

# The Named Jew and the Name of God: The Argument of Romans 2:17–29 in Light of Roman Attitudes to Jewish Teachers

Lionel J. Windsor

This is the author manuscript (AM) of an article published in the journal *Novum Testamentum*. The published article can be found here:

Windsor, Lionel J. “The Named Jew and the Name of God: The Argument of Romans 2:17–29 in Light of Roman Attitudes to Jewish Teachers.” *Novum Testamentum* 63.2 (2021): 229–248.

Link to article: [https://brill.com/view/journals/nt/63/2/article-p229\\_7.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/nt/63/2/article-p229_7.xml)

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## Acknowledgements

I am grateful for Micah Sheath’s assistance in following up several promising leads, and for Will Timmins’s insightful suggestions for improvement.

# The Named Jew and the Name of God: The Argument of Romans 2:17–29 in Light of Roman Attitudes to Jewish Teachers

## Abstract

A connection between Paul's charges against his interlocutor in Rom 2:21–22 and Josephus's account of a notorious Jewish teacher in Rome (*A.J.* 18.81–84) is a catalyst for re-examining the purpose, topic, and argument of Rom 2:17–29. The foreground issue is not the soteriological status of Jews, but the effectiveness of typical Jewish law-based teaching to solve human foolishness, wickedness, and impiety. Paul reframes the discourse topic to demonstrate that typical Jewish law-based educational activity is ineffective in bringing about God's glory among the nations. The interlocutor is thus a foil for Paul's own eschatologically conceived apostolic ministry.

## Keywords

Apostle Paul, discourse analysis, education, Jewish identity, Jewish wisdom, Romans 2:17–29

## Jewish educational activity in Rome and Romans 2:21–22

In Rom 2:21–22, Paul charges a fictive Jewish teacher with theft, adultery, and temple-robbery. Interpreters occasionally cite an account by Josephus (*A.J.* 18.81–84) to shed light on these charges.<sup>1</sup> Josephus recounts a notorious incident in which a Jewish teacher in Rome,

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<sup>1</sup> E.g. F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (Rev. and exp. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 203–205; D.A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 561–562. J. Dochhorn, "Der Vorwurf des Tempelraubs in Röm 2,22b und seine politischen Hintergründe," *ZNW* 109 (2018) 101–117, doi:10.1515/znw-2018-0005, provides an extended treatment (see further below).

along with three companions, defrauded a wealthy Roman noblewoman who had been won over to Jewish customs, misappropriating gifts she had intended for the temple in Jerusalem. Josephus, while casting the incident as a rare instance of rogue criminal behaviour, describes it as the catalyst for a large-scale expulsion of Jews from Rome under Tiberius. The historicity of such an expulsion in 19 CE, and its connection with Roman apprehension about the effect of Jewish religious teaching in the city, is well-established,<sup>2</sup> although its precise cause, nature, and extent is debated.<sup>3</sup> It is significant that Josephus's account, although written more than seven decades after the event, is still quite defensive.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that for much of the century, including at the time Paul wrote Romans in the 50s, some form of this scandalous story was circulating as a cautionary tale,<sup>5</sup> reinforcing Roman suspicion of Jewish teaching activity in a way that necessitated ongoing apologetic pleading on behalf of the entire Jewish community.<sup>6</sup>

Dochhorn has analysed Josephus's account in some detail and highlighted its relevance to Paul's charges in Rom 2:21–22.<sup>7</sup> The incident clearly involves theft (Rom 2:21). While Josephus does not explicitly mention adultery (Rom 2:22), Dochhorn demonstrates that the charge is explicable in light of the preceding, connected account in Josephus: a salacious story of deception and adultery involving another Roman noblewoman and the Isis-cult (*A.J.* 18.65–80).<sup>8</sup> Thus, although Josephus himself seems to have toned down the Jewish scandal, suggestions of adultery were probably attached to it in public consciousness.<sup>9</sup> The verb Paul

<sup>2</sup> Tacitus, in recounting the expulsion, mentions *profanos ritus* (*Annals* 2.85), implying the existence of a level of religious activity of concern to the Roman authorities. Suetonius mentions *externas caerimonias ... ritus ... superstitione ... religiosas uestes cum instrumento* (*Tiberius* 36). Cf. Dio Cassius, who describes widespread activity of Jewish immigrants “converting (μεθιστάντων) many of the locals to their own customs (ἔθῃ)” (57.18.5).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. M.H. Williams, “The Disciplining of the Jews of Ancient Rome: Pure Gesture Politics?,” in *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XV* (ed. C. Deroux; CL 323; Bruxelles: Éditions Latomus, 2010) 79–102 at 98–100; H. Wendt, “Iudaica Romana: A Rereading of Judean Expulsions from Rome,” *JAJ* 6 (2015) 97–126 esp. 112–118, doi:10.13109/jaju.2015.6.1.97; Dochhorn, “Vorwurf,” 109–113.

<sup>4</sup> Josephus concludes: “So these [law-keeping Jews], due merely to the wickedness of four men, were expelled from the city” (*A.J.* 18.84).

<sup>5</sup> Dochhorn, “Vorwurf,” argues that Josephus's account “steht für konkrete geschichtliche Erinnerung, was auch immer der historische Kern sein mag” (108).

<sup>6</sup> Wendt, “Iudaica Romana,” 102. Cf. Philo's similar defence of the Jewish population in Rome, citing “false slanders” (ψευδεῖς... διαβολαί) based on the actions of “the guilty” (τοὺς αἰτίους) “few” (ὀλίγοι) under the reign of Tiberius, more than a decade later (*Legat.* 159–161, quoting 161).

<sup>7</sup> Dochhorn, “Vorwurf.”

<sup>8</sup> Dochhorn, “Vorwurf,” 109–115. Egyptian and Jewish religion are also connected in Tacitus (*Annals* 2.85) and Suetonius (*Tiberius* 36).

<sup>9</sup> Dochhorn, “Vorwurf,” 109, 113.

uses for the third charge, ἱεροσυλέω (Rom 2:22), appears elsewhere in a vice list (Philo, *Conf.* 163), and Josephus himself uses it to refer to the appropriation of gifts intended for the Jerusalem temple (*A.J.* 16.45).<sup>10</sup> This all strengthens the case that Paul is alluding to the incident here, thereby claiming that his interlocutor's disgust at idolatry is contradicted by this notorious incident of virtual temple-robbery by known Jewish teachers, which puts them on the same level as idolatrous priests of Isis.<sup>11</sup>

However, such an allusion is seldom regarded as likely, since it appears incompatible with Paul's rhetorical purpose—at least according to prevailing accounts of the purpose, topic, and argument of this section of Paul's letter.<sup>12</sup> While Rom 2:17–29 is “notoriously difficult,”<sup>13</sup> and has produced a wide range of interpretive options,<sup>14</sup> it is normally regarded as a continuation of the soteriological argument of the previous section (2:1–16). That is, Paul in 2:17–29 is normally assumed to be mounting some form of soteriological argument concerning Jews, explicitly excluding key Jewish distinctives—possession of the Mosaic law (2:17–24) and circumcision (2:25–29)—as grounds for eschatological salvific advantage, thus supporting his subsequent conclusion that “all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin” (3:9).<sup>15</sup> In 2:21–22, according to this common view, Paul must be understood as accusing a *representative* Jew with serious instances of lawbreaking— theft, adultery, and temple-robbery—that render him culpable in the final judgment. However, as is often pointed out, these specific charges are not typical Jewish crimes, and so this appears to be a rather clumsy case of special pleading.<sup>16</sup> Thus, it seems unlikely that Paul would deliberately be alluding to the actions of rogue Jewish teachers decades earlier, since such an allusion would only

<sup>10</sup> Dochhorn, “Vorwurf,” 104 n. 3. Cf. ἱερά describing temple gifts (*A.J.* 16.160–170).

<sup>11</sup> Dochhorn, “Vorwurf,” 114–115.

<sup>12</sup> E.g. J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988) 114–115; M. Thiessen, “Paul's Argument against Gentile Circumcision in Romans 2:17–29,” *NovT* 56 (2014) 380–381, doi:10.17613/M6ZD33. Dunn, like many interpreters, suggests that Paul “probably has pagan temples and idols in view” (114–115).

<sup>13</sup> J.M.G. Barclay, “Paul and Philo on Circumcision: Romans 2:25–29 in Social and Cultural Context,” *NTS* 44 (1998) 536–556 at 544, doi:10.1017/S0028688500016714.

<sup>14</sup> For a survey see M.A. Mininger, *Uncovering the Theme of Revelation in Romans 1:7–3:26: Discovering a New Approach to Paul's Argument* (WUNT 2/445; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017) 157–163.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975) 1:139–140, 1:163–176; Dunn, *Romans*, 108–128; D.J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 158–177; R.N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016) 290–324. By necessity, this list is representative not exhaustive.

<sup>16</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 124; N. Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (JSNTSup 45; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990) 192–196; T.W. Berkley, *From a Broken Covenant to Circumcision of the Heart: Pauline Intertextual Exegesis in Romans 2:17–29* (SBLDS 175; Atlanta: SBL, 2000) 133.

expose the weakness in his argument further. As Thiessen points out, “Paul’s interlocutor, or a reader of Paul’s letter to the Romans, needs only demonstrate the existence of exceptions to this rule.”<sup>17</sup>

Due partly to such dissonances, alternative accounts of the nature and purpose of Paul’s argument in Rom 2:17–29 have arisen that question common assumptions about the Jewish identity of Paul’s interlocutor. Stowers, for example, argues that the interlocutor is not a typical Jew, but rather one of Paul’s Jewish missionary competitors, whom Paul censures in diatribal style using the “type” of the “pretentious person” (ὁ ἀλαζών). While the missionary opponent may claim the name “Jew” for himself, Paul insists that his claim does not match his deeds; thus, he “merely calls (*onomazō*) [sic] himself a Jew.”<sup>18</sup> Pressing this line of thought even further, Thorsteinsson has contended that Paul’s interlocutor is not Jewish at all. Rather, he represents a gentile (potential) proselyte who is trying to become Jewish to escape divine judgment. Paul is opposing this attempt by depicting him as pretentious (“you [want to] call yourself a Jew”), and arguing that proselytism provides no soteriological benefit for gentiles.<sup>19</sup> Yet these alternative accounts still do not adequately account for the specific charges in 2:21–22, charges which—as argued seen above—seem deliberately designed to highlight stereotypical Roman attitudes towards Jews by recalling the well-known actions of notorious Jewish teachers.<sup>20</sup>

The aim of this article is to outline another, hitherto unexplored, account of the purpose, topic, and argument of Rom 2:17–29 in light of Roman attitudes to Jewish teaching practices, and to demonstrate that this account provides a more satisfactory explanation for several puzzling features of the unit. It will be argued that Paul is not *directly* discussing the eschatological soteriological status of his interlocutor in Rom 2:17–29. While soteriological concerns are clearly in the foreground of 2:1–16, in verse 17, Paul turns to develop his argument further, focusing on a related but distinct topic: the *effectiveness of typical Jewish teaching* to solve the previously identified problems of human foolishness, wickedness, and impiety. While the soteriological concerns of 2:1–16 are still relevant to the argument of 2:17–

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<sup>17</sup> Thiessen, “Argument,” 381.

<sup>18</sup> S.K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) 143–158, quoting 145, 148; cf. R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006) 221–222.

<sup>19</sup> R.M. Thorsteinsson, *Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography* (ConBNT 40; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003) 151–242, quoting 197–198. See also Thiessen, “Argument”; *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) 43–71; R. Rodríguez, *If You Call Yourself a Jew: Reappraising Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014) 47–72.

<sup>20</sup> The parallels to Wis 14:24–27; 1 Cor 6:9–10 proffered by Thiessen, “Argument,” 381–382 are inexact.

29, such concerns move into the background, and *pedagogical* concerns move into the foreground. If the discourse is reread in light of this precise topic and focus, several key details in the argumentation of Rom 2:17–29 become more comprehensible, hitherto neglected exegetical possibilities are opened up for serious consideration, and fresh light may be shed on the subsequent argument.

### “Now if you are named ‘Jew’”: A new topic in Romans 2:17a

The first step in assessing the purpose, topic, and argument of Rom 2:17–29 is to examine the topical shift that occurs in 2:17a. We begin with the discourse function of the preverbal elements εἰ δὲ σὺ Ἰουδαίος. In terms of function-based discourse grammar,<sup>21</sup> each of these preverbal elements provides valuable information to the reader which serves to *frame* the subsequent discourse.<sup>22</sup>

The connective particle δέ is a *development marker*, signalling a “new, distinct development” in the argument.<sup>23</sup> The particle εἰ marks a *conditional frame*, so “establish[ing] a specific condition that must be met” for the subsequent argument to be applicable (cf. 3:3, 5, 7; 4:2; etc.).<sup>24</sup> The syntactically redundant preverbal pronoun σὺ marks a *topical frame* designed “to highlight the introduction of a new participant or topic” (cf. 6:11; 8:9, etc.).<sup>25</sup> By combining these three terms, Paul explicitly marks a shift in topic with respect to his interlocutor. He is thus signalling either the introduction of a new interlocutor or a changed perspective on the same interlocutor.<sup>26</sup> In either case, the readers are being encouraged to

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<sup>21</sup> See e.g. S. Dik, *The Theory of Functional Grammar Part 1: The Structure of the Clause* (2nd ed.; FGS 20; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997); S.E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis* (LBR; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010).

<sup>22</sup> See further Runge, *Discourse Grammar*. Preverbal information that is already established, either in the discourse or in the shared world of author and reader, serves as “an explicit frame of reference, providing the reader with the primary basis for connecting what follows with what precedes” (194), e.g. by clarifying the clause’s precise topic (210–216).

<sup>23</sup> Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 28–36, quoting 31.

<sup>24</sup> Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 227–233, quoting 228. The conditional frame continues until the end of 2:20. The variant ἴδε (D<sup>3</sup> L 33 etc.) has apparently arisen in order to repair the syntactical anacolouthon created by οὖν (2:21). However, in doing so, it slightly obscures the effect of Paul’s framing device.

<sup>25</sup> Runge, *Discourse Grammar*, 210–216, quoting 210.

<sup>26</sup> Elliott, *Rhetoric*, 127; cf. Origen, *Comm. Rom.* 2.11.2.

envisage the interlocutor of 2:17–29 with respect to a conceptual frame that has shifted in some way.<sup>27</sup>

The nature of the topical shift is indicated, in the first instance, by the substantive Ἰουδαίος. This is not an entirely new idea; Paul is here recalling a term that he has already introduced into the discourse. The word first appears in the thematic statement (1:16–17), within an “all”/“Jew first” formulation (1:16b). On one side of this formulation, Paul’s gospel is universal: it is God’s power for salvation “to everyone (παντί) who believes.” On the other side, there is an element of Jewish priority: “to Jew first (Ἰουδαίω... πρώτον) and to Greek.” This “all”/“Jew first” pattern continues in Romans 2 at both lexical and conceptual levels. Whatever the envisaged ethnicity of the interlocutor in 2:1–16,<sup>28</sup> Paul pointedly describes him in universal terms.<sup>29</sup> He addresses him as “every human” (ἄνθρωπε πᾶς, 2:1; cf. 2:3), charges him with practising the same things (2:1, 3) as other “humans” (ἀνθρώπων, cf. 1:18), and goes on to assert God’s eschatological judgment of “each person” (ἐκάστῳ, 2:6) and the secrets “of humans (τῶν ἀνθρώπων)” (2:16). Within this universally-oriented soteriological discourse, however, Paul reintroduces his thematic “all”/“Jew first” formulation (2:9–10). Paul’s primary concern at this point is with the universal element—i.e. what is common to “every human being” (πᾶσαν ψυχὴν ἀνθρώπου, 2:9a; cf. παντί, 2:10a). Nevertheless, the “Jew first” element appears in 2:9–10 as a secondary topic, introduced through underdetermined phrases in apposition at the end of their respective clauses and underscored by repetition (Ἰουδαίου... πρώτον..., 2:9b; Ἰουδαίω... πρώτον..., 2:10b). In this way, Paul leads his addressees to anticipate that he will return to explain this “Jew first” element more fully in his subsequent discourse.

Given this note of anticipation, Paul’s reintroduction of the word Ἰουδαίος within a clearly marked topical frame (εἰ δὲ σὺ Ἰουδαίος, 2:17) signals that he is now intending to address a topic he had previously only foreshadowed. Thus, the discourse function of the preverbal phrase εἰ δὲ σὺ Ἰουδαίος (2:17) is to signal a new development in the discussion, connected to but distinct from the preceding discourse. Having discussed the topic of divine eschatological judgment of all “humans” (2:1–16), Paul now turns to discuss the previously identified but hitherto underdeveloped topic of Jewish priority (2:17–29).

The nature of Paul’s topic is further specific by the verb ἐπονομάζει. Since this verb is middle/passive in form, from a purely formal standpoint, various options are open to the

<sup>27</sup> Pace Thorsteinsson, *Interlocutor*, 163–164.

<sup>28</sup> The options are: Jewish (e.g. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:137–139), specifically gentile (e.g. Thorsteinsson, *Interlocutor*, 188–196), or any judgmental person regardless of ethnicity (e.g. Longenecker, *Romans*, 245–246).

<sup>29</sup> J.A. Linebaugh, “Announcing the Human: Rethinking the Relationship Between Wisdom of Solomon 13–15 and Romans 1.18–2.11,” *NTS* 57 (2011) 214–237 at 220–223, doi:10.1017/S0028688510000330.



reader, ranging from a simple passive (“you are named/called”) to a reflexive middle (“you name/call yourself”). Over the course of the twentieth century, there has been a shift in typical translation practice of Rom 2:17 away from passive renderings to reflexive renderings of ἐπονομάζῃ.<sup>30</sup> Modern interpreters are therefore predisposed to assume—often without argumentation—that the verb here is reflexive (“you call yourself”).<sup>31</sup> The reflexive rendering is especially stressed by Thorsteinsson to support his argument that Paul’s interlocutor is a gentile (potential) proselyte; however, Thorsteinsson provides no substantial lexical evidence for his reflexive rendering.<sup>32</sup> This highlights the need for a brief primary lexical investigation into the usage of ἐπονομάζω outside Rom 2:17, to determine whether the modern assumption of an (apparently unique) reflexive rendering of the middle/passive form in Rom 2:17 is in fact plausible. The established usage of ἐπονομάζω in the shared world of Paul and his readers must be examined in order to determine whether Paul intended his choice of the middle/passive form of the verb here to convey a passive or a reflexive sense.

<sup>30</sup> An extensive search yielded no reflexive renderings of ἐπονομάζῃ in Rom 2:17 prior to the twentieth century. The Vulgate translates the word with the non-reflexive passive *cognominaris*, as does Rufinus’s Latin translation of the citations in Origen’s commentary (*Comm. Rom.* 2.11). Key translations in English, German and French before the twentieth century, and several beyond, render it with customary and/or passive formulations, e.g. “thou art named” (Wycliffe); “thou art(e) called” (Tyndale; Geneva; KJV; Webster); “thou bearest the name” (RV; ASV); “you bear the name” (NASB); “you are called” (NKJV); “du heisst” (Luther; Schlachter 1905); “vous qui portez le nom” (Bible Sacy). It was only in the twentieth century that the shift towards a reflexive rendering appeared, e.g. “you call yourself” (RSV, NRSV, JB, NIV, CSB, ESV, NET); “du dich... nennst” (Schlachter 1951); “Du nennst dich” (HFA); “Toi qui te donnes le nom” (LSG). The lexica do not support such a shift. BDAG and LSJ both regard the verb in Rom 2:17 as passive (s.v. ἐπονομάζω), although BDAG, probably influenced by modern translation conventions, anomalously and without explanation gives a reflexive gloss: “you call yourself” (BDAG, s.v. ἐπονομάζω).

<sup>31</sup> Contextual factors are occasionally cited. An early example is T. Zahn, *Der Brief Des Paulus an Die Römer* (KNT 6; Leipzig: Deichert, 1910), who rules out the possibility of a passive understanding on contextual grounds alone, arguing that this verb, like the following verbs, “kann... nur ein Verhalten des Angeredeten bezeichnen” (136). By contrast, Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:164, is reluctant to allow any detected “irony” in the context to undermine what he regards as the normal passive rendering of the verb.

<sup>32</sup> Thorsteinsson, *Interlocutor*, 197–211. Thorsteinsson provides no primary evidence for a reflexive usage of ἐπονομάζω outside Rom 2:17; he only cites reflexive renderings by others (197–198 nn. 133–137). He proffers parallels with Epictetus’s “pretentious person” (ὁ ἀλαζών) (200–201); cf. S.K. Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (SBLDS 57; Chico: Scholars, 1981) 96. However, Epictetus never uses ἐπονομάζω (in any form) to depict the pretentious person; furthermore, Epictetus’s key formulations are unambiguously reflexive: λέγεις σεαυτόν (*Diatr.* 2.9.19); σεαυτόν εἶναι λέγεις (*Diatr.* 3:24.41).



Although ἐπονομάζω is *hapax legomenon* in the NT, it is a relatively common word in other extant sources.<sup>33</sup> The verb had a well-established and definite semantic content in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources: it was used to refer to the impartation or invocation of a customary public signifier, i.e. a well-known *name*. The verb is used to describe the naming of objects and ideas (Plato, *Crat.* 406a; *Phaed.* 103b; *Theat.* 185c; *Tim.* 60d; Exod 16:31; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.189), places (often in LXX, e.g. Gen 21:31; Josephus, *A.J.* 1.138; 2.249), individuals (often in LXX, e.g. Gen 4:25; Philo, *Praem.* 23; Josephus, *A.J.* 7.21; 17.14; *T. Jud.* 1:3), gods (Herodotus 4.35.3; 5x in LXX e.g. Exod 20:24), and ethnic groups (Deut 2:11; Josephus, *A.J.* 1.143). Thucydides also describes the “naming” (ἐπονομάζων) of individuals by their “tribe” (φυλὴν) (7.69.2). The verb commonly takes the active voice. There is only one unambiguously middle extant use, and this is not reflexive: “they named him Zeus,” Δὲ ἐπωνομάσανθ’ (Sib. Or. 3:141). However, there are many passive uses. In keeping with the nature of the lexeme, these passive uses are invariably customary; i.e. the passive is used to indicate a public and generally accepted name for objects and ideas (Thucydides 2.29.3; Euripides *Heracl.* 1329; Plato, *Parm.* 133d; *Phaedr.* 238a; Josephus, *A.J.* 4.207), places (e.g. “the name of that place was named bitterness,” ἐπωνομάσθη τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου Πικρία, Exod 15:23; cf. Philo, *Congr.* 163; see also Thucydides 6.2.4; Josephus, *B.J.* 1.118; Polybius, *Hist.* 1.29.2), individuals (Josephus, *A.J.* 2.1), and gods/shrines (Plato, *Leg.* 738b). It can be associated with public reputation: “I was hearing Ischomachus being named ‘beautiful and good’ (καλὸν τε κάγαθὸν ἐπωνομαζόμενον) to all—men, women, foreigners and citizens alike” (Xenophon, *Oec.* 6.17). Plato speaks of a man who customarily “is named with a paternal title” (πατρόθεν ἐπονομάζεται) due to his father’s fame (*Lys.* 204e).

At times, Greek authors *do* use ἐπονομάζω in reflexive formulations. However, they do *not* employ the middle/passive form to do so; rather, they use the active form with a reflexive pronoun. For example, Dio Cassius writes that Agrippa “possessed an illiberal nature, and spent most of his time in fishing, by virtue of which he used to call himself Neptune (Ποσειδῶνα ἑαυτὸν ἐπωνόμαζε)” (*Hist. Rom.* 55.32.1 [Cary, LCL]); Iamblichus writes, “he called himself this name [i.e. ‘philosopher’] (τοῦτο τὸ ὄνομα... ἑαυτὸν ἐπωνόμασε) instead of ‘wise one’” (*De Vita Pythagorica* 8.44.14).

This survey of the lexical data demonstrates that 1) when the word ἐπονομάζω is used with a passive or middle/passive form by Greek authors—including in biblical and other Jewish

<sup>33</sup> The following summarises 645 results from a search in the TLG database for the lemma ἐπονομάζω in texts before the fourth century CE (M. Pantelia, *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae: A Digital Library of Greek Literature* (Irvine, CA: University of California, 2014) <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/> searched 10 December 2019), checked against F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 807.

texts—the sense intended and understood is a *customary passive*, and 2) when an author does wish to convey a reflexive sense, the active form with a reflexive pronoun is used.<sup>34</sup> Thus, despite twentieth century translation tendencies, it is highly implausible to conclude that when Paul uses the middle/passive form ἐπονομάζει in Rom 2:17, he intended—or that his audience would have understood—a reflexive sense (“you call yourself”). Had Paul wished to convey this sense, he had the reflexive pronoun at his disposal; i.e. he could have written σεαυτὸν ἐπονομάζεις. However, since he actually wrote ἐπονομάζει, it is far more likely that he intended his audience to read the normal customary passive sense (“you are [customarily] named”). Thus, a reader should expect the subsequent discourse to be concerned with issues related to customary public names and/or actual reputations. It is advisable to read it in this light unless compelling reasons are found to the contrary.

If, therefore, ἐπονομάζει is a customary passive, its function would be to reinforce and further specify the topic of Jewish priority signalled by the preverbal elements εἰ δὲ σὺ Ἰουδαίος. The reason Paul chooses this specific verb (rather than εἶ) is to signal that he is specifically concerned with his Jewish interlocutor’s public *name* in relation to other human beings (rather than his private existence in relation to God). In other words, from 2:17 onwards, the discourse topic has shifted from the eschatological divine judgment of “humans” (cf. 2:1–16) to the public reputation and social identity of one who is known to others by the customary name “Jew.”

### Paul’s interlocutor in light of Jewish education discourse (Romans 2:17–20)

What is Paul seeking to achieve by invoking this public signifier “Jew”? Paul provides a richly detailed elaboration in the complex conditional frame spanning 2:17–20. The frame consists of six clauses. The first (2:17a), as seen above, signals a reframing of the discourse in terms of the interlocutor’s public Jewish “name.” The following four clauses (2:17b–18b) describe the interlocutor’s activities: he rests on the law, boasts in God, knows (God’s) will and approves the better things. These all arise from his “being instructed from the law” (2:18c; cf. 2:13).<sup>35</sup> The final, more detailed clause (2:19–20) adds a pivotal element: this named Jew views himself as an *educator of others*. This concept is elaborated using four phrases in

<sup>34</sup> The verb ὀνομάζω exhibits similar characteristics (cf. Montanari, *Dictionary*, 1463–1464).

<sup>35</sup> The present tense of κατηχούμενος implies ongoing instruction (cf. 1 Cor 14:19, Gal 6:6).

apposition, each describing the (singular) interlocutor educating (plural) others: guide for the blind, light for those in darkness, educator of fools, teacher of infants. A further elaboration reiterates that the basis for this educational activity is the law (2:20b). Paul thus deliberately frames his Jewish interlocutor in terms of his identity as a known law-based *educator*.

Gathercole, after surveying a wide range of Second Temple Jewish texts, regards the descriptions of confidence and boasting in 2:17–20 as “confidence that God will vindicate Israel at the *eschaton*” on the basis of “obedience to Torah.”<sup>36</sup> While such eschatological concerns almost certainly form the background (cf. 2:1–16) and ultimate horizon (cf. 3:27–28) for the interlocutor’s confidence, more precision is needed in discerning the focus of the discourse at this point in 2:17–20. In particular, it is important to take more seriously the rhetorical significance of the climactic fourfold repetition of descriptions of educational activity in 2:19–20. Teaching is not simply one aspect of the interlocutor’s activity; it is the aspect Paul emphatically brings to the fore. The focus of the interlocutor’s confidence at *this* point is not his own (or his nation’s) eschatological salvation—although this is almost certainly assumed—but rather on the interlocutor’s own (or his nation’s) *ability to instruct others*.

A closer examination of the precise vocabulary Paul uses in this frame strongly suggests that he is deliberately evoking the ideal of the Jew as renowned law-based scholar/educator,<sup>37</sup> an ideal that appears both in inscriptions<sup>38</sup> and in Second Temple Jewish wisdom texts.<sup>39</sup> In key places in these texts, Jewish confidence in the law extends into confidence in the ability to instruct others in law-based wisdom.

<sup>36</sup> S.J. Gathercole, *Where Is Boasting?: Early Jewish Soteriology and Paul’s Response in Romans 1–5* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 200–210, quoting 201 (italics original), 202. Gathercole cites a range of Jewish literature in which “confidence before God and obedience are inextricably entwined” (202–203, quoting 202, cf. 161–194), including As. Mos. 9.3–6; Bar 4:1; CD 7:3–6; Wis 15:1–4; 2 Bar. 48.22–24.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J.M. Zurawski, “Jewish Education and Identity: Towards an Understanding of Second Temple *Paideia*,” in *Second Temple Jewish Paideia in Context* (ed. J.M. Zurawski and G. Boccaccini; BZNW 228; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017) 267–278.

<sup>38</sup> Named Jews are memorialised using νομομαθής (CJF 1:113, 1:193, 1:333), [νομω]διδάσκαλος (CJF 1:201, 1:333), μαθητης σοφῶν καὶ πατήρ συναγωγῶν (CJF 1:508); see D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* (2 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 2:59, 2:235–236, 2:260–261, 2:315, 2:427; cf. Dochhorn, “Vorwurf,” 113.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. E.J. Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul: A Tradition Historical Enquiry into the Relation of Law, Wisdom, and Ethics* (WUNT 2/16; Tübingen: Mohr, 1985) esp. 232–234. Cf. parallel terms in Wisdom expressing the value of Jewish law-based wisdom: certain gentiles are described using

For example, Ben Sira's grandson, describing the translation of his grandfather's work into Greek, opens by boasting in the knowledge of God through the law and other scriptures, claiming that "it is necessary to praise Israel for education (*παιδείας*) and wisdom" (Sir. Prol. 3). This Jewish self-identification as a nation of wise and renowned educators appears in various places in Ben Sira's work, with similar concepts and vocabulary to that found in Rom 2:17–20. For Ben Sira, not only does law-derived wisdom give "rest" (*ἀνάπαυσιν*, Sir 6:28; cf. *ἐπαναπαύη νόμω*, Rom 2:17) and the grounds to "boast in the law of the Lord's covenant" (*ἐν νόμω διαθήκης κυρίου καυχῆσεται*, Sir 39:8b; cf. *καυχᾶσαι ἐν νόμω*, Rom 2:17), it also enables the wise scribe to "bring to light the education of his teaching" (*ἐκφανεῖ παιδείαν διδασκαλίας αὐτοῦ*, Sir 39:8a; cf. *φῶς*, Rom 2:19; *παιδευτήν, διδάσκαλον*, Rom 2:20). The law "shines forth education like light" (*ὁ ἐκφαίνων ὡς φῶς παιδείαν*, Sir 24:27; cf. *φῶς*, Rom 2:19; *παιδευτήν*, Rom 2:20). Nevertheless, Ben Sira, like Paul, is well aware of the ironic possibility that an "educator" (*παιδευτής*) may fail to instruct himself (Sir 37:19; cf. Rom 2:21–22).

The Letter of Aristeas is also concerned with portraying Jewish sages as renowned and wise educators whose skill is derived from their devotion to the Mosaic law. The stylised description of the feast held by the Ptolemaic king for the translators describes great honour accruing to Jewish sages who use the law even to instruct Greek nobles. The law "has been stipulated (*νενομοθέτηται*) for truth (*ἀλήθειαν*) and an expression of correct reason" (*Let. Aris.* 161; cf. "having the form of knowledge and truth (*ἀληθείας*) in the law (*νόμω*)," Rom 2:20); thus, Jewish sages, "excelling in education (*παιδεία*)" (*Let. Aris.* 121; cf. *παιδευτήν*, Rom 2:20), enlighten Greek nobles and philosophers, who acknowledge their excellence because the "starting point" in their answers is "God himself" (*Let. Aris.* 200–201, 235; cf. *καυχᾶσαι ἐν θεῷ*, Rom 2:17).

These linguistic and conceptual points of contact, corroborated by similar sentiments in Josephus (e.g. *C. Ap.* 1.165; 2.153) and Philo (e.g. *Mos.* 2.20), suggest that Paul in Rom 2:17–20 is deliberately framing his subsequent discourse in terms which correlate to a known (though not necessarily universal) Jewish self-identification in terms of educational prowess. Paul's interlocutor represents a paragon and exemplar of this particular conception of Jewish identity, according to which the name "Jew" should invoke admiration for law-based education. This view of Jewish identity is relevant to the element of Jewish priority noted above: "to Jew first *and* to Greek" (1:16; 2:9–10). Paul is thus not portraying this renowned

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*ἀποτυφλώω* (Wis 2:21) and *ἄφρων* and *νήπιος* together (12:24; 15:14); the law is *φῶς* among *σκοτός* (18:4); Jews have *γνώσις* and *ἀλήθεια* (3:9; 6:22; 7:17). Since in Rom 1:18–32, Paul evokes and deconstructs elements of the soteriological perspective of Wis 13–14 (Linebaugh, "Announcing," 217–220), it is quite conceivable that in Rom 2:17–20, he is doing the same in relation to pedagogical perspectives from Jewish wisdom texts.

Jewish interlocutor simply as an exclusivist who believes he possesses special salvific advantages *over* others. Rather, the interlocutor believes that his privileged connection with the Law of Moses enables him to *educate* others.

Why does Paul turn to address the topic of the Jewish law-based educator here? The answer may be found in the prior discourse. The interlocutor represents a purported solution to the problem Paul has already identified: God’s wrath against human foolishness, wickedness, and impiety (1:18–32). Humans as a whole did not glorify God; rather “their foolish heart was darkened (ἐσκοτίσθη)” (1:21). However, the Jewish interlocutor, who unlike the gentiles (2:14) possesses “the form of knowledge and truth in the law” (2:20), believes that he is thereby the solution to this problem of human foolishness and wickedness, since he can provide law-based education: “you are sure that you yourself<sup>40</sup> are a guide for the blind, a light for those in darkness...” (πέποιθας... σεαυτὸν ὁδηγὸν εἶναι τυφλῶν, φῶς τῶν ἐν σκότει..., 2:19).

Romans 2:17–20 thus represents a genuinely new development in Paul’s argument. Having undermined several common *soteriological* claims of contemporary Jewish discourse (2:1–16),<sup>41</sup> Paul now turns to address certain *pedagogical* claims (2:17–29). That is, Paul has reframed the discourse so that from 2:17 onwards his interlocutor represents a known Jewish alternative to Paul’s gospel-preaching ministry (cf. “my gospel,” 2:16).<sup>42</sup> This renowned Jew is one who “boasts” in the knowledge of God through the law, not only as grounds for his own eschatological confidence,<sup>43</sup> but also, and more specifically here, as grounds for *educating* others (2:17, 23). He is thus purporting to be able to address the previously identified problem of human foolishness, wickedness, and impiety (cf. 1:18–32), solving it through a program of law-based education (2:17–20). In this respect, he represents a foil for Paul himself, who has previously been claiming that this problem is solved through his own gospel-preaching ministry (1:16–17, 2:16).

Having identified this reframing of the discourse in terms of the topic of Jewish law-based education (2:17–20), the subsequent argument may now be read in a fresh light.

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<sup>40</sup> The rendering by Thorsteinsson, *Interlocutor*, “[you have] persuaded yourself...” (209) is syntactically impossible. The perfect active πέποιθας is not causative (BDAG, s.v. πείθω 2); hence the reflexive pronoun σεαυτὸν cannot be its direct object. Rather, σεαυτὸν must be acting as an intensified accusative of reference for εἶναι, highlighting the agency of the interlocutor.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Linebaugh, “Announcing.”

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Stowers, *Rereading*, 142.

<sup>43</sup> While this is in the background (cf. Gathercole, *Boasting*, 200–203) it is not the focus here.

## The failure of Jewish education in Rome (Romans 2:21–24)

In Rom 2:21–22, Paul addresses his interlocutor four times in terms of his educational activity (διδάσκων, κηρύσσων, λέγων, βδελυσσόμενος),<sup>44</sup> in each case accusing him of contradictory action. As demonstrated above, Paul’s interlocutor is known and “named” as a Jew (2:17) and his activity, self-identification, and reputation is bound up in his law-based educational activity (2:19–20). By 2:24, it becomes clear that Paul is especially interested in the public nature of the interlocutor’s reputation as it applies to gentiles. While Jewish education was primarily an intra-communal endeavour, it did at times translate into actual attempts by Jews to use the law to teach wisdom to gentiles. It was suggested above that Paul is here alluding to the notorious incident related by Josephus involving a Jewish teacher defrauding a Roman convert of funds intended for the Jerusalem temple. This incident fits well into Paul’s framing of his interlocutor in terms of well-known Jewish law-based wisdom teaching (2:17–20). Indeed, Josephus explicitly describes the chief fraudster as a known Jewish law-based wisdom teacher: a “Jew” (Ἰουδαίος) who “was purporting to expound wisdom from the laws of Moses” (προσεποιεῖτο... ἐξηγεῖσθαι σοφίαν νόμων τῶν Μωυσέως, 18.81). Of course, as has been argued, if Paul purposes here were to prove the individual guilt of all Jews before God, then an allusion to this specific incident would be confusing and indeed rhetorically counterproductive. However, if—as this article is seeking to show—the primary issue in the foreground at this point is the effectiveness of Jewish education among gentiles, an allusion to the incident is highly apposite. The allusion demonstrates that the ideal of the well-known Jew as educator (Rom 2:17–20) is contradicted by the empirical reality of Roman gentile opinion of this very activity (2:21–22). It proves that for the Roman public, the name “Jew,” especially when associated with Jewish educators, engenders only scandal and suspicion. In its own terms, the ideal of the famed Jew as law-based educator has been a spectacular failure among the actual Roman population. Moreover, as Paul goes on to state, this activity has shamed *God himself* (2:23), a situation which is consistent with the written scriptures (2:24, citing Isa 52:5 LXX). The primary focus both in the cited Isaianic text and in Paul’s argument here is not on Jewish sinfulness per se, but on Jewish causality (διὰ) in shaming God (cf. Isa 52:6, 10).<sup>45</sup> Not only has this “named” Jewish educator failed to teach the

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<sup>44</sup> In such an educational setting, the teacher’s attitude of disgust signified by βδελυσσόμενος (2:22) is not simply an internal attitude but also an exemplary educational device; cf. βδέλυγμα in Sir 17:26; 27:30; 49:2.

<sup>45</sup> J.R. Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “In Concert” in the Letter to the Romans* (NovTSup 101; Leiden: Brill, 2002) 176–177.



nations wisdom leading to their salvation and God's honour (cf. Paul's own purpose in 1:5); he has actually caused God's "name" to be slandered among the nations.

### The reversal of the ideal: Gentile condemnation of the Jewish transgressor (Romans 2:25–27)

If, as has been argued thus far, the issue in the foreground of Paul's argument here is the effectiveness of Jewish law-based education, fresh light can be shed on the three-step argument of Rom 2:25–27 concerning circumcision. In Rome, circumcision was a fundamental marker of Jewish distinctiveness from gentiles.<sup>46</sup> In 2:25, Paul focuses on the issue of whether circumcision "helps" (ὠφελεῖ). The verb ὠφελέω is transitive, but here has no explicit object, thus requiring the object to be supplied by the reader.<sup>47</sup> Typically, interpreters and translators assume that Paul is discussing how circumcision "helps" *the eschatological salvation of the circumcised person* by affording him a salvific advantage.<sup>48</sup> However, if—according to our reading—the precise focus of the discourse at this point is not on the interlocutor's personal salvation but on the effectiveness of his educational activity, especially among gentiles, 2:25 reads more naturally as a statement concerning whether circumcision—and the Jewish distinctiveness it entails—"helps" the precise issues Paul has just raised, i.e. the *education of the gentiles* and thus *the honouring of God's name among gentiles* (cf. 2:23–24).<sup>49</sup> Paul's primary concern here, then, is whether and how Jewish distinctiveness might benefit gentiles and glorify God (cf. e.g. Sir 24:23–34; *Let. Aris.* 134–171). Paul stresses that were any such benefit to come from the interlocutor's activity, it would be conditional on the interlocutor actually *doing* the law. Since Paul has just stated that interlocutor has done the opposite (2:23), the condition is hypothetical. The actual situation is that the interlocutor is a "transgressor of the law" (παραβάτης νόμου), and so his purported Jewish distinctiveness does not help at all. With respect to the key issue in the foreground of the discourse at this point, his interlocutor's "circumcision" has become "uncircumcision."

In 2:26, Paul draws an inference regarding the inverse: the *uncircumcised law-keeper* may be regarded as *circumcised*. This may be understood in light of a recognised Jewish debate

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<sup>46</sup> J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996) 438.

<sup>47</sup> BDAG, s.v. ὠφελέω.

<sup>48</sup> e.g. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:171; Thiessen, "Argument," 384–385.

<sup>49</sup> The verb is used in a similar way in *Let. Aris.* 293–294; Josephus, *AJ.* 12.102.

over whether gentile sympathisers who were being educated in the Jewish laws must be circumcised;<sup>50</sup> Paul leads his interlocutor to the more liberal viewpoint in the debate (cf. Philo *QE* 2.2; Ananias in Josephus *A.J.* 20.34) by affirming that circumcision can be “reckoned” rather than literally enacted. Paul is thus not using the verb λογίζομαι here to refer to divine eschatological judgment (as many interpreters assume),<sup>51</sup> but rather—as he does several times elsewhere in Romans—to describe a human “reckoning” of one thing as if it were another (cf. Rom 6:11; 8:36; 14:14).<sup>52</sup> He is affirming the viewpoint that a gentile who is not physically circumcised but who otherwise keeps the law demonstrates an acceptable response to Jewish educational activity, and thus may be regarded as also having kept the law of circumcision.

The clauses in 2:25–26 provide a logical basis for Paul’s third and climactic statement that this uncircumcised law-keeper “will judge” (κρινεῖ) the circumcised transgressor (2:27). Although interpreters commonly see Paul here recalling the references to *divine* judgment from 2:1–16,<sup>53</sup> this interpretation ignores the more straightforward and obvious parallel that also appears in the same section: Paul’s repeated references to the *human* who judges another for moral failure (ἄνθρωπε πᾶς ὁ κρίνων... κρίνεις τὸν ἕτερον... ὁ κρίνων, 2:1; ἄνθρωπε ὁ κρίνων, 2:3). Paul is highlighting a direct and marked contrast: in 2:1–3, the interlocutor “judges” other human beings; here in 2:27, the *gentile* law-keeper “will judge” the public representative of Jewish law-based education.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, Paul is here describing further negative consequences when Jewish law-based educators transgress the law. If the interlocutor simply represented individual Jews standing before God’s judgment, his sin would have consequences only for himself. But since he is one customarily “named ‘Jew’” (2:17), and since his public identity and reputation consists in law-based education (2:17–20), his sin has disastrous consequences for God’s honour among the nations (2:21–24). Under these circumstances, his circumcision—and the distinctiveness it might otherwise entail—“helps” (ὠφελεῖ) no-one (2:25). Even worse, his public and direct association with God’s written law through physical circumcision render him a known “transgressor of the law” (τὸν διὰ γράμματος καὶ περιτομῆς παραβάτην νόμου,

<sup>50</sup> Watson, *Judaism*, 75–78.

<sup>51</sup> Pace e.g. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:173. The future tense need not imply eschatological motifs; since it occurs in an apodosis, it is most naturally taken as expressing the consequence of the condition (cf. Rom 7:3; 1 Cor 8:10; 14:23).

<sup>52</sup> Cf. humans as the subject of λογίζομαι in 2:3, 3:28, 8:18.

<sup>53</sup> E.g. Longenecker, *Romans*, 316.

<sup>54</sup> The verb κρινεῖ has the same consequential (and non-eschatological) sense as that of λογισθήσεται (2:26).

2:27).<sup>55</sup> That is, he is not merely a sinner; he is one who embodies in his public persona a visible contradiction of God’s law. Thus, the gentiles he purports to educate do not praise him, but condemn him (2:27).

### Conditions for Jewish praise (Romans 2:28–29)

At this point of Paul’s argument, then, the focus of the discourse is on human condemnation (rather than human praise) for the transgressing Jewish educator. If it is accepted that this issue continues into the foreground of 2:28–29, fresh light can be shed on these challenging verses. The verses are often read as a multi-clausal redefinition of the terms “Jew” and “circumcision” in order to delineate the criteria for eschatological salvation.<sup>56</sup> However, such an interpretation is not unambiguously supported by the syntax;<sup>57</sup> it also appears to contradict the clear ethnic and non-soteriological uses of “Jew” and “circumcision” in the following verse (3:1).<sup>58</sup> However, if 2:28–29 is approached as a continuation of Paul’s discussion of the public reputation of the known Jewish educator, and due weight is given to the mention of “praise” (ἔπαινος) at the end of 2:29, a less dissonant reading becomes viable. According to such a reading, the *primary* issue here is the grounds and source of true *praise* for Jews. This would be a natural topic to address at this point, since the reputation of the “named” Jewish educator has been in the foreground of Paul’s argument throughout 2:17–27. Furthermore, the Jewish texts discussed above often affirm that Jewish law-based educators should receive human “praise” (using ἔπαινος and cognates) for their activity.<sup>59</sup>

A possible translation of 2:28–29 is thus:

<sup>55</sup> For Paul, the terminology of transgression (cf. παράβασις, 2:23) denotes more than simply wrongdoing; it involves the breaking of specified laws (e.g. 4:15; 5:14; cf. Gal 2:18; 3:19). To be a “transgressor” (παραβάτην) one must be bound to a specific legal code. Paul’s interlocutor has a specific, written code (γράμμα) and is bound to it by circumcision (περιτομή). When he sins, these circumstances are *instrumental* in making him a “transgressor” of the law (2:23, cf. 2:21–22). Thus διά is being used in its common instrumental sense; there is no need to posit a rare marker of “attendant circumstances” (pace Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:174).

<sup>56</sup> E.g. Gathercole, *Boasting*, 206–207.

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:175 must supply four verbs and four substantives to render this sense.

<sup>58</sup> Thiessen, “Argument,” 374–375.

<sup>59</sup> Key terms include ἔπαινος (Sir 39:10; 44:15); ἐπαινέω (Sir. Prol. 3; *Let. Aris.* 189, 195, 206, 208, 213, 225, 234, 240, 246, 265, 291), αἰνέω (Sir 39:9; 44:1); κατεπαινέω (*Let. Aris.* 193, 212, 266); and συναινέω (*Let. Aris.* 226).

For the Jew in public is not [the one],  
nor the circumcision in public in flesh,  
but the Jew in secret,  
and circumcision of the heart, in Spirit not letter,  
whose [is] the praise—not from humans, but from God.<sup>60</sup>

In 2:28–29a, Paul delineates two understandings of Jewish identity. “The Jew in public” and “circumcision in public in the flesh” (v. 28) recall terms from the immediately preceding description of the (publicly) named Jew as law-based educator (2:17, 25, 27). The alternative understanding of Jewish identity (v. 29a) evokes prophetic and eschatological motifs: the Jew “in secret” recalls the significance of God’s eschatological judgment of “secrets” (2:16); circumcision “of the heart” is a prophetic viewpoint (e.g. Deut 30:6); circumcision “by Spirit” recalls the “new spirit” enabling obedience (Ezek 36:26 LXX).<sup>61</sup> Having delineated these two understandings of Jewish identity—one representing Paul’s interlocutor, the other conceived in prophetic eschatological terms—Paul states that the latter, rather than the former, receives “praise,” *ὁ δὲ ὁ ἔπαινος...* (2:29b). Paul is thereby making a pointed statement about the ineffectiveness of the public, well-known Jewish teaching among gentiles. Those Jews who hold to such a publicly recognised understanding of Jewishness do not receive the human praise they seek. Yet the other kind of Jew, understood in terms of prophetic eschatology, while bereft of human recognition, *will* receive praise from God. Paul thus simultaneously denies the view that typical Jewish law-based education is effective in providing praiseworthy instruction for gentiles, and puts forward prophetic eschatology as the basis for a positive vision of Jewish identity, worthy of divine approval. In this way, the “Jew first” motif (cf. 2:9–10) finds its development. One kind of Jew, the public transgressor, is the prototypical doer of evil (cf. 2:9); the other, circumcised in heart, is the prototypical doer of good (cf. 2:10).

### Paul’s subsequent argument

Thus far it has been argued that Paul’s purpose in 2:17–29 is to establish the ineffectiveness of public Jewish law-based educational activity and to assert the divine

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<sup>60</sup> Modifying Thiessen, “Argument,” 375–378, who cites H.K. Arneson (forthcoming). Romans 2:28–29a thus forms an elaborate multi-phrase framing device (as in 2:17–20).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Berkley, *Broken Covenant*, 154.

praiseworthiness of an alternative, “hidden,” eschatologically conceived understanding of Jewish identity. How does this shed light on the subsequent argument? To answer this question, it is necessary to scrutinise carefully the meaning and significance of the immediately subsequent questions: Τί οὖν τὸ περισσὸν τοῦ Ἰουδαίου ἢ τίς ἢ ὠφέλεια τῆς περιτομῆς; (3:1). In each question, a verbal substantive (περισσὸν, “abundance”; ὠφέλεια, “help”) cognate with a key verb in the context (περισσεύω, “I [cause to] abound,” 3:7; ὠφελέω, “I help,” 2:25) is followed by a genitive substantive (τοῦ Ἰουδαίου, “of the Jew”; τῆς περιτομῆς, “of circumcision”). Interpreters typically assume the first of these genitives to be objective, and the second subjective; i.e. they assume the questions are equivalent to “Then what abounds *for* the Jew? Or what help does circumcision provide [him]?” Understood thus, the questions are about the salvific “advantage of the Jew over the Gentile.”<sup>62</sup> However, if the argument in this article is correct, the question of salvific “advantage” is only in the background, not the foreground, of 2:17–29. The key point Paul has just established is that the “public” Jew has failed to educate others in a praiseworthy manner, and so has failed to bring about the honour of God’s name among the nations. If this is Paul’s focus here, it is more natural to understand both genitives as subjective,<sup>63</sup> i.e. the questions are equivalent to “Then what is the abundance/overflow of the Jew [for these matters]? Or what help does circumcision provide [for these matters]?” The questions then concern how Jews and Jewish distinctiveness could possibly help to bring about the honour of God’s name among the nations. Such questions naturally arise from the previous discourse: Paul has argued that the “public Jew” (2:28) has nothing to offer but has only shamed God (2:24); furthermore, the “secret” Jew is unrecognised by humans (2:29).<sup>64</sup> Under these circumstances, how could any Jew “abound” or “help” in bringing about the enlightenment of gentiles leading to the honour of God’s name among the nations?

If the nature of Paul’s questions in 3:1 is thus reconceived, the following argument (3:2–8) becomes more intelligible. Conventional readings, which assume Paul here to be discussing the salvific advantage of Jews over gentiles, give rise to numerous inconsistencies, leading to various proposals for complex schemas involving unmarked speech-in-character.<sup>65</sup> However, if Paul’s precise question at this point is not about salvific advantage, but about how Jews

<sup>62</sup> So e.g. Cranfield, *Romans*, 1:176.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. M. Monkemeier, “What Then Is Τὸ Περισσὸν Τοῦ Ἰουδαίου?: Romans 3:1 and the ‘Benefit from the Jew,’” *JSPL* 8 (2018) 81–101, doi:10.5325/jstudpaullett.8.1-2.0081.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. “secret (κεκρυμμένη) wisdom and unseen treasure—what is the help (τίς ὠφέλεια) in either?” (Sir 20:30/41:14).

<sup>65</sup> E.g. S.K. Stowers, “Paul’s Dialogue with a Fellow Jew in Romans 3:1–9,” *CBQ* 46 (1984) 708–710; J. King, *Speech-in-Character, Diatribe, and Romans 3:1–9* (BibInt 163; Leiden: Brill, 2018) 195–196.

might cause God's name to be honoured among the nations, then Paul's argument can be seen as a coherent (albeit conceptually radical) answer to *this issue*. "Much in every way!" Paul states (3:2a). Why? The primary reason is that the Jews were entrusted with God's word—his "oracles" (3:2b). The unfaithfulness of "some" Jews—such as the interlocutor of 2:17–29, who represents the notorious Jewish teachers in Rome who have caused God's name to be blasphemed (2:21–24)—does not undermine God's faithfulness (3:3). Jewish unfaithfulness is entirely consistent with God's faithfulness to his word of judgment against unfaithful humans (3:4).<sup>66</sup> In fact, in providing an opportunity to demonstrate God's truth over against the falsehood of "every human" (πάς... ἄνθρωπος, 3:4), this public transgression has "abounded" (ἐπερίσσευσεν) to God's "glory" (δόξαν; 3:7).<sup>67</sup> This helps universal sinfulness to be established (3:9) such that "the whole (πάς) world" is "accountable to God" (3:19)—paving the way for the manifestation of divine righteousness in the gospel of Christ (3:21–26).

Furthermore, later in Romans, Paul describes himself in eschatological terms reminiscent of the "Jew in secret" (11:1–3; cf. 2:29), and claims that he, in his gospel-preaching ministry, has a key role in glorifying God's name among the nations (11:13–16; 15:9–12). In this way, the interlocutor of 2:17–29 is ultimately a foil for Paul's apostolic gospel-preaching ministry (cf. Paul's aim to glorify God's "name" in 1:5; and his "boast" in his ministry in 15:17).

## Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, a possible connection was noted between Paul's charges against his interlocutor in Rom 2:21–22 and Josephus's account of certain notorious Jewish teachers in Rome (*A.J.* 18.81–84). Interpreters seldom regard such a connection as likely, since it is incompatible with most accounts of Paul's purpose and argument in Rom 2:17–29. However, such a connection becomes viable if an alternative, hitherto unexplored, account of the purpose, topic, and argument of Rom 2:17–29 is considered. The issue in the foreground of this unit is not the eschatological soteriological status of Paul's interlocutor, but rather the effectiveness of typical Jewish teaching to solve the problems of human foolishness, wickedness, and impiety (cf. 1:18–32). In Rom 2:17, Paul reframes the discourse in terms of public Jewish reputation and social identity. Paul's description of his interlocutor in 2:17–20 represents a perspective found in Jewish education discourse. Paul's

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<sup>66</sup> So W.N. Timmins, *Romans 7 and Christian Identity: A Study of the "I" in Its Literary Context* (SNTSMS 170; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 48–49.

<sup>67</sup> Timmins, *Romans 7*, 35–65.



purpose in 2:17–29 is to establish that public Jewish law-based educational activity is ineffective in bringing about God’s glory among the nations, and to assert the praiseworthiness of an alternative, “hidden,” eschatologically conceived understanding of Jewish identity. The interlocutor thus stands in direct contrast with Paul’s own apostolic ministry. This reading has opened up several hitherto neglected exegetical possibilities for a coherent understanding both of Rom 2:17–29 itself and also of the subsequent discourse.