Acts 13:45; 18:6; 1 Tim 1:20; 6:4; Jas 2:7; Jude 8; 10; Rev 2:9. Cf. Eph 4:31; Col 3:8; 1 Pet 4:4; Rev 13:5-6.

[46] See also the phrase ὑπέρογκα γὰρ ματαιότητος in 2:18, where ὑπέρογκα can connote high-flown speech against God. Though Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 274 contends that the term, as it is used here, may have lost that specific significance.

[47] Bauckham, *Jude , 2 Peter*, 289. Cf. Jude 1:18.

similar denigratory thrust; the opponents despise and deride God and the things of God.

IV. Follow Myths (μῦθος)

A common and more indirect strategy of caricature, which is seen most vividly in the pastoral epistles, is the accusation that the opponents follow myths (1 Tim 1:4; 4:7; 2 Tim 4:4; Tit 1:14). Here, in sections of ethical exhortation, the readers are warned not to follow, or even give heed to myths (μύθοις/μύθους). While the specific character of the myths in 2 Tim 4:4 are not noted, they are described as "vile and old-womanish" (βεβήλους καὶ γραώδεις) in 1 Tim 4:7; "Jewish" (Ἰουδαικοῖς) in Tit 1:14; and are coupled with "genealogies" (γενεαλογίαις) in 1 Tim 1:4. Implied within these bits of exhortation is a warning against following the myths of the adversaries. In 2 Peter, the author declares that in making known the power and coming of Jesus to the readers/hearers of the epistle, they did not follow cleverly-devised (σεσοφισμένοις) myths; rather they relied on their own eyewitness account (1:16).[48] This verse is double-edged. While it obviously reveals one of multiple attempts by the author to legitimate his own teachings, position, and/or authority, it also implicitly caricatures the opponents and their ways as being fabricated and of human origin.

V. Going Astray (πλανάω; ; δελεάζω)

The charge of going or leading others astray is an additional one that is brought against the opponents in 2 Peter. Though the verb, πλανάω, as well as the noun, πλάνη, do not possess any pejorative characteristics which are inherent to them, a depreciatory sense was often picked up in their early Christian usage. In their neutral sense, the terms simply convey the idea of "wandering" (e.g., Heb 11:38). However, at times they were loaded with dangerously evil and

[48] It is possible that the author is not making a charge against the opponents here but merely attempting to refute one of their claims, due to the appearance of the οὐ...ἀλλά formula. Cf. Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Apologetic Use of the Transfiguration in 2 Peter 1:16-21," *CBQ* 42 (1980) 506-9 and Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 103.

potentially tragic connotations. As a result, early Christian authors often warn their readers against the "deceit"/"error" (πλάνη) of the adversaries and call them to guard against being "lead astray" (πλανάω) by these persons.[49] In 2 Peter, this pejorative sense is employed in 2:15 where the author claims that the opponents have "gone astray" (ἐπανήθησαν) from the straight way and now are "following the way of Balaam."[50] Furthermore, the author uses πλάνη (2:18; 3:17) to denote, or at least connote, the "error" of these opposing teachers. The author's usage of these terms in the epistle match up with their larger usage in the New Testament, as a derogatory concept used to caricature a "wrong" way of life and, ultimately, an opponent.

Connected to the charge of going or leading astray is the accusation that the opponents have enticed (δελεάζω) certain persons to follow their ways and teachings (2:14, 18).[51] The accusation of enticement insinuates that the people were not following these teachers out of their own initiative but, rather, that they were being lead away or baited by them. The force of this charge is heightened through the additional contention that the opponents are preying upon those who are "unstable" (2:14) and who have just escaped from those who live in error (2:18). The opponents are being accused of enticing those who are not yet grounded in Christian teaching and who still have not yet broken free from their pagan society; in short, those who largely are defenseless against heretical teachings.[52]

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[49] For this use of πλάνη see Eph 4:14; 1 John 4:6; Jude 11 and for πλανάω see, especially, 2 Tim 3:13; 1 John 2:26; Rev 2:20.

[50] See Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 267-8 on ancient texts which connect the image of "road" or "way" with the notion of "going astray."

