

Just a Busybody? A Look at the Greco-Roman Topos of Meddling for Defining ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in 1 Peter 4:15

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Near the end of 1 Peter, the author of the letter lists four activities that his audience is to avoid as they suffer for Christ's sake. The first three are not surprising: "But let none of you suffer as a murderer (φονεύς), a thief (κλέπτης), an evildoer (κακοποιός)" (1 Pet 4:15). The final activity, however, has caused much consternation for scholars and translators more particularly. Is ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος to be translated "embezzler," "informer," or "errant bishop"? Or should it be rendered as in most modern English translations with one of a number of related English equivalents: "meddler" (NIV, ESV [English Standard Version]), "busybody" (KJV, NKJV, CEV) or "mischief-maker" (RSV, NRSV)?

I will argue that the latter constellation of ideas (busybody, meddler, mischief-maker) reflects the author's purpose for using ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος, but without the rather innocuous associations of these terms in English. In fact, the Greco-Roman idea of meddling or interfering in other people's affairs was an activity that caused serious opposition and may have even evoked revolutionary overtones. More pointedly, it could refer to inappropriate movement outside of one's assigned role in society. This connotation may adhere to the author's usage of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in 1 Pet 4:15. In the larger purview of 1 Peter, the prohibition against this particular behavior would fit well with the admonition in the *Haustafel* for Christians to submit to and remain within the sphere in which they find themselves (2:11–3:12). In the end, the author of 1 Peter entreats his audience to refrain from activity that will impede the progress of the gospel, in the case of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος, to refrain from meddling, that is, transgressing prescribed social boundaries.¹

¹ John H. Elliott uses the language of transgressing social boundaries, although he focuses on the social boundaries between the Petrine church and society rather than, as I do, on the particular

I. LEXICAL DISCUSSION OF ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος

The term ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος (1 Pet 4:15) is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT that does not occur elsewhere in extant ancient Greek writings prior to the fourth century C.E. Though the two occurrences in Epiphanius (*Anc.* 12 and *Pan.* 66.85; both fourth century C.E.) and the single occurrence in Dionysius the Areopagite (*Ep.* 8.1; fifth century C.E.) lend support for understanding ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in connection with the Greco-Roman concept of meddling,² the lateness of the three instances and their lack of direct dependence on 1 Pet 4:15 make these later sources suggestive rather than definitive for the meaning of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in 1 Peter.

Given the lack of lexical evidence from contemporaneous Greek sources, scholars have been forced to move to etymological considerations to define ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος. That the word is clearly a compound may allay fears of committing an etymological fallacy, especially if, as is likely, the author of 1 Peter coins the term for his particular situation.³ In addition, early precedent for drawing on etymological considerations is evident in the Greek manuscripts. Two variant readings, ἄλλότριος ἐπίσκοπος and ἄλλοτρίοις ἐπίσκοπος, indicate that etymology was at least one way that scribes attempted to define the obscure ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος.⁴ The combination of ἄλλότριος (not one's own) and ἐπίσκοπος (one

social boundaries upheld in the Petrine household code (Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000], 788; idem, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981], 141). Of recent commentators, Elliott provides the most detailed discussion of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος, especially his illumination of relevant Greco-Roman literature.

² Particularly Epiphanius's use of περιεργάζομαι ("to meddle") in close proximity to and as a mutually defining term for ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος lends support for understanding the latter term to be within the conceptual sphere of meddling (*Anc.* 12). As J. Ramsey Michaels notes more generally, "The common idea in these [three] uses of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος appears to be that of meddling in things that are none of one's business" (1 Peter [WBC 49; Waco: Word Books, 1988], 267); see p. 267 for a brief summary of each usage in its context.

³ William M. Ramsey, *The Church in the Roman Empire before A.D. 170* (3rd ed.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1894), 293; Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901), 177; Elliott, *Home*, 141; James Moffatt, *The General Epistles: James, Peter, and Judas* (MNTC; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928), 158; contra Michaels, *1 Peter*, 267. Since the term occurs in no extant literature prior to 1 Peter and considering that a number of such compound terms related to the concept of meddling are coined by earlier Greek authors, it is more than plausible that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος was coined by the author of 1 Peter. In this regard, Plato coins ἄλλοτριπραγμοσύνη, and Aristotle is the first to use μονοπραγματέω, which expresses the opposite of meddling (Victor Ehrenberg, "Polypragmosyne: A Study in Greek Politics," *JHS* 67 [1947]: 60 n. 43, 61).

⁴ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 257. For a discussion of the nature of the compound, see also Elliott,

who observes or watches over) would, at first blush, seem to point to a person who concerns himself/herself in the affairs of another.⁵ In support of this, Hermann W. Beyer indicates, “[w]hen ever ἄλλότριος is used [in a compound], it always denotes an activity which is foreign to the doer, or which is not his concern.”⁶ The sense of concerning oneself in another’s affairs, that is, meddling, is what many have argued that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος means.⁷ In fact, most modern English translations move in this direction, as the examples above indicate.⁸

Nevertheless, the apparently anomalous nature of the final English equivalent in the fourfold list has raised questions about the appropriateness of such a definition. “Murderer, thief, evildoer . . . busybody”: Does not the latter provide a poor fit with the former three?⁹ In an argument for ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος as a more serious offense, BDAG suggests that “it is questionable whether such [meddling] behavior would merit the kind of reprisal suggested by the context” and notes that “a more serious type of crime has been suggested.”¹⁰ Here the range of possibilities includes embezzler, informer, revolutionary, and errant bishop (a bishop who misuses funds belonging to widows and orphans).¹¹

1 Peter, 785. As Paul J. Achtemeier notes, “The variety of forms presented in the [manuscripts] for this word indicate[s] its obscurity” (1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 303).

⁵ For further discussion of these individual terms, see BDAG, 47 and 379, respectively.

⁶ Hermann W. Beyer, “ἄλλοτρι(ο)επίσκοπος,” TDNT 2:621. For example, note Plato’s use of ἄλλοτριπραγμοσύνη in the same context and with similar meaning to πολυπραγμοσύνη, a word that more commonly denotes meddling activity (Plato, *Resp.* 444b).

⁷ E.g., Elliott, 1 Peter, 787; Michaels, 1 Peter, 267–68; Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 225; Ernest Best, 1 Peter (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 164–65; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 169; Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1947), 225; Edwin A. Blum, “1 Peter” (Expositor’s Bible Commentary 12; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 248; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (trans. J. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 309, 326. As already mentioned, this connotation fits well with the three later occurrences of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος from the fourth–fifth centuries.

⁸ In addition to the translations cited in the first paragraph, the following translations render ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος with some variation on this theme: NEB, REB, and ASV. The exception is the *Jerusalem Bible*, which translates it as “informer.”

⁹ Struck by the perceived incongruity, C. E. B. Cranfield even suggests that “[t]here is possibly a trace of humour in introducing the busybody into this disreputable list” (*The First Epistle of Peter* [London: SCM, 1950], 103).

¹⁰ BDAG, 47.

¹¹ For embezzler, see Johannes Bauer, “Aut maleficus aut alieni speculator (1 Petr 4,15),” *BZ* 22 (1978): 115; Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 37; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 126; Achtemeier, 1 Peter, 310. For informer, see Beyer, TDNT 2:622. For revolutionary, see Moffatt, *Peter*, 158; Francis W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947), 163 (“agitator”); and John Knox, “Pliny and 1 Peter: A Note on 1 Pet 4.14–16 and 3.15,” *JBL* 72 (1953): 188. For errant bishop, see K. Erbes, “Was bedeutet ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος 1 Pt 4,15?” *ZNW* 19 (1919–20): 41, 44. Certainly each of these concepts includes

It is unnecessary, however, to propose a more serious form of activity than the one suggested by the English translation equivalents “meddler” or “busybody” (although these terms are less than adequate, I will argue).¹² If we look at Greco-Roman conceptions of meddling, we find significant concern about and censure of such activity. In fact, we find that interfering in the concerns of others is not only frowned on by the ancients, but it is considered by some to be subversive to the fabric of society. Thus, ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος warrants association with such terms as φονεύς, κλέπτης, and κακοποιός.

II. GRECO-ROMAN TOPOS REGARDING MEDDLING

Terminology

If the component parts of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος suggest its association with the idea of meddling, then a look at the wider semantic range surrounding the topos of meddling in the Greco-Roman context may illuminate other possible connotations of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος.¹³ A number of Greek terms are used to express the concept of meddling, including περίεργος (and its cognate verb, περιεργάζομαι), πολυπραγμοσύνη (and its cognates, πολυπραγμονέω and πολυπράγμων),¹⁴ φιλοπραγμοσύνη, and ἄλλοτριπραγμοσύνη (also ἄλλοτριπραγμία).¹⁵

an element of acting outside one's proper sphere and so might be thought to fit under the rubric of meddling. This provides all the more reason to examine the Greco-Roman topos of meddling to ascertain its particular connotations.

¹²In most cases, discussion of the term by commentators reveals a need for further exploration. The definitional divergence, even among those who agree that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος should be rendered something like “meddler,” calls for further study of the term. Examples of the range of options given for the kind of meddling envisioned in 1 Pet 4:15 include (1) “missionary activity [that] resulted in the splitting of families or the stirring up of riots” (Best, *1 Peter*, 164–65); (2) “denouncing [of] idolatry” (Davids, *1 Peter*, 169); (3) “Christians who considered themselves . . . guardians of public morality” (Michaels, *1 Peter*, 267); and the more general (4) “an over-enthusiastic convert creating disturbance by crude defiance of accepted customs” (J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* [HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1969], 189).

¹³The term “meddling” will be used at this point in the essay to refer to the general concept described by the Greek terms. It remains to be determined (and it is one of the goals of this article) whether “meddling” is an adequate description of the Greco-Roman concept under study.

¹⁴An entire essay of Plutarch's *Moralia*, for example, is taken up with the topos of περὶ πολυπραγμοσύνης (“On Being a Busybody,” *Mor., Curios.* 515b–523b). Numerous commentators connect ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος to the topos of meddling and/or to various Greek terms associated with meddling; see Bigg (*1 Peter*, 178) and Selwyn (*First Peter*, 225), who tie ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος to πολυπραγμοσύνη. Michaels connects ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος to the term περίεργος, which is the preferred term in the Pauline corpus for meddling (*1 Peter*, 268).

¹⁵Two of the antonyms used for meddling in discussions of the topic are ἀπραγμοσύνη and μονοπραγματέω. See Ehrenberg, “Polypragmosyne,” 46, 61.

In the NT, the cognates περιεργάζομαι and περίεργος are used in the Pauline epistles to express the idea of meddling in someone else's affairs.¹⁶ The contexts of the Pauline usages of these terms indicate that such meddling is associated with idleness (ἀτάκτως, ἄργός), that is, not working or fulfilling one's proper function (2 Thess 3:11–12; 1 Tim 5:13–14). The antidote for such meddling is for those who have been interfering to “do their work quietly and . . . earn their own living” (2 Thess 3:12 NRSV)¹⁷ and, in the case of Christian widows who are meddlers (περίεργος [1 Tim 5:13]), to marry, bear children, and manage their (own) household (οἰκοδεσποτέω [1 Tim 5:14]).

The language of meddling is not limited to the NT or to Christian literature more generally. In fact, language that signals the topic of meddling is used extensively in the ancient world. One significant composite of terminology is used by Epictetus in his discussion of Cynic philosophy. Epictetus (55–135 C.E.) uses περίεργος and πολυπράγμων as virtual synonyms¹⁸ in a passage frequently cited in commentaries on 1 Pet 4:15, owing to its verbal ties to the elements of the compound ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος (Epictetus, *Diatr.* 3.22.97). In the context of defending why the Cynic, in spite of his oversight of people outside his own family, should not be considered a meddler (indicated by περίεργος in *Diatr.* 3.22.82), Epictetus argues that “the Cynic has made all [humanity] his children . . . in that spirit he approaches them all and cares for them all” (*Diatr.* 3.22.81, Oldfather). He concludes with a strong affirmation that the Cynic is not a meddler (3.22.97).

Διὰ τοῦτο οὔτε περίεργος οὔτε πολυπράγμων ἐστὶν ὁ οὕτω διακείμενος· οὐ γὰρ τὰ ἀλλότρια πολυπραγμονεῖ, ὅταν τὰ ἀνθρώπινα ἐπισκοπῇ, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἴδια.

On account of this, neither a meddler nor interferer is the one who thinks in this way, for he does not interfere in the affairs of others when he oversees human activity but [attends to] his own affairs. (my translation)

Not only are περίεργος and πολυπράγμων joined as synonyms in this passage (they are related terms that do not rightly describe the Cynic, according to Epictetus), but, in describing why such a person is not a meddler, Epictetus defines interference or meddling by using the two terms that make up the compound

¹⁶ In addition to the already mentioned lexical tie between ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος and περιεργάζομαι in Epiphanius (*Ans.* 12), their connection is affirmed also by E. A. Nida and J. B. Louw, who group περιεργάζομαι and περίεργος together with ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος under the heading, “Being a Busybody” (L&N, 768). Other Greco-Roman writers use περίεργος in their discussion of meddling as well (e.g., Plutarch and Epictetus; see subsequent examples).

¹⁷ In 2 Thess 3:12, the author speaks of working μετὰ ἡσυχίας (rendered here as “quietly”). The noun ἡσυχία is frequently used in association with (and as an opposite to) words for meddling. See subsequent discussion on 1 Pet 3:4.

¹⁸ According to Ehrenberg, these two words have significant overlap of meaning and “are sometimes used almost as synonyms” (“Polypragmosyne,” 62).

from 1 Pet 4:15, ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος. A meddler is one who oversees (ἐπισκοπῇ) affairs that are not one's own but belong to others (τὰ ἀλλότρια).

The Serious Nature of Meddling

From this text, we not only have an indication that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος may well fit the Greco-Roman topos of meddling, but we also get a sense of the seriousness of the activity so described. After vigorously defending the Cynic's right to oversee general human activity, Epictetus clearly shows this right to be the exception rather than the rule. Only a few have this right to oversee the activity of others. He chides his reader (who presumably is not one of these few) for any such interference:

What have you to do with other people's business (τοῖς ἄλλοτρίοις)? Why who are you? Are you the bull of the herd, or the queen bee of the hive? Show me the tokens of your leadership, like those which nature gives the queen bee. But if you are a drone and lay claim to the sovereignty over the bees, don't you suppose your fellow-citizens will overthrow you, just as the bees so treat the drones? (*Diatr.* 3.22.99, Oldfather)

Interference or meddling, then, is overseeing the activities of others when one has no proper right to do so. And interfering in this way is likely to get one "overthrown" by those who are the recipients of the interference. The seriousness of the repercussion hints at the seriousness of the transgression.

The seriousness of the offense of meddling is even more apparent in Plutarch's extended discussion on the topic, περὶ πολυπραγμοσύνης. Plutarch describes πολυπραγμοσύνη (along with synonyms περίεργος and φιλοπραγμοσύνη¹⁹) as searching for what is hidden or concealed (*Mor., Curios.* 516d–e, 517c, 518c) and seeking what does not concern that person (*Mor., Curios.* 520e). He closely links meddling to κακοήθεια ("bad disposition, malignity" [*Mor., Curios.* 515d; 518c])²⁰ and ἐπιχαιρεκακία ("joy over one's neighbor's misfortune" [*Mor., Curios.* 518c]).²¹ Plutarch also speaks of meddlers as of the same family as informers (συκοφάντης [*Mor., Curios.* 523a–b]), a group he describes as especially despised.²² Association

¹⁹ Both terms denote meddling according to LSJ, 1373, 1989.

²⁰ LSJ, 861; BDAG defines κακοήθεια as "a basic defect in character that leads one to be hurtful to others" (p. 500).

²¹ LSJ, 672.

²² See LSJ, 1671. The connection between informing and interfering can be seen in Aristophanes' play *The Plutus*. One of the characters, an informer (sycophant, συκοφάντης), has an extended conversation with a just man (δικαίος). The sycophant speaks of his involvement in both public and private matters (907). The just man then questions whether this is not interference (πολυπραγμονέω [913]) and calls him (in his meddling) a housebreaker (τοιχωρύχος [909]). See also the connection between πολυπραγμοσύνη and συκοφάντης in Isocrates' *Areopagiticus*, as cited in Ehrenberg, "Polypragmosyne," 57.

of the idea of meddling with activities of such a serious nature lends support for understanding meddling with similarly serious connotations.

In addition, Plutarch uses a number of potent metaphors to communicate the abhorrent nature of meddling. He likens this activity to a chicken that ignores its own nearby food and instead searches out one single grain of barley from the dung heap (*Mor., Curios.* 516d). He also uses the image of a maggot feeding on dead matter to illustrate the nature of interference (*Mor., Curios.* 517e). Both images evoke a sense of revulsion at the activity described and could hardly be termed innocuous, as might the English word “busybody.”²³

Finally, Plutarch speaks of meddling as an action of similar severity to adultery. He speaks of a certain legislator who banned “the lampooning on the comic stage of all citizens except adulterers and busybodies” (μοιχοὺς καὶ πολυπράγμονας) (*Mor., Curios.* 519b, Helmbold). It seems that these two personages alone merit such inconsiderate treatment. Plutarch then points out the similarity between meddling and adultery by noting that “adultery does seem to be a sort of curiosity about [better, “meddling in”; πολυπραγμοσύνη] another’s pleasure . . . while curiosity (πολυπραγμοσύνη) is an encroaching, a debauching and denuding of secret things” (*Mor., Curios.* 519c, Helmbold).²⁴

Meddling: Connotations of Injustice and Improper Roles

In Plato’s foundational discussion of the proper basis of the *polis*,²⁵ he speaks of the ruinous consequences of meddling (πολυπραγμοσύνη and verbal cognate). He begins by defining justice (δικαιοσύνη), the cornerstone of the *polis*, as attending to one’s own business (τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν) and not being one who meddles (προσπραγμονέω) (*Resp.* 433a).²⁶ For Plato, this is tied to each person’s fulfilling of his/her proper, nature-given, singular task.

²³ Ehrenberg flags the inadequacy of the translation “busybody” for πολυπραγμοσύνη when he says, “though this translation may be adequate in some passages of Greek literature, it is only too apt to conceal the full implications of the word” (“Polypragmosyne,” 46).

²⁴ In addition to the authors cited in this section, Elliott speaks of widespread disapprobation of meddling, which is “condemned not only by Hellenistic moralists but by Israelite and Christian authors as well.” In regard to Jewish authors, Elliott mentions Sir 3:23; *T. Iss.* 5:1; *T. Reu.* 3:10 (Elliott, *1 Peter*, 787). Nevertheless, the words used to denote meddling are not given a negative shading in all instances. Plutarch, for example, does acknowledge a potentially positive side of πολυπραγμοσύνη, namely, curiosity for learning (*Mor., Curios.* 520f–521a). Ehrenberg also mentions that Polybius often uses the verbal form of πολυπραγμοσύνη to indicate “any kind of intensified activity” as well as “investigating . . . , reconnoitering, or even instructing” (“Polypragmosyne,” 62 n. 46).

²⁵ In the *Republic*, the dialogue is set between Socrates and Glaucon, who challenges Socrates on the nature of the ideal *polis*.

²⁶ Plato cites this definition as essentially proverbial: “a saying that we have heard from many and have very often repeated ourselves” (*Resp.* 433b, Shorey). Ehrenberg (“Polypragmosyne,” 60)

ἕνα ἕκαστον ἐν δέοι ἐπιτηδεύειν τῶν περὶ τὴν πόλιν, εἰς ὃ αὐτοῦ ἡ φύσις ἐπιτη-
δειοτάτη πεφυκυῖα ἔιν.

each [person] must perform one social service in the state for which his[/her] nature
was best adapted. (*Resp.* 433a, Shorey)²⁷

Plato's argument for the integral connection between justice and nonmed-
dling proceeds as follows. He has previously argued (*Resp.* 427d–432) that three
virtues are foundational to justice in the *polis*: σωφροσύνη (self-control, mod-
eration), ἀνδρεία (courage), and φρονήσις (understanding, wisdom).²⁸ The
remaining quality, which preserves the other three in the pursuit of justice, is “the
principle embodied in child, woman, slave, free, artisan, ruler, and ruled, that
each performed his[/her] one task as one [person] (τὸ αὐτοῦ ἕκαστος εἷς ὢν
ἔπραττε) and was not a versatile busybody (οὐκ ἐπολυπραγμόνει)” (*Resp.* 433d,
Shorey). He concludes that the principle of nonmeddling (that is, each attending
to her or his own task: ἡ τοῦ ἕκαστου . . . τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν δύναμις) rivals the
other three virtues in its contribution to the *polis* and so can be termed justice
(δικαιοσύνη) (*Resp.* 433d–e; also 441e).

Plato then elaborates on the nature of πολυπραγμοσύνη and its relationship
to assigned roles and functions. According to Plato, while minor interchange
(μεταλαμβάνω) of social roles is not particularly destructive to the *polis* (for
example, that of a carpenter and a cobbler), wholesale interchange *between social
strata* can bring about the state's destruction (*Resp.* 434b). In this regard, Plato
speaks of three distinct “classes”: those who deal with commerce or business (χρη-
ματιστικός, e.g., artisans), the military (ἐπικουρικός), and guardians (φύλακος,
i.e., those who rule the state) (*Resp.* 434c).²⁹ The concept of role substitution
(μεταβολήν) between major social strata provides further clarification of Plato's
definition of πολυπραγμοσύνη. Such role substitution promotes “the greatest
injury to a state and would most rightly be designated as the thing which chiefly
works its harm” and so is rightly termed injustice (ἀδικία [*Resp.* 434c, Shorey]).³⁰
In contrast, the proper functioning of the three groups, defined as ἐκάστου
τούτων τὸ αὐτοῦ πράττοντος (“each of these [groups] performing its own task”)
is δικαιοσύνη. Plato briefly comments on meddling as crossing social or class

sums up Plato's position with these words, “when Plato maintains his fundamental claim that justice
and moderation consist in τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν, he expressly contrasts this with πολυπραγμονεῖν,
that is to say, he envisages the true way of life as one opposed to πολυπραγμοσύνη.”

²⁷ As it is here, the concept of φύσις (nature) is frequently connected to the discussion of
meddling. For other examples, see Plato, *Resp.* 374b–c, 434b; Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.31.

²⁸ The term σοφία is also used to describe the third virtue.

²⁹ LSJ, 2005, 640, 1960; see also *Resp.* 374e, 375–76, 456a; and Ehrenberg, “Polypragmosyne,”
60.

³⁰ Interchanging of honor (τιμάς) between social strata is considered a serious breach (*Resp.*
434b; see also *Resp.* 444b).

boundaries later in the *Republic*, when he notes that one detriment of an oligarchy is the propensity for its citizens to meddle (πολυπραγμονέω), that is, to be farmers, those engaged in business (χρηματιζομένους), and soldiers at the same time (*Resp.* 551e–552a).³¹

It is clear thus far that the concept of meddling expressed by any number of Greek terms (including πολυπραγμοσύνη, περίεργος, and their cognates) often receives serious approbation from Greco-Roman writers. In addition, one connotation of the meddling concept is movement outside of one's assigned sphere of activity or proper role.³² This may involve moving outside of one's assigned place in society and, as we shall soon discover, moving outside of gender roles more specifically. The key to social and to political life (that is, to justice in the state), in contrast to such meddling, is for all persons to fulfill their designated tasks without presuming to fulfill functions not rightfully theirs.³³

Meddling: Connotation of Improper Gender Roles

If the connotative range of meddling as a topos includes moving outside of one's assigned sphere of activity, then it might be helpful to explore a couple of Greco-Roman texts that explicate this connotation in terms of gender roles. Xenophon, a historian of the same era as Plato, delineates indoor and outdoor

³¹ The Loeb translator, Paul Shorey, uses the combination of “busybodies” and “jack-of-all-trades” to express πολυπραγμονέω. Although in certain twenty-first-century cultures, being a jack-of-all-trades is an admirable quality, in the ancient context (as well as some contemporary contexts), this characteristic is not only undesirable; it is unachievable. As Plato elsewhere states, “it is impossible for one [person] to do the work of many arts well” (*Resp.*, 374a, Shorey). Ehrenberg (“Polypragmosyne,” 61) states that “[Aristotle] regards large States as fortunate for having many officials each of whom is restricted to one kind of work only—a strange remark in our ears.”

³² In the context of his discussion of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος, Dionysius the Areopagite speaks of the value of a priest staying within the order (τάξις) of his cultic service or ministry (*Ep.* 8.1). The concern for τάξις in religious, social, and political hierarchies is thematic in Greco-Roman ethical discourse. See Elliott, *1 Peter*, 486–87.

³³ Since the relationship between household and state is closely construed in Greco-Roman thought (e.g., Plato above), one could argue that the concept of meddling had political as well as social overtones. For instance, Isocrates sets meddlers in opposition to those who are “good men with reference to the polis . . . and to their own households” (*Antid.* 99). As David Balch notes, the connection between household and state (*polis*) was such that “insubordination in the one led to insubordination in the other” (*Let Wives Be Submissive: The Domestic Code in 1 Peter* [SBLMS 26; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1981], 94). See also Elliott, “1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy: Discussion with Balch,” in *Perspectives on First Peter* (ed. Charles H. Talbert; NABRP Special Studies Series 9; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 63. In a sense, then, commentators whose impulse it is to translate ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος as a “revolutionary” may have hit upon a legitimate nuance, though not an adequate translation of the term (e.g., Moffatt, *Peter*, 158; Beare, *Peter*, 167; Knox, “Pliny and 1 Peter,” 188).

tasks in relation to gender roles: the woman's sphere involves indoor duties, and outdoor tasks belong to the men (*Oec.* 7.29–32). Xenophon grounds this distinction in divine appointment and law (ὁ νόμος [*Oec.* 7.29–30]). He then infers from this that if a man disregards his own work (τῶν ἔργων τῶν ἑαυτοῦ) or performs his wife's work (πράττων τὰ τῆς γυναικὸς ἔργα), he will be punished (*Oec.* 7.31–32). The language Xenophon uses here is quite similar to the grammatical/linguistic construction Plato uses to describe activity that is the opposite of meddling, τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν (“performing the activities which are one's own” [see *Resp.* 433a, 433d, 434c]).³⁴ To perform one's own assigned work and not interfere in the assigned tasks of another—here those of one's spouse—is to be commended; it is the honorable (καλός) thing (Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.30).

The connection between meddling and gender (marriage) roles is even more apparent in Philo (*Spec.* 3.169–77). According to Philo, women are “best suited to the indoor life,” that is, confinement at home (οἰκουρία [*Spec.* 3.169, Colson]).³⁵ Their task is to govern the household (οἰκονομία), while men have been fitted for the work of public life or statesmanship (πολιτεία [*Spec.* 3.170]). After delineating appropriate spheres of influence, Philo ties movement outside of assigned roles to meddling. “A woman (wife) should not meddle in tasks outside of the household” (ἔξω τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκονομίαν πολύπραγμονεῖτω [*Spec.* 171]).³⁶ A wife's meddling, in this instance, is seeking tasks outside of the sphere assigned to her.

To summarize the evidence from Greco-Roman discourse, a distinct aspect of meddling as a concept involves attention to tasks outside of one's own designated sphere of activity. In a few writers (Xenophon and Philo), we hear this particular connotation for meddling applied to women seeking to move outside of the (proper) sphere of their own role in the household.

III. ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος DEFINED: CORROBORATING EVIDENCE FROM 1 PETER

This semantic association of the Greco-Roman topos of meddling seems particularly helpful to the discussion of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in the context of 1 Peter. Assuming, as already argued, that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in 4:15 is meant

³⁴ Specifically, both use the grammatical construction of a verbal form of πράσσω + a genitive showing to whom the activity or task belongs. In addition, the word ἔργον (“work”) often is included or the idea of one's task is implied by inclusion of a substantival neuter article.

³⁵ The term οἰκουρία can refer to “housekeeping and its cares” or “keeping at home” (indoors) (LSJ, 1205).

³⁶ Philo contrasts this with what a woman ought to do, namely, ζητοῦσα μοναλίαν (“seek a life of seclusion” [*Spec.* 171, Colson]).

to evoke the concept of meddling, we might try out the connotation of moving outside of one's proper role as a possible meaning for ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος in 4:15. Does the context of 1 Peter support such a reading?

The Petrine Context: Fitting a Theme

In examination of the broader context of 1 Peter, a prominent exhortation across the whole of the letter is toward honorable and holy conduct (1:15–16, 22; 2:11–12, 15, 20; 3:1–2, 13–14, 16–17; and 4:1–2).³⁷ Woven with this theme is the idea that suffering will often accompany good conduct (2:12, 20; 3:13–14, 16–17; 4:3–4; see also 4:16). Ironically, in fact, what believers know to be right behavior will often be misjudged as evil by nonbelievers (2:12; 3:16; cf. 4:3–4) and so may result in unearned suffering. In the context of the intersection of these themes, the author admonishes believers to be sure that their “maligned” behavior is truly good and not evil. “Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame” (3:16–17 NRSV; see also 2:20; 3:13–14). This is where 4:15 enters the picture thematically. “But none of you ought to suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or as a meddler” (μὴ γάρ τις ὑμῶν πασχέτω ὡς φονεὺς ἢ κλέπτης ἢ κακοποιὸς ἢ ὡς ἀλλοτριεπίσκοπος).

The author of 1 Peter seems bent on preparing his readers for suffering at the hands of unbelievers that might arise from their obedience to God; what he does not want is for them to mistake this for justified suffering that results from wrongdoing. As Elliott notes, “the addressees should lead irreproachable lives . . . and offer no occasion for justifiable accusation on the part of outsiders.”³⁸

The Immediate Context: 1 Peter 4:12–19

Beginning in 4:12, the author of 1 Peter returns to the refrain that believers should expect suffering. He explains that such suffering comes not only as a test

³⁷ The Greek term καλός, often rendered “good” in English, is one of many terms associated with the concept of honor in the first-century world. See LSJ, 870, where the translation equivalents “noble” and “honourable” are provided. The NRSV helpfully renders the dual occurrence of καλός in 2:12 as “honorable/bly.” For the word applied to the fulfillment of proper gender tasks, see Xenophon, *Oec.* 7.30. As Elliott notes regarding Greco-Roman ethics, “[t]o behave honorably was to conduct oneself in accord with one's social station and given roles” (1 Peter, 487; see also 488). For the ancient connection between honor and women remaining in the private sphere, see David A. deSilva, *The Hope of Glory: Honor Discourse and New Testament Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 13–14.

³⁸ Elliott, 1 Peter, 788.

(4:12) but also as a signal of the initiation of God's final judgment (4:17).³⁹ Rather than being caught off guard by such suffering (4:12), believers should rejoice, since current suffering indicates their blessed state and future joy (4:13–14). It is at this juncture in his argument that the author qualifies his discussion of suffering. His audience is to make sure that their suffering results from Christian identification rather than from wrongdoing.

The activities denounced in 4:15 are particular examples of wrongdoing that in the previous context of 1 Peter has been described only in general terms as sinning (ἁμαρτάνω [2:20]) and evildoing (κακοποιέω [3:17]).⁴⁰ The relationship of the four activities in 4:15 (ὡς φονεὺς, ἢ κλέπτης ἢ κακοποιός ἢ ὡς ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος) is pertinent to an understanding of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος. Most commentators have understood the third term κακοποιός ("evildoer"; cf. the cognates in 2:12, 14; 3:17) to be a more general category than the preceding two mentioned, murderer and thief (φονεὺς and κλέπτης).⁴¹ Debated among scholars is the issue of whether this more general term refers to illegal activity, as the first two terms clearly do.⁴² The relevance of this issue for an understanding of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος becomes clear as we recall that the English renderings of it fall into two camps, reflecting either illegal activity (e.g., embezzler) or socially censured behavior (e.g., meddler). It seems more likely, given the general nature of κακοποιέω earlier in 1 Peter, to allow κακοποιός in 4:15 similar latitude.⁴³ If this is the case, then the list alone would not necessarily suggest that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος indicates illegal activity (since the preceding term does not likely refer to illegal activity specifically).⁴⁴ The nature of the list, along with the evidence above,

³⁹ Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 315.

⁴⁰ The list in 4:3, although containing quite specific activities, is not mentioned as provoking Gentile *opinion* that the activities themselves are evil (only that the Gentiles are surprised that Christians no longer participate in them).

⁴¹ E.g., Elliott, *1 Peter*, 785; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 310; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 267; Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 224. In a slightly different vein, Davids (*1 Peter*, 168) understands κακοποιός to sum up the previous two illegal activities.

⁴² For κακοποιός as illegal activity, see Michaels, *1 Peter*, 266, 268; Davids, *1 Peter*, 168; Reicke, *Peter*, 125. Contra Best, *1 Peter*, 164; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 310; Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 325–26; and Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 224.

⁴³ The meaning of κακοποιέω in 2:12 and 3:17 is quite general in scope, referring to the antithesis of good behavior (καλῶν ἔργων and ἀγαθοποιούντας, respectively). In 2:14, the same verb (as a substantival participle, κακοποιῶν) refers to those whose activity is rightly punished by governing authorities and so may be more narrowly understood as illegal activity. Yet the contrast to κακοποιέω in this verse is still (those who do) good behavior (ἀγαθοποιῶν) more generally. So unless we have clear contextual reasons for narrowing κακοποιέω solely to illegal activity, it is better understood in 4:15 as a general term for wrongdoing, as earlier in the letter. So Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 325–26 n. 36.

⁴⁴ Best indicates that "[u]nlike the first three categories it is difficult to take [ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος] as denoting a criminal" (*1 Peter*, 165). Elliott speaks of the second two terms as "likely involving offenses against expected decorum" (*1 Peter*, 788). Contra Achtemeier, who avoids defining

indicates that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος refers not to illegal activity (such as embezzling) but to socially censured meddling, which although not an illegal activity is a weighty social transgression in the first-century world.

Another issue raised by the list is the placement of ὡς immediately prior to the list of four activities and its recurrence directly before ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος. Does the additional ὡς before the final word indicate that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος is distinct in some way from the first three activities? Although numbers of commentators argue for some kind of distinction,⁴⁵ Achtemeier helpfully points to both text-critical and linguistic indicators to argue that the additional ὡς does not likely signal a significant distinction of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος from the previous three terms.⁴⁶ Instead, it may be that the presence of ὡς before ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος can be explained at least in part by reference to 4:16. Since in the subsequent verse the author is going to provide a potent contrast to suffering as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler, the repetition of ὡς at the end of the list helps to heighten the impending contrast. It is suffering “as a Christian” (ὡς Χριστιανός) that incurs no shame for the believer. Because both the subject and imperatival verb of this phrase are implied from 4:15, the repetition of ὡς immediately prior to ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος not only strengthens the contrast but also reiterates the relationship between the two contrasting ideas.

μὴ γάρ τις ὑμῶν πασχέτω	ὡς φονεὺς
	ἢ κλέπτης
	ἢ κακοποιὸς
	ἢ ὡς ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος
εἰ δὲ . . . [τις πάσχει] . . .	ὡς Χριστιανός

The repetition of ὡς at the end of 4:15 highlights that it is the *manner* of suffering that distinguishes shameful suffering from suffering that actually brings glory to God: not “as a murderer a thief, a criminal, or as a meddler, but . . . as a Christian.”

κακοποιός as solely illegal activity (“this word could . . . include reference to legally punishable acts, but it need not be restricted to such acts, and so is broader than the first two words [of the list]” [p. 310]) but in the end argues in rather circular fashion that interference in social matters as the meaning of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος is less defensible, since this meaning “would not be, like the others [in the list], a legal offense; as such it would abruptly change the direction of the list of acts to be avoided” (1 Peter, 310).

⁴⁵ With ὡς introducing a “fresh category” (Kelly, *Commentary on Peter*, 189); distinguishing ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος as noncriminal activity (Michaels, 1 Peter, 268; see also Selwyn, *First Peter*, 225) or as a “less serious” activity (Schreiner, 1 Peter, 225); or even indicating that the final term “sum[s] up all possible offences in a comprehensive *et cetera*” (Biggs, *St. Peter*, 179).

⁴⁶ Achtemeier argues his point by reference to “the fact that some early scribes did not understand ὡς to have such a [distinguishing] function [since the particle shows up in some manuscripts before the second and/or third nouns as well] and the fact that some such device is often used in the NT to indicate the end of a list” (1 Peter, 310).

In other words, while its inclusion is not absolutely necessary, there is rhetorical justification for the second ὥς of 4:15.

Finally, if we understand ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος to refer to meddling, it can easily be argued that the list of 4:15 retains its coherence. In contrast to assertions by some that ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος cannot refer to meddling since it does not cohere with the serious nature of the preceding three terms of the list,⁴⁷ we have noted the serious nature of meddling in the ancient context. To interfere outside of one's assigned sphere of activity is no small transgression. Instead, it merits severe censure because it disrupts the ordained order of the sociopolitical realm.

So then, understood in the larger context of 1 Peter, the list of activities in 4:15 provides specific cases of wrongdoing to be avoided, so that any suffering by Christians arises not from wrong behavior but from pagan misrepresentation of good behavior based in Christian identity. What is to be eschewed by the Petrine audience is suffering for actual wrongdoing. The examples given in 4:15 include ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος, which likely refers to interference outside of one's assigned roles.

This connotation aptly fits the admonitions of the household code given earlier in 1 Peter. In fact, the use of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος at this point in the letter may be a nod back to the general thrust of the exhortations of 2:11–3:12.⁴⁸ Conversely, the import of the Petrine household code provides support for understanding ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος as moving outside one's assigned sphere of activity.

The Petrine Context: The Relevance of the Petrine Household Code

The Petrine *Haustafel* (2:11–3:12) is an important part of the author's emphasis on Christians exhibiting good behavior in a hostile, pagan environment. The introduction to the household code (2:11–12) contains the thematic admonition to “conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles” in the same breath as the proviso “though they malign you as evildoers” (2:12 NRSV). Honorable conduct in relation to Gentiles is then elaborated: ὑποτάγητε πάσῃ ἀνθρωπίνῃ κτίσει (“submit to every human creature” [2:13]). After applying this to submission to king and governors (2:13–17), the author in the rest of the code describes the appropriate responses for particular members of the household: slaves (2:18–25),

⁴⁷ E.g., BDAG, 47. This is often the (at least partial) legitimation provided for rendering ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος as “embezzler” rather than “meddler.”

⁴⁸ I understand the household code to include 2:11–3:12, though I recognize that, given its more general introduction (2:11–12) and conclusion (3:8–12), one could refer to 2:13–3:7 as the household code proper. So also Balch, *Wives*, 125; Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 153; Best, *1 Peter*, 110; and Beare, *Peter*, 133; cf. Achtemeier for a defense of 2:11(13)–3:7 as the delimitation of the code (*1 Peter*, 169).

wives (3:1–6), and husbands (3:7). The code concludes by returning to a more general audience and exhorting believers to peace and right behavior (3:8–12).

Common to these various segments of the domestic code is the value of remaining within one's prescribed role in the household (and hence in society or the *polis*) as much as possible given one's prior and primary Christian convictions.⁴⁹ Slaves are to submit to masters, whether kind or harsh (2:18), and wives are to submit even to unbelieving husbands (3:1).⁵⁰ The expectation in the household code of 1 Peter is for believers to enact allegiance to Christ while remaining in their assigned (societal) sphere of activity. The goal of such behavior is to minimize, for the sake of the gospel, the social disruption caused by conversion to Christianity. As Balch argues in his detailed work on the Petrine domestic code, "the author was especially concerned about divided households: many masters and husbands were still pagans, while some slaves and wives had converted to Christianity. In these divided houses, the harmony demanded by the Hellenistic moralists had been disturbed, which was judged to be a negative reflection on the new religion."⁵¹ According to Balch, the function of the household code is apologetic; it reassures those in authority that those who have converted "are obedient slaves and wives, just as the culture expected them to be."⁵²

Such an expectation, especially the call to wives in 3:1–6, has affinities with Philo's admonition to wives to avoid meddling in tasks outside of their household. Meddling (πολύπραγμονέω) undermines cultural expectations and, for Philo, disrupts the natural order (ἐφαρμόζω, what is suitable [*Spec.* 3.169]). So a connection exists for Philo between meddling and moving outside social boundaries (particularly, boundaries of the household). The same may be the case for the author of 1 Peter, if 4:15 provides the obverse to the exhortation to wives in 3:1–6.

Corroborating evidence in this regard is the use of ἡσυχία (with adjectival cognate ἡσύχιος) as an ideal for Christian wives in nonbelieving households (3:4) and its connection to proper submission within the household (3:5). "Let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet (ἡσύχιος) spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. *It was in this way* long ago that the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves by accepting

⁴⁹ See Balch's extensive work on the domestic code of 1 Peter (*Wives*).

⁵⁰ Though not to the extent of leaving their new-found faith; see Jeannine K. Brown, "Silent Wives, Verbal Believers: Ethical and Hermeneutical Considerations in 1 Peter 3:1–6 and Its Context," *Word and World* 24 (Fall 2004): 400. The call to husbands moves beyond societal expectations by commanding them to assign honor to their wives. Nevertheless, the hierarchical framework of the household is by no means eliminated in the Petrine *Haustafel*. Instead, the social order is essentially maintained (*ibid.*, 399, 401–2).

⁵¹ Balch, *Wives*, 109. Balch points out the emphasis on reestablishing (household) harmony in the conclusion to the household code—3:8–12.

⁵² *Ibid.*

the authority of [ὑποτάσσω, submitting to] their husbands” (3:4–5 NRSV [italics mine]). If engaging one’s proper role in the societal hierarchy is associated with ἡσυχία (as is implied in the comparative relationship between 1 Pet 3:4 and 3:5), then the significant conceptual connection between ἡσυχία and meddling in Greco-Roman literature provides additional support for the link between 1 Pet 3:1–6 and 4:15.

The term ἡσυχία is frequently used in direct contrast to the concept of meddling in Greek literature (e.g., πολυπραγμοσύνη).⁵³ According to Ehrenberg, ἡσυχία denotes “harmonious quiet,” that peaceful demeanor opposed to public interference and striving.⁵⁴ Though the contrast between ἡσυχία and public interference surfaces time and again in Greco-Roman commentary on meddling, a couple of texts illustrating this connection will suffice. In Aristophanes’ play *The Plutus*, a just man accuses a sycophant of interference (τὸ πολυπραγμονεῖν [Plut. 913]) and calls him instead to “lead a quiet life” (ἡσυχίαν ἔχων [Plut. 921]). Further description of ἡσυχία is given by Isocrates, who in defending his students characterizes them using the two terms ἀπράγμων (the opposite of one who practices πολυπραγμοσύνη) and ἡσυχία. He defines the latter as “giving their minds to their own affairs and confining their intercourse to each other, and living, furthermore, day by day in the greatest simplicity and decorum” (*Antid.* 227–28, Norlin).⁵⁵

New Testament usage of the term outside of 1 Peter demonstrates the positive connection between ἡσυχία (or its cognate) and role acceptance in addition to the antonymous connection between ἡσυχία and meddling. In 1 Timothy 2, the concept of ἡσυχία is invoked three times (ἡσύχιος in 2:2 and ἡσυχία in 2:11 and 12). In 2:1–2, the author commends prayer for those in positions of authority (ὑπεροχή), including kings, for the purpose of his readers leading a tranquil and quiet (ἡσύχιος) life. Here ἡσυχία is linked to proper alignment with governing authorities (by praying and thanking God for them).⁵⁶ In 1 Tim 2:11–12, ἡσυχία is explicitly tied to proper submission. Women are to learn in quietness (ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ), that is, in full submission (ἐν πάσῃ ὑποταγῇ).⁵⁷ The call to ἡσυχία is

⁵³ Ibid., 112 n. 41.

⁵⁴ Ehrenberg draws in part on a definition by Pindar (“Polypragmosyne,” 47, 56). In discussion of Greco-Roman usage, BDAG provides one definition of ἡσυχία as “of a quiet scholar’s life w. implied contrast of being engaged in public affairs” (p. 440).

⁵⁵ For numerous other examples, see Ehrenberg, “Polypragmosyne,” 47, 54, 56, 58, 59. Ehrenberg (p. 57) refers to Isocrates’ statement, “the least meddlesome people [ἀπραγμονέστατοι] in the city” are those who “keep πλείστην [much] ἡσυχίαν” (*Areop.* 15, 227).

⁵⁶ This is reminiscent of the first segment of the Petrine household code, which speaks of proper submission to governing authorities (1 Pet 2:13–14).

⁵⁷ The two parallel prepositional phrases (both beginning with ἐν) seem to be mutually defining to some degree. So William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (WBC 46; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 117.

heralded again in the end of 2:12, where it is contrasted with (improper) exercise of authority over a man, that is, exercising an improper social role (αὐθεντεῖν ἄνδρός, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ).⁵⁸ Earlier we noted the opposition of meddling and ἡσυχία in 2 Thess 3:11–12, where idle, meddling (περιεργαζομένους) persons are exhorted instead to “work quietly” (μετὰ ἡσυχίας ἐργαζόμενοι). This strikes a familiar chord with 1 Thess 4:11, where the readers are urged to live quietly (verbal cognate, ἡσυχάζω) and to perform their own tasks (πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια) and to work (ἐργάζεσθαι) with their own hands.⁵⁹ Thus, the evidence tying ἡσυχία to proper role fulfillment in contrast to meddling provides additional support for hearing a connection between *ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος* in 1 Pet 4:15 and the domestic code of 2:11–3:12, especially the exhortation addressed to wives (with ἡσυχία in 3:4).

Nevertheless, only a few commentators have noted the connection (entire or partial) between the domestic code and *ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος* in 4:15. Balch is one who affirms a connection between the Petrine household code (2:11–3:12) and the prohibition against meddling (4:15). For Balch, however, this connection stems from the criticism garnered from outsiders:

Given the apologetic function of the conduct described in the household code, that is, that such behavior is a response to outsiders' criticisms, I suggest that the “evil speaking” and “minding others' affairs” forbidden to Christians (2:1 and 4:15) were being practiced also by pagans toward Christians. Certain busybodies spoke against . . . the Christians' *household* relationships and their impiety.⁶⁰

According to Balch, the conduct that the Petrine author disavows for his audience in relation to unbelievers is behavior being practiced by pagan neighbors toward believers.

While Balch's reconstruction of antagonism between believers and their detractors may very well be accurate, a more direct link also seems likely between the domestic code and the prohibition of meddling in 4:15.⁶¹ The prohibition of movement outside one's assigned sphere of activity in 4:15 (*ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος*) finds its antidote in the commended submission within the household in 2:11–3:12. Balch does seem to approach affirming this connection when he states, “Christians are not to exacerbate the situation [of newly converted wives and

⁵⁸ The *inclusio* that frames 2:11–12 (with 2:11 beginning γυνὴ ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ and 2:12 ending ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ) strengthens the conclusion that these verses are focused on the concept of proper role fulfillment.

⁵⁹ The latter has verbal similarities to Plato and Xenophon when they describe proper role fulfillment in contrast to meddling. See discussion above, p. 558. Xenophon: πράττων τὰ τῆς γυναικὸς ἔργα (*Oec.* 7.31); Plato: τὸ τὰ αὐτοῦ πράττειν (*Resp.* 4.433a, 433d, 434c).

⁶⁰ Balch, *Wives*, 94 (author's emphasis).

⁶¹ And may best explain the presence of *ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος* in 4:15.

slaves] by meddling in others' domestic affairs (4:15). The readers are warned that governors punish insubordinate persons but are reassured that the authorities praise those who accept their role in the socio-political system (2:14).⁶² This is the only point where Balch hints that the meddling referred to in 4:15 might be linked to what he terms insubordination within the sociopolitical system, with the (contrasting) proper response being to accept one's role in that system. I believe this link is exactly right. Even as he is hinting at this relationship, however, Balch provides a more standard definition of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος as "meddling in others' domestic affairs" rather than moving outside of one's assigned role (a more suitable and specific definition if insubordination is in mind).⁶³

Elliott ties the idea of meddling in 4:15 with inappropriate transgression of social boundaries, although he does not connect ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος explicitly to the household code of 2:11–3:12.⁶⁴ The "proscription of meddling may well have been intended to warn the addressees to respect the social boundaries distinguishing them from outsiders, to keep their own house in order and beyond reproach, and to focus on attracting others rather than on criticizing them or meddling in their affairs."⁶⁵ Elliott's emphasis in this regard, however, is on the Christian household (i.e., church) rather than familial households. As he indicates in *A Home for the Homeless*, ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος "describes a type of person who acts contrary to the norm, and transgresses the boundaries, of *the household of God*."⁶⁶

If, as Elliott argues, the meaning of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in 1 Pet 4:15 points to the transgressing of social boundaries, the contextual (as well as the lexical/conceptual) evidence suggests that social transgression occurs when individuals move outside their assigned role or sphere of activity. This fits well with the thrust of the household code earlier in 1 Peter, especially the admonition to wives in 3:1–

⁶² Balch, *Wives*, 109.

⁶³ Balch exhibits a more generic understanding of ἄλλοτριεπίσκοπος in his implicit agreement with Zeller that it refers to Petrine missionaries who are meddling in pagan affairs (*Wives*, 93).

⁶⁴ The only connection made by Elliott between the two is in relation to participation prior to conversion in industrial guilds, which "were sources of social and political ferment in this period. Previous membership in such guilds could have been a . . . factor in the tensions which existed between the Christians and their neighbors, particularly their employers (see the charges leveled against them in 4:15 and the law-abiding admonition of 2:13–17)" (Elliott, *Home*, 70).

⁶⁵ Elliott, *1 Peter*, 788.

⁶⁶ Elliott, *Home*, 141 (emphasis mine). See also his discussion of the purpose of the household code: John H. Elliott, "1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy," in *Perspectives on First Peter*, 66, where he states "the household code (2:13–3:12; 5:1–5) provides a schema for delineating behavior, norms, and values typical of persons belonging to the household of God." For Balch's critique of Elliott's emphasis on the household of God, see David L. Balch, "Hellenization/Acculturation in 1 Peter," in *Perspectