

V. HENRY T. NGUYEN

Christian Identity in Corinth

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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V. Henry T. Nguyen

Christian Identity in Corinth

A Comparative Study of 2 Corinthians,
Epictetus and Valerius Maximus

Mohr Siebeck

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To my Wife

Preface

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March 2008

V. Henry T. Nguyen

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Object and Rationale of the Study

This study developed from an initial research interest in exploring ‘identity’, especially Christian identity, in the social world of the New Testament. In a recent study, David Horrell states, ‘Identity has become something of a buzzword in recent social science and in studies in early Christianity’.¹ Also, Philip Esler reflects on the difficulty of discussing identity issues because the term ‘identity’ has become a ‘plastic word’ and so elastic in definition.² Esler advises that it makes sense for one to use the term, provided that he or she defines it. Thus, to clarify, this present study is interested in what is considered ‘social identity’ – that is, an individual’s identity in society, and how that identity was perceived and used in social relations. In particular, this study is interested in looking at the social relations involving Christian identity. In his study, *Social Identity*, Richard Jenkins provides a helpful definition for this present study: ‘Social identity is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)’.³

Some New Testament scholars have employed the modern ‘social identity theory’, which was developed by Henri Tajfel and others in the 1970s, to interpret the New Testament, especially with the use of modern scientific models.⁴ However, the aim of this study is to employ a basic understanding of ‘social identity’ (as given above) to evaluate the primary sources that reveal

¹ Horrell, *Solidarity*, 91. For studies of ‘cultural identity’ in the Roman empire, see e.g. Laurence & Berry, *Cultural Identity*; Huskinson, *Experiencing Rome*. For historical studies of Christian identity, see e.g. Lieu, *Neither*; idem, *Christian Identity*. Additionally, many studies of Christian identity have employed modern social scientific approaches: e.g. Malina, *NT World*; Esler, *Conflict*; Buell, *New Race*; Horrell, *Solidarity*.

² Esler, *Conflict*, 19. Cf. Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 11–17, who evaluates the anachronistic idea of ‘identity’ in the first- and second-century contexts.

³ Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 5.

⁴ For more on this modern theory which considers the social psychology of identity, see Tajfel, *Human Groups*; Robinson, *Social Group*. For recent NT studies that incorporate this modern theory, see e.g. Esler, *Galatians*; idem, *Conflict*; Asano, *Community-Identity*.

dynamics of social relations in the ancient Graeco-Roman world; this understanding, in turn, will shed some light on the New Testament texts and the social aspects of Christian identity. In other words, given the overlap with studies using the social identity theory and their application of a *modern* model or grid, this study can be perceived as attempting to construct an *ancient* model or grid in order to interpret the New Testament writings.

This study began with a particular interest in looking at social identity in Paul's letters in order to grasp how he approaches Christian identity in his church communities. After surveying the Pauline corpus, there appeared to be some important texts that indicated issues relating to social identity. One notable text was 2 Cor 5.12, in which Paul explains that he gives the Corinthians an opportunity to boast against those who boast in 'outward appearance' (πρόσωπον) and not in the heart. Commentators have rightly explained that Paul is reacting here against a boasting in external and worldly things that were used for social advantages (e.g. social status, eloquence in speech, and physical appearance).⁵ However, commentators have not provided much explanation for Paul's use of πρόσωπον here, and how it might be used to express aspects of social identity. In addition to this verse, the initial survey of the Pauline writings revealed that there were other instances of πρόσωπον and its cognates that also seemed to indicate some features of social identity. For instance, in 2 Cor 10.7 Paul writes τὰ κατὰ πρόσωπον βλέπετε, and in Gal 2.6 he asserts that unlike humans, God does not look on man's outward appearance (πρόσωπον) (cf. Gal. 6.12). Given these examples, this study became interested in examining whether Paul could be communicating aspects of social identity with some of his uses of πρόσωπον and other related concepts.

From an early immersion in the literary and non-literary sources of the Graeco-Roman world in and around the first century CE, followed by a survey of pertinent secondary literature, I found an ancient concept – the concept of *persona* (or social *persona*) – which seemed to explain aspects of social identity.⁶ Interestingly, the modern English usage of *persona*, which is a loanword from Latin, does have a colloquial meaning of the 'aspect of a person's character that is displayed to or perceived by others'.⁷ Given this modern definition the idea of *persona* can somewhat be already understood by modern readers; nevertheless, this concept still needs to be properly grasped in its ancient context. Furthermore, although scholars occasionally use the

⁵ See Chapters Five and Six for an analysis of this verse.

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the texts and translations of ancient Greek and Latin literary sources are taken from the Loeb Classical Library, and in some cases the translations may have been slightly modified in order to highlight certain Greek and Latin terms (e.g. πρόσωπον and *persona*).

⁷ *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ad loc.

term *persona* (often in its modern sense) there has been no study that has extensively explored the social significance of the ancient concept of social *persona* in the Graeco-Roman world. In fact, scholars of the New Testament and of ancient history have significantly overlooked this important social concept. One reason why New Testament interpreters have not given much attention to it is because they have not picked up on the equivalence of the Latin word *persona* and the Greek word πρόσωπον, and have usually understood the latter as merely denoting the ‘face’. This study seeks to demonstrate that πρόσωπον has an additional overlooked meaning of social identity and a relation to the concept of *persona*.

In an early stage of this study, extensive searches of the Latin term *persona* and the Greek term πρόσωπον were conducted with the aid of electronic databases of ancient sources (e.g. the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae [TLG] and the Packard Humanities Institute [PHI]). A preliminary observation of the results from these searches revealed that although the terms have a wide range of meanings, both terms often indicated aspects of social identity. In particular, the features of rank and status were involved in many of these instances that expressed notions of social identity. Since rank and status are important components of one’s socio-political identity in the Graeco-Roman social world (see Chapter Two), they were used to help decide which material would be pertinent for this study. This survey also showed that there were many significant uses of the terms *persona* and πρόσωπον by many authors during this time period. Two of these figures – Valerius Maximus and Epictetus – were selected for further examination since: they had significant uses of *persona*/πρόσωπον, they provided valuable details relating to social identity, and the size of their literary works are manageable.⁸ Their works were read as a whole in order to grasp fully their awareness and understanding of the concept of *persona*. After reading through their works, it was clear that they dealt with issues of social identity (e.g. rank and status), and would be able to illuminate some of the Pauline texts concerning social identity. In addition to these ancient figures, a survey of the Pauline material revealed that about half of the instances of πρόσωπον occurred in 2 Corinthians. Moreover, a survey of the Corinthian correspondence revealed numerous texts that describe conflicts in the church involving issues of social status and Christian identity. With this concentrated use of πρόσωπον and the valuable social description, the Corinthian correspondence (more specifically, 2 Corinthians) was chosen as a suitable focus of this Pauline study.

⁸ The small amount of secondary literature on Valerius and Epictetus, and the manageable size of their literary works, make it feasible to consider them in detail within this comparative study. Also, see Chapter Seven for a brief suggestion of some other figures who are worth considering for further studies on this research topic of social identity (e.g. Seneca, Plutarch, and Dio Chrysostom).

The particular rationale for selecting these three figures is that, as the following chapters will show, they all indicate some reflection on this common theme of social *persona*. There are, moreover, further benefits in comparing these three figures. For instance, their works offer a diachronic and geographic trajectory for this study: Valerius wrote in Rome during the early first century CE, Paul lived in Corinth during the mid-first century and later wrote on a number of occasions to the church there, and Epictetus lived in Rome and then in Nicopolis in the Greek East during the late first and early second century. That is, Valerius provides insights into the outworking of social identity in Rome, and Epictetus provides details of its outworking in the Greek East; the information gleaned from these two figures, then, will provide the necessary backdrop for understanding the social context of Paul's letters to the Christians in Corinth, which is a Roman colony in the Greek East. Another benefit is that since New Testament scholars, and even classicists have largely neglected Valerius and Epictetus, this study will provide further knowledge of them that will help to illuminate the New Testament and its social world.⁹

This study proposes to fill in the lacuna of this prominent ancient social concept in both classical and New Testament studies by delineating the concept of *persona* and its importance in the Graeco-Roman social world and particularly in the church at Corinth. The thesis is that Paul, Epictetus, and Valerius all react against a preoccupation with superficial displays of *persona* in the early imperial period. In 2 Corinthians, in particular, Paul reacts against the Corinthian Christians' assimilation of the conventional values of *persona* into their conception of Christian identity, and challenges their superficial assessment of one another based on these conventional values. In order to correct their misconception of Christian identity, Paul promotes and embodies a new and subversive Christ-like identity.

This argument will be developed by first addressing, in the remainder of this chapter, some introductory issues concerning method. Then, in Chapter Two, the concept of *persona* will be elucidated with the use of literary and non-literary sources. In Chapters Three to Six, Valerius Maximus, Epictetus, and Paul will be examined, respectively, for their understandings and critiques of *persona*. As mentioned above, Valerius will provide an understanding of

⁹ It should be noted that this study's interest in these two figures contributes to the small number of studies that has considered their comparative value for New Testament studies – though none of the studies has examined aspects of social identity. For Valerius, there are only two: Hodgson, 'Gospel Criticism'; idem, 'Social World'. For Epictetus, see Bonhöffer, *Epiktet und NT*; idem, 'Epiktet und NT'; Bultmann, 'Epiktet'; Sharp, *Epictetus*; Schrage, 'Stellung'; Sevenster, 'Education'; Braun, 'Indifferenz'; Klauck, 'Dankbar leben'; Jagu, 'Morale'; Oakes, 'Epictetus'; Winter, *Philo*, 113–22; Yieh, *One Teacher*, 185–236; Engberg-Pedersen, 'Self-Sufficiency'.

social *persona* in the city of Rome, and Epictetus will provide an understanding of social *persona* in the Greek East; accordingly, the gleaned insights will be helpful for interpreting Paul's correspondence to the Christians in the Roman colony of Corinth in its proper social context. Given that this is a New Testament study, Paul's critique of social identity will be given special attention, especially his approach to Christian identity in 2 Corinthians. Furthermore, some comparison will be made at the end of each of these three chapters between their critiques and the conventional outworking of *persona*, and also between the critiques of the three figures themselves. Finally, conclusions will be drawn together in Chapter Seven.

1.2 Method

Scholars have been interested in what has been called *Antike und Christentum* – the intersection of ancient history and early Christianity, and the use of ancient sources to illuminate early Christianity.¹⁰ New Testament scholars interested in this intersection have conducted comparative and linguistic studies that search for 'parallels' in ancient literary and non-literary sources.¹¹ However, some scholars have drawn attention to the hazards and problems involved with the use of such 'parallels' – for example, the narrow focus only on terms that are the same.¹² Given that this study is concerned with comparing parallel material, some issues regarding method need to be addressed.

1.2.1 Social Concept

Since this study is stimulated by some of Paul's uses of πρόσωπον, it is important to indicate that this study should be regarded as a 'social concept study', rather than a 'word study'. Although the word or lexical study has been a popular and useful method to ascertain the meaning of words in the New Testament, there are some shortcomings to its use. Since this study is interested in a particular meaning of πρόσωπον, which happens not to be

¹⁰ For more on this topic, see Judge, 'Antike', 3–58. See also Winter, 'Christentum', 121–30, who discusses in the reverse direction, *Christentum und Antike*, suggesting that scholars of ancient history should consider early Christian sources (e.g. the New Testament) as illuminating sources for studies in ancient history. It is also the goal of this present study to contribute knowledge to scholarship in ancient history. See e.g. Engels, *Roman Corinth*, 107–16, who notably examines Paul's Corinthian correspondence for his study of Roman Corinth.

¹¹ See White & Fitzgerald, 'Quod est comparandum', 13–39, for a recent overview of the use of 'parallels'.

¹² For the problems of 'parallels', see White & Fitzgerald, 'Quod est comparandum', esp. 27–32; Sandmel, 'Parallelomania', 1–13.

given explicitly in any of the Greek lexicons, it is important to focus on the current state of Greek lexicography.¹³ Recent studies have drawn attention to and demonstrated the inadequacies of many of the standard lexicons used in studying the Greek language – such as Bauer and Danker’s *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* and Liddell-Scott-Jones’ *A Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ).¹⁴ For instance, although LSJ is the most popular and a heavily relied upon Greek lexicon, it is essentially focused on Classical Greek and not the Greek of the post-Classical period – the latter period being more pertinent for New Testament studies. Some faults in Greek lexicons, which have been demonstrated, are: the gaps in coverage; the reliance on glosses instead of providing definitions; that most lexicons are built upon the material of predecessors and a great number of the entries have been uncritically accepted by subsequent lexicons; and the contamination from translations such as the Latin Vulgate.¹⁵ Also, John Lee has expressed that reading through texts of the post-classical period, ‘you will sooner or later come across something poorly dealt with, or not covered at all, by LSJ and any other available tool’.¹⁶ In view of Lee’s comment, this present study suggests that this is the case with the term *πρόσωπον*. Therefore, this study heeds the caution in using lexicons and aims to study the term *πρόσωπον* in a different fashion.

In addition to the problem of Greek lexicography, there is the improper use of ‘parallels’ in word studies. New Testament scholars often investigate a word by searching for and compiling other instances with the aid of electronic databases of ancient texts such as the TLG. Often times, though, scholars will only make a narrow use of the ancient sources by being fixated on the particular term and only searching for instances of it. Additionally, they often will use the results for statistical purposes or merely as proof texts for their arguments. This superficial use of parallels to describe a term found in the New Testament runs the risk of missing out on the context of the ancient source and other synonymous language and expressions used in it. L. Michael

¹³ The lexical entries will be mentioned in the next chapter.

¹⁴ Liddell, Scott, & Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*; Bauer & Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. For some critiques, see e.g. Chadwick, *Lexicographica Graeca*, who presents copious examples of the shortcomings of LSJ; Lee, *History*, for an excellent study of the history of NT lexicography; idem, ‘Present State’, 66–74, for the present state of Greek lexicography; and other essays in Taylor, Lee, Burton, & Whitaker, *Biblical Greek*.

¹⁵ See the more detailed discussions and examples in Lee, *History*; idem, ‘Present State’, 66–74. Also, Johnson, ‘Resources’, 77, after looking at the somewhat more adequate Latin lexicons, shifts his attention to the Greek lexicons and describes their situation: ‘We have not walked into a slum exactly, but the buildings are more closely spaced, the porch banisters often rickety, the lawns not so well kept. Approaching the dictionary, a Hellenist must remain cautious and light on the feet’.

¹⁶ Lee, ‘Present State’, 72.

White and John Fitzgerald convey that ‘one must deal with the nuances and differences among the moralists and other non-Christian writers based on their context, backgrounds, and intentions – in precisely the same way that we need to be aware of the drastic differences among the New Testament writing themselves’.¹⁷ Therefore, New Testament scholars should treat properly not only their New Testament texts, but also other ancient sources – that is, to consider sources in their proper context.

Scholars have recently taken on the task of providing new directions to study New Testament words, such as considering a term’s semantic domain and synonyms.¹⁸ White and Fitzgerald promote:

In future studies of this type it will be crucial to investigate such terms, not simply in isolation from one another, but as part of the conceptual ‘linkage group’ to which they belong and with increased attention to the social worlds in which they are used. Similarly, attention will need to be given to combinations of Greek words as well as to equivalent terms and similar expressions in Latin and other languages. While there is thus a need to expand the linguistic horizons of research, the data used in making comparisons must not be restricted to instances of verbal identity or similarity. Some of the most striking parallels between Christian and non-Christian texts are primarily conceptual and involve little or no verbal agreement between the two.¹⁹

This study aligns with their suggestions, and will take a more robust approach by investigating both the Greek term πρόσωπον and the equivalent Latin term *persona*. Additionally, this study will also consider those other ‘concepts’ that are related to the social feature of *persona*.

Furthermore, rather than searching ancient sources for a wooden meaning of a term or concept, this study will consider its dynamic meaning by examining the concept of *persona* and related concepts (e.g. rank and status) within the larger arguments of the works of Paul, Epictetus, and Valerius. For instance, in the case of Epictetus, who has some significant uses of πρόσωπον, rather than only collating the relevant instances of the term, this study additionally will explore his work as a whole for other similar expressions and concepts that could be missed if the study was only fixated on the term πρόσωπον. Peter Oakes similarly points out the ‘danger of jumping straight into seeking to compare Epictetus with the New Testament’:

¹⁷ White & Fitzgerald, ‘Quod est comparandum’, 38, which is commenting on a statement by Malherbe, ‘Hellenistic Moralists’, 275–6.

¹⁸ See Lee, *History*, 155–75, who considers Louw & Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon* and its approach to semantic domains as ‘the breakthrough’ in NT lexicography. See also Winter, ‘Lexical Handbook’, whose paper promotes his new lexical project that considers ‘ancient’ rather than ‘modern’ semantic domains, the latter being used by Louw and Nida. I am grateful to him for a copy of the paper.

¹⁹ White & Fitzgerald, ‘Quod est comparandum’, 31. Cf. Horst, ‘Corpus’, 1157–61, who overviews the project *Corpus Hellenisticum Novi Testamenti*, which has a main emphasis on conceptual parallels, rather than lexical parallels.

Documents clearly need to be read as a whole, in their context, and the significance of the parts only deduced once the argument of the whole has been grasped. If instead we jump straight into comparison with the New Testament, we will probably address the document with an agenda other than its own, leading to an analysis of the ideas of the document using an inappropriate, and hence distorting the grid.²⁰

Therefore, this study should not be regarded merely as a lexical study, but more as a ‘social concept study’ that will consider the concept of *persona* within the context and framework of a number of ancient documents.

1.2.2 Social History

Many scholars who are interested in comparative studies have given special attention to the ‘background’ of a concept by considering its historical socio-cultural context. By looking at this context, information can be gathered about the social practices, beliefs, behaviour, values, and ideals of the people in their own contexts – which would shed light on how people perceived and valued certain concepts. The acceptability of this method is evinced from the many studies of the Graeco-Roman social world by Roman social historians.²¹ Also, the widespread use of the socio-historical method to understand the social world of the New Testament, especially of the Corinthian correspondence, testifies to the acceptability of the method for New Testament studies.²² In order to grasp the concept of *persona* in the Graeco-Roman social world, this study employs this descriptive-historical perspective by exploring the literary and non-literary sources in their contexts. White and Fitzgerald aptly concludes: ‘In order for us to understand fully how a Paul – or any other writer of the time, whether pagan, Jew, or Christian – might have appropriated these semantic and social conventions, we must continue to examine closely the parallels in their contexts. *Quod est comparandum* (“Thus should it be compared”)’.²³

²⁰ Oakes, ‘Epictetus’, 39.

²¹ It will suffice to list here a few studies that are used in the next chapter: Garnsey & Saller, *Roman Empire*; Lendon, *Honour*; Saller, ‘Status’; Barton, *Roman Honor*.

²² See e.g. those on the Corinthian correspondence: Clarke, *Leadership*; idem, *Serve*; Chow, *Patronage*; Dutch, *Educated Elite*; Welborn, ‘Discord’; Pogoloff, *Logos*; Litfin, *Proclamation*; Winter, *After Paul*; idem, *Philo*; Marshall, *Enmity*; Horrell, *Social Ethos*; Savage, *Power*; Ebel, *Attraktivität*; Meggitt, *Poverty*. Also worth noting are the studies of Philippians, which concerns the socio-historical setting of another Pauline church in a Roman colony: Oakes, *Philippians*; Hellerman, *Reconstructing*.

²³ White & Fitzgerald, ‘Quod est comparandum’, 39.

1.2.3 Heuristic Comparison

Even though comparative studies are common in New Testament scholarship, one final issue to address is the comparative approach of this study.²⁴ A problem of some comparative studies is that the different sources are often simply reduced to show that there is some sort of dependency, relationship, or shared tradition. This study, however, will compare the different sources heuristically. Philip Alexander has recently given a helpful explanation of his employment of a heuristic comparison:

it is intended to sharpen our understanding of what each text is saying, whether in agreement or disagreement. It is not meant to establish literary dependence...Since the comparison is heuristic, differences of date, place, tradition, literary genre and language are immaterial. What we are comparing and contrasting are *ideas* circling round a common theme.²⁵

Although Paul, Epictetus, and Valerius offer a variety of dates, places, traditions, literary genres, and languages, they all show concerns with the common theme of social *persona*. Therefore, the same interpretative lens will be placed on these three individuals in their own contexts to examine this common theme. By placing Paul in the same discussion with Epictetus and Valerius, insights would be gained that in return would illuminate Paul's own understanding and critique of *persona*.²⁶

²⁴ See e.g. the comparative studies in Fitzgerald, Olbricht, & White, *Early Christianity*. See above for a list of NT studies of Valerius and Epictetus, most of which employ a comparative method.

²⁵ Alexander, 'Qumran', 353 (italics his).

²⁶ Cf. Malherbe, 'Hellenistic Moralists', 299, who writes in his study of Paul and the Hellenistic moralists, 'It is potentially fruitful, and certainly more realistic, to place Paul in the context of these discussions...'

Chapter 2

Social Identity and *Persona*

2.1 Introduction

Social identity, as noted in the previous chapter, ‘is our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and reciprocally, other people’s understanding of themselves and of others (which includes us)’.¹ In order to grasp how aspects of identity affect social relations in the Graeco-Roman world, this study focuses on the ancient concept of *persona*. As will be seen, *persona* is a rich term that has a long history. In modern times, the word is commonly used in reference to the ‘aspect of a person’s character that is displayed to or perceived by others’.² Although this modern definition of *persona* is helpful for the present study, this definition needs to be explored whether it was existent or prevalent in ancient times, particularly during the New Testament era.

Having come across the possible significance of the concept of *persona*, this study conducted direct searches of the Latin term *persona* and also the Greek word πρόσωπον – which is commonly considered to be the Greek counterpart of *persona* – in the Graeco-Roman primary sources. The results revealed many instances of the terms that do connote aspects of social identity. Interestingly, the social features of rank and status, which are important elements of identity in Graeco-Roman society, were seen to be connected to these instances and were helpful in deciding which instances were relevant for this study. The recognition of the relationship between *persona* and the social features of rank and status further confirmed the possible importance of the concept of *persona* for the understanding of social identity in the ancient sources.

Although scholars of the New Testament and ancient history have made passing references to the term *persona*, there has been no substantial study of its social significance. This chapter, then, will establish the concept of *persona* and its significance in the Graeco-Roman social world – especially in Roman society. In order to understand this social concept, this chapter

¹ Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 5.

² *The Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), ad loc.

proposes: first, to demonstrate that the terms *persona* and πρόσωπον can convey a sense of social identity; secondly, to consider the Roman stress on *persona*; and thirdly, to assess the conventional (or popular) projection of social *persona* in the first-century Graeco-Roman social milieu.

2.2 *Persona* and Πρόσωπον

A suitable place to begin this study of the concept of *persona* is with an examination of the Latin term *persona*. In addition to this Latin word, equal attention will be given to πρόσωπον because New Testament scholars have largely ignored the correlation between the terms. Attention will first be given to the state of research on the two terms, followed by an analysis of them.

2.2.1 *The State of Research on Persona/Πρόσωπον*

Research on the term *persona* (and πρόσωπον) can be seen in the numerous studies of the modern interest in defining human identity, the person, human personality, or the human self. With different interests (e.g. philosophical, psychological, moral, biological, and legal), these studies have investigated in part the term *persona* and its developed meanings in order to gain further understanding of the notion of a ‘person’. Although this present study is not interested in the understanding of *persona* in the modern sense of the human person or personality, the studies of that modern sense are helpful in providing information that have bearing on the social dimension of *persona*. Therefore, this section on the state of research of *persona* will consider these studies of the ‘concept of the person’ in order to grasp better the ancient social ‘concept of *persona*’.

In his seminal study of the ‘concept of the person’, which gives consideration to *persona* and πρόσωπον, Marcel Mauss remarks on

comment une des catégories de l’esprit humain, – une de ces idées que nous croyons innées, – est bien lentement née et grandie au cours de longs siècles et à travers de nombreuses vicissitudes, tellement qu’elle est encore, aujourd’hui même, flottante, délicate, précieuse, et à élaborer davantage.³

Since that important study, scholars have continued to elaborate on the concept and have further complicated the understanding of it. Christopher Gill introduces his edited work on the same concept by acknowledging, ‘The subject of the person is one of the most discussed, and most controversial, in modern philosophy’.⁴ Troels Engberg-Pederson, in the same volume,

³ Mauss, ‘L’esprit humain’, 263.

⁴ Gill, ‘Introduction’, 2.

expresses, ‘Like so many other time-hallowed concepts, that of the person is constantly under attack in modern philosophy, and one may be rather tempted to give it up altogether’.⁵ In particular, the terms *persona* and πρόσωπον have posed difficulties for research into this subject, as noted by P.W. Duff: ‘The word *persona* has a long and complicated history. Its various meanings, and those of its Greek equivalent, πρόσωπον, and of its modern derivatives, have been the subject of much controversy among philologists, lawyers, philosophers, and especially theologians’.⁶ Max Turner, a New Testament scholar, also affirms the difficulties with the terms in his recent quest for an understanding of ‘personhood’: ‘For New Testament scholars there could thus be some excuse to shrug our shoulders and walk away from the problem [of “personhood”], not least because the troublesome words *persona* and *prosōpon* (in the sense “person”) do not appear in our Scriptures, nor in their contemporary literature’.⁷

Many modern studies, like those above, that are interested in the concept of human identity have managed to give brief consideration to the meanings of *persona* and πρόσωπον. However, with the varied interests of scholars examining the concept of the person and the meaning of *persona* and πρόσωπον, there has been no conclusive understanding of human identity.⁸ Given the difficulty of too many competing definitions, Amélie Rorty, in her essay on human identity, ‘Persons and *Personae*’, indicates the problem: ‘As inheritors of the Judaeo-Christian, Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romantic traditions, we want the concept of the person to fill a number of functions’.⁹ With so many modern interests in human identity – including moral, legal, theological, metaphysical, social, biological – these concerns tend to colour and inform the meanings sought. She argues that it is not possible to have *the* concept of person, since some of these functions overlap and may even cause tension with others.¹⁰ Consequently, she underscores the necessity to accept the tensions and conflicts of the various functions, and to abandon any ‘metaphysical longing’ for only one concept.¹¹

Rorty’s comments are helpful for any study attempting to trek through the difficult terrain of the terms *persona* and πρόσωπον, and even the uncharted terrain of the social concept of *persona*. Thus, to clarify, this study does not

⁵ Engberg-Pedersen, ‘Stoic Concept’, 109.

⁶ Duff, *Personality*, 1.

⁷ Turner, ‘Personhood’, 211.

⁸ Cf. Gill, ‘Introduction’, 7.

⁹ Rorty, ‘Persons’, 22. See her pp. 22–35 for a list of seven functions, one of which is pertinent to this present study (#4): ‘Social persons are identified by their mutual interactions, by the roles they enact in the dynamic dramas of their shared lives’ (28).

¹⁰ Rorty, ‘Persons’, 35.

¹¹ Rorty, ‘Persons’, 37–8.

attempt to establish *the* identity of an individual in Graeco-Roman society, especially in light of Rorty's caution for a more complex understanding, nor does it attempt to describe comprehensively one's 'personal' or 'human' identity. This study, rather, is only exploring the terms *persona* and πρόσωπον for a circumscribed meaning of one's 'social identity'.

2.2.2 *Social Identity: A Meaning of Persona/Πρόσωπον*

There have been a few studies that have analysed both *persona* and πρόσωπον, and have provided useful insights for understanding the terms in the sense of social identity. In 1906, Siegmund Schlossmann produced a substantial study, *Persona und ΠΡΟΣΩΠION im Recht und im christlichen Dogma*,¹² which analysed both terms and the history of their development, especially the development of their legal meaning as found in the legal and Christian sources. Then in 1938, Mauss presented a significant essay, 'Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: La notion de personne, celle de "moi"',¹³ which discussed the concept of the person by considering the notions of the 'person' (*personne*) and the 'self' (*moi*). In his socio-anthropological analysis of the ancient Greeks and Romans, he found similar conclusions to Schlossmann on the development of the terms' meanings and their relation to the concept of the person. Mauss, however, goes beyond a mere legal meaning and considers an enriched moral and socio-political meaning of *persona*, which he suggests was influenced by Late Stoicism and Christianity. Finally, Maurice Nédoncelle also produced a useful study of the etymology of both terms in 1948 entitled, 'Prosopon et Persona dans l'antiquité classique'.¹⁴ In it he draws similar conclusions to the other two studies, yet places a stronger emphasis on *persona*/πρόσωπον as denoting the actual social being, that is, 'l'individu qui se promène dans la rue et que vous y apercevez en ouvrant les yeux'.¹⁵

The comprehensive studies of Schlossmann, Mauss, and Nédoncelle, along with some other illuminating studies on aspects of *persona*, provide a strong foundation for this study's interest in social identity. Given the lack of need for an exhaustive treatment of the meanings of *persona* and πρόσωπον, the goal of this section is to build on the relevant conclusions from these valuable studies in order to grasp a meaning of 'social identity' and a correlation of the two terms.¹⁶ Before exploring the terms *persona* and πρόσωπον and the

¹² Schlossmann, *Persona*.

¹³ Mauss, 'L'esprit humain', 263–81. See Carrithers, Collins, & Lukes, *Category*, for an English translation and a collection of essays reflecting on Mauss' essay.

¹⁴ Nédoncelle, 'Prosopon', 277–99.

¹⁵ Nédoncelle, 'Prosopon', 299.

¹⁶ This section will not provide exhaustive details from primary sources concerning the

theme of social identity, it is important to bear in mind that both terms (as will be seen) are very malleable, since they often carry such a varied range of senses, such as ‘mask’, ‘face’, ‘front’, ‘person’, ‘social status’, and ‘legal status’.¹⁷

2.2.2.1 Persona

The Latin word *persona* exhibits a range of meanings:¹⁸ (1) a mask, especially worn by actors; (2) a character in a play or dramatic role; (3) the part played by a person in life (a position, role, character); (4) the actual being of someone, individual personality, or one’s person; (5) in a legal context, referring to an individual in a case, or the person in respect of the individual’s rank or importance; (6) in the grammarians, a person. Besides the term’s wide semantic range, scholars have indicated the difficulties of understanding its etymology. Nédoncelle, for instance, comments on the difficulty: ‘*Persona* mérite de nous retenir plus longuement. Son importance est obvie. C’est un mot difficile: l’étymologie en est obscure, le développement sémantique en est compliqué’.¹⁹

Despite the complication, the consensus is that the term had an original meaning of ‘mask’.²⁰ Interestingly, Gellius recounts a witty explanation, given by Gavius Bassus, that *persona* was formed from the verb *personare*, whereby the mask has a hole for the voice ‘to sound through’ (*per/personare*) (*Noct. att.* 5.7). Although the validity of this explanation is uncertain, it was an early meaning of ‘mask’ that consequently influenced the term’s development into the meaning of ‘person’. Nédoncelle asserts that ‘*personus* (= qui résonne) et *persona* ont dû confluer de bonne heure dans l’inconscient des Romains’.²¹ This development is observed through the common use of various expressions that have the word *persona* linked with certain verbs, such as *personam gerere* (‘to conduct a role’), which became associated with

developed meanings of the terms. See the major works discussed in this section for further references to primary sources.

¹⁷ Since these complex terms are used in a variety of ways in different contexts, they will often not be translated in this study.

¹⁸ These meanings are selected from Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ad loc; Lewis & Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, ad loc. Although the shortcomings of lexicons were highlighted in Chapter One, the lexical definitions are given in this chapter to highlight both of the terms’ wide semantic range.

¹⁹ Nédoncelle, ‘*Prosopon*’, 284.

²⁰ E.g. Mauss, ‘L’esprit humain’, 274. See Nédoncelle, ‘*Prosopon*’, 286–93, who argues that *persona* derives either from the proper name ‘Persepona’, or from the ancient Etruscan word *phersu* (‘mask’). Cf. Altheim, ‘*Persona*’, 35–52.

²¹ Nédoncelle, ‘*Prosopon*’, 293. Cf. Schlossmann, *Persona*, 14–15.

a role in a drama (*dramatis persona*).²² Schlossmann explains that *persona* itself does not mean ‘role’, but it is the qualification in the various expressions that dictate ‘die Rolle spielen’.²³ He continues to show the theatrical imagery ‘spilling over’ into the social interactions of public life: ‘Endlich heißt *personam gerere* etc. häufig nicht bloß soviel wie eine Rolle auf der Bühne, im Drama spielen, sondern auch im Leben irgend eine Funktion verrichten’.²⁴ Similarly, Carlin Barton explains this understanding of *persona*, ‘The Latin *persona* was not only the mask but also the part expressed by that mask’.²⁵ Since it is natural for the mask to represent, essentially, the individual and his or her role, ‘the self cannot be the mask alone...nor can it be the man alone...so it must be some fusion of mask and man’.²⁶ Thus, the word *persona* has a meaning of a role played in life, which is derived from a role played in the theatre.

In his study, Nédoncelle lists seven variant meanings of *persona* used by Cicero beyond the mere theatrical meaning:²⁷ ‘rôle en justice’ (e.g. *De or.* 2.102); ‘personnage ou rôle social’ (*Inv. rhet.* 1.52.99); ‘réalité ou dignité collective’ (*Off.* 1.124); ‘personnalité marquante ou constituée en dignité’ (e.g. *Off.* 1.97); ‘personne juridique par opposition aux choses’ (*De orat.* 3.53); ‘personnalité ou caractère concret d’un individu’ (e.g. *Amic.* 1.4; *Q. Rosc.* 20; *Inv. rhet.* 1.34); ‘notion philosophique de personne’ (*Off.* 1.107). His presentation of Cicero’s usage is significant because it shows that by the time of Cicero, the term clearly developed meanings beyond the semantic domain of the theatre and is reflecting the socio-political identity of the individual. Mauss similarly recognises the expansion of the term’s meaning beyond its original theatrical meaning, and suggests that Roman law influenced the developed meaning of *persona* by making it synonymous with the true nature of the individual.²⁸ He demonstrates the legal meaning by pointing out how *persona* conveyed certain qualifications (e.g. citizenship, the Roman name, and property) and how slaves did not have this right of *persona* (*servus non habet personam*).²⁹ This understanding is clearly evident in the legal writings of the Roman jurists, who, to some extent, established the

²² See Schlossmann, *Persona*, 19–20, 22–4; Emmet, *Roles*, 175.

²³ Schlossmann, *Persona*, 19.

²⁴ Schlossmann, *Persona*, 20.

²⁵ Barton, *Roman Honor*, 82.

²⁶ Hollis, ‘Masks’, 222.

²⁷ Nédoncelle, ‘Prosopon’, 297, comments on the large development of the word by Cicero’s time: ‘Mais avec Cicéron, d’un seul coup, elles apparaissent toutes’. See his pp. 297–8 for more references.

²⁸ Mauss, ‘L’esprit humain’, 277.

²⁹ Mauss, ‘L’esprit humain’, 275–7. Emmet, *Roles*, 176, also follows Mauss: ‘A *persona* has *Conditio* (his family ranking), *Status* (his civil position) and *Munus* (his functions in civil and military life)’.

technical meaning of a legal *persona*. In Roman law, there are only *personae*, *res*, and *actiones* (Gaius, *Inst.* 1.3.8), and slaves are regarded as *res* (things or property) and not legal persons with rights to ownership.³⁰ The Roman socio-political world, then, can be seen as one of the major influences on the notion of *persona*.³¹ In fact, Mauss intimates that ‘les Romains, les Latins pour mieux dire, semblent être ceux qui ont partiellement établi la notion de *personne*, dont le nom est resté exactement le mot latin’.³²

This section has highlighted the developed meaning of the term *persona* and pointed out a particular nuance of ‘social identity’ that existed, at least, since the time of Cicero. The term had an original meaning of mask, which functioned as a portrayal or reflection of a particular identity. With the influence of several factors, *persona* expanded in meaning and was often used to represent the social identity of the individual. Anthony Long, in his study of the concept of the person, aptly states, ‘Persona is not primarily what a human being is, but rather a role or status a human being has or maintains or undertakes or bears or assumes...’³³

2.2.2.2 Πρόσωπον

The Greek word πρόσωπον is commonly identified as the equivalent to the Latin word *persona*. Interestingly, Greek lexicons also reveal a wide range of meanings:³⁴ (1) face, countenance: in front, facing; in person; (2) one’s look, countenance; (3) a mask: dramatic part, character; (4) person: legal personality [‘standing, social position’];³⁵ (5) a feature of a person. Even though πρόσωπον displays some similarities to *persona* in its range of meanings, its etymology is not as difficult to ascertain as that of *persona*.³⁶ The earliest identifiable meaning is found in Homer, which refers to the ‘face’ – for example, ‘the old woman hid her face (πρόσωπα) in her hands’

³⁰ Cf. Mauss, ‘L’esprit humain’, 274.

³¹ Another later influence on the meaning of the term was the early church debates over Christian dogma, especially concerning the person of Christ. See e.g. Tertullian, *Adv. Prax.* 7.11–12; Boethius, *Contra Eutychem* 3.4–5.

³² Mauss, ‘L’esprit humain’, 274.

³³ Long, ‘Persons’, 13.

³⁴ The list of meanings are selected from Liddell, Scott, & Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ad loc; Bauer & Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, ad loc.

³⁵ Interestingly, the *LSJ Supplement* replaces the legal meaning with a meaning of social standing which is relevant for this study’s interest in social identity. The legal sense, nevertheless, will be established below.

³⁶ Nédoncelle, ‘Prosopon’, 293, does not see a common root for both *persona* and πρόσωπον, nor does he believe that the former derived from the latter.