[51] Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 266 notes that the verb means not only to entice, but to do so with a bait. The only other NT example of this verb is found in Jas 1:14, where it talks of humans being tempted and enticed by their own lusts.

[52] Though the manner and tactics by which the teachers are enticing and leading people astray surely are being exaggerated here for rhetorical purposes, the fact that they are accused specifically of preying upon new believers may well reflect some level of objective accuracy within the charge.

VI. Blind (τυφλός)

Another accusation that the author of 2 Peter indirectly appends to the opponents is that they are blind (τυφλός 1:9). This charge, along with others, is directed at the opposing teachers in a covert, rather than overt, fashion. After exhorting the readers to follow and live by a lengthy list of virtues (1:5-7), the author then states that anyone who lacks them is "nearsighted" (μυωπάζων) and "blind." Here, the author has combined his own word, μυωπάζων, a New Testament hapax legomenon, with a term already common to the language of polemical rhetoric, τυφλός.[53] The implicit, yet seemingly glaring, message behind the statement is that the opponents lack these aforementioned virtues and are, thus, spiritually nearsighted and blind.

VII. Animalistic Imagery (ζῷον; ὑποζύγιον; κύων; ὗς)

A simple category common to polemical rhetoric was that of animalistic imagery (i.e., likening one's adversary to an animal or beast). In the New Testament we see opponents caricatured as "dogs" (κύων; Phil 3:2; Rev 22:15; cf. Matt 7:6) and wild animals (implied in θηριομαχέω; 1 Cor 15:32).[54] Yet, an even more wide-ranging employment of this category of polemical rhetoric is found in 2 Peter. In the most overt example, the author aligns the opponents with "irrational beasts" (ἄλογα; 2:12) via metaphor.[55] Furthermore, in a more indirect manner, he implies that the opponents are more irrational than an "ass" (ὑποζύγιον; 2:16), in aligning them with the Balaam figure and story, and likens them to a "dog" (κύων; 2:22) and a "sow" (ὗς; 2:22) through the citation and extension of an Old Testament proverb (Prov 26:11). In a

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[53] For other NT examples of τυφλός being used as rhetoric of caricature see Matt 15:14 (4x); 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26; Rev 3:17.

[54] Cf. Rom 1:23 and 1 Pet 5:8 where animalistic imagery is used to describe actions of the wicked and the devil, respectively.

[55] Cf. Heb 13:11; Jude 10; and multiple instances in Revelation where ζῷον is employed.

related instance, the author calls the teachers "spots and blemishes" (σπίλοι καὶ μῶμοι; 2:13; cf. Eph 5:27), which in the context of sacrificial offerings can refer to impure animal offerings and priests.[56] The ultimate import of employing this category of polemical rhetoric is quite clear; it implies that the opponents are animalistic and, thus, inhuman in their character and actions.

VIII. Natural Imagery (πηγή; ὁμίχλη)

The employment of natural imagery, as a category of polemical rhetoric, is similar to the use of specific animals and/or animalistic figures, the obvious difference being the types of images that are utilized. The use of natural imagery to caricature an opponent is limited largely to the books of Jude and 2 Peter, again reflecting the high level of overlap in the polemical rhetoric within the two epistles.[57] In Jude 12-13 the opponents are metaphorically compared to "waterless clouds" (νεφέλαι ἄνυδροι), "fruitless autumn trees" (δένδρα φθινοπωρινὰ) that are "twice-dead" and "uprooted," "wild waves" (κύματα ἄγρια) of the sea, and "wandering stars" (ἀστέρες πλανῆται). It is interesting to note that in each of these four cases the image from nature is modified further by terminology that connotes a devious character. Likewise, in 2 Pet 2:17, partially relying upon Jude, the natural images that are employed also are modified by negative descriptors; "springs" (πηγαὶ) is modified by "waterless" (ἄνυδροι) and "mists" (ὁμίχλαι) is described as being "driven by a tempest." The seeming implication of this observation is that natural images, in and of themselves, did not connote a strong denigratory force against an opponent. Therefore, they were joined with terminology that made plain the implied message: the character and actions of these opponents were dubious.

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[56] Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 265-6 notes this in relation to Lev 1:3 and 21:21.

[57] On the use of natural imagery in 2 Peter and Jude see Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 54-6.

IX. False Figures (e.g., ψευδοπροφήτης; ψευδοδιδάσκαλος)[58]

A more intricate and, possibly more sophisticated, category of polemical rhetoric is that of false figures. In this instance, an author compares his or her opponent(s) to a given false figure type, usually one that is drawn on from the past. These figure types, therefore, have an established history that likely would be well-known amongst the people, heightening the force of the defamation being implied. In the New Testament, most of these false figure types have the ψεύδ-prefix.[59] Hence, the author of 2 Peter employs "false prophets" (ψευδοπροφῆται)[60] and "false teachers" (ψευδοδιδάσκαλοι)[61] in 2:1 as types of false figures in order to caricature the opponents.[62] Additional false figure types employed elsewhere in the New Testament are "false apostles" (ψευδαπόσολοι; 2 Cor 11:13; cf. Rev 2:2) and "false brother" (ψευδαδέλφους; Gal 2:4). Furthermore, the label ψευδής or "liar," as seen in Rev 2:2 and 21:8, not only represents a character flaw but, possibly, also a typological label for an opponent.[63] Through the employment of these false figure types, the author hopes that his readers/hearers will see and acknowledge the opponents not as individual human beings but as representatives of a larger, devious figure type.

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[58] du Toit, "Vilification," 405 identifies a similar category that he titles "Hypocrisy and falseness." Here, I pick up on du Toit's idea of falseness but channel it into a more-specific discussion of false figures and how they are used to characterize one's opponents.

[59] See du Toit, "Vilification," 405.

[60] Cf. Matt 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; Luke 6:26; Acts 13:6; Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10; and, especially, 1 John 4:1.

[61] This is a NT *hapax legomenon.*

[62] Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 106-7 notes how the chiastic structure of 2:1-3a directly aligns the opponents with the false teachers.

[63] However, ψεύστης, as found in 1 Tim 1:10; Tit 1:12; 1 John 1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10, appears to emphasize the characteristic of being a liar rather than representing a specific type of figure.

X. OT Figures and Jewish Tradition (e.g., Balaam, Angels, Ancient World, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Lawless)

The false figures category of polemical rhetoric, at times, was refined further by New Testament authors through the selection of specific historical figures to replace the typological ones. Here, instead of relying upon general false figure types, an author would invoke a concrete, historical figure, as well as the traditions and legends which surrounded the figure, in an attempt to discredit the opponent. Almost invariably these figures (as seen in the New Testament) were ones drawn from the Old Testament and/or were the subject of (further) Jewish legend. We see the figures and traditions surrounding Jezebel (Rev 2:20), the Nicolaitans (Rev 2:6, 15), Cain (1 John 3:12; Jude 11), Korah (Jude 11), Esau (Heb 12:16), and Jannes and Jambres (2 Tim 3:8) utilized by various epistle writers in an effort to discredit the respective opponents which thwarted them. Likewise, the author of 2 Peter invokes multiple Old Testament figures in working toward this same end. In 2:15-16 he invokes the figure of Balaam in order to further explicate how exactly the opponents "have gone astray."[64] According to the author, the figure of Balaam, along with the traditions surrounding him, is paradigmatically illustrative for the error of the opponents; they are following the "way of Balaam." Additionally, the "angels" (2:4), "the ancient world" (2:5), "Sodom and Gomorrah" (2:6), and "the lawless" (2:7) are Old Testament figures, both individual and collective, that represent God's past punishment of the wicked.[65] These Old Testament figures, as they are used here, are also "typological prophecies of the eschatological judgment. They

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[64] See also Jude 11 and Rev 2:14 where the figure of Balaam is employed in an attempt to denigrate an adversary. Based on these texts, Fornberg, *An Early Church*, 40 notes that Balaam "represents a common type of heretic" and "was regarded as an heretic *par excellence* at least in parts of Asia Minor."

[65] The author also provides counterexamples that confirm God's ability to rescue the godly. He notes the sparing of Noah (2:5) and Lot (2:7) in an effort to reassure the readers of God's coming deliverance for them. On the rhetorical moves being made in this section, see Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 83-4, 110-4.

foreshadow the doom of the wicked of the last days, among whom the false teachers and their followers are numbered."[66] Ultimately, while the "false figures" and "Old Testament figures" forms of polemical rhetoric are quite similar, in that they both are intended to serve as typologies or paradigms for interpreting the character and/or actions of the opponents, the present category reaches further toward this end. Here, the author parallels the opponents not with a general false figure type, but with a specific and, often times, widely known heretical figure, a method of caricature and defamation known as *Ketzergeschichte*. Via *Ketzergeschichte* the author assigns a heretical trajectory to the given opponents that not only defames their current position but also disparages their entire past by retrofitting them into a normative heretical history. In short, the opponents are and always have been heretical types in line with the specific Old Testament figures and/or traditions noted.

In these numerous categories of polemical rhetoric, one sees that the author of 2 Peter employs some forms held in common with other New Testament writers and others that are unique to his own epistle. He has seemingly run the gambit of polemical rhetoric. However, the ultimate force of the rhetoric lies not in the individual categories that the author employs. Rather, it is found in the synergy that results from the heaping up of denigratory and/or defamatory terms, images, and figures.[67] Thus, while I have dedicated the majority of time and space to the content (i.e., forms) of the polemical charges, the issue of function still remains to be addressed. Though all the forms of polemical rhetoric have some functional commonality, in that they all are designed to caricature and/or denigrate the opponent, certain forms do have some distinct functional aspects to them. Therefore, I will turn to address the function of the polemical rhetoric in 2 Peter.

Yet, before moving on, a brief note on methodological intent is in order. In the next section, I will concentrate only on the socio-

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[66] Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 256.

[67] On the style of the author's use of polemical rhetoric, especially in 2:10b-22, see Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 115.

rhetorical function of the polemical rhetoric.[68] I will attempt to understand how the polemical rhetoric deliberately functions within the rhetorical argumentation of the author and the social implications that stem from it.

As an aid in this effort, I will relate and highlight an interactionist perspective of deviance, drawn from the field of sociology.[69]

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[68] While I contend that this is the primary functional dimension of the rhetoric, I do not rule out other possible functions it may have. Also, I do not intend to undertake here a formal analysis of the rhetorical argumentation of 2 Peter in light of ancient Greco-Roman conventions of rhetoric. This has already been addressed quite effectively by Watson in his *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*. My analysis is rhetorical in a much more limited sense. I intend, simply, to examine how the author employs various forms of polemical rhetoric within the argumentation (i.e., attempt at persuasion) of the letter, as well as tracking and highlighting the social factors involved in and resulting from this effort.

[69] Some notable examples of NT scholarship where ideas from the sociology of deviance have been employed are Desjardins, "The Portrayal of the Dissidents," 89-102; Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Calling Jesus Names: The Social Value of Labels in Matthew* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1988); *idem*, "Conflict in Luke-Acts: Labelling and Deviance Theory," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991) 97-122; Jack T. Sanders, *Schismatics, Sectarians, Dissidents, Deviants: The First One Hundred Years of Jewish-Christian Relations* (London: SCM, 1993); Helmut Mödritzer, *Stigma und Charisma im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt. Zur Soziologie des Urchristentums*, NTOA 28 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1994); Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community*, Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism, eds. William Scott Green and Calvin Goldscheider (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1994); Philip Richter, "Social-Scientific Criticism of the New Testament: An Appraisal and Extended Example," in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism*, eds. Stanley E. Porter and David Tombs, JSNTSup 120 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) 266-309; John M. G. Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-Century Judaism and Christianity," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995) 114-27; *idem*, "Who Was Considered an Apostate in the Jewish Diaspora?," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, eds. Graham N. Stanton and Guy G. Stroumsa (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1998) 80-98; Lloyd Pietersen, "Despicable Deviants: Labelling Theory and the Polemic of the Pastorals," *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997) 343-52; and Todd D. Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica: A Pauline Church and its Neighbours*, JSNTSup 183 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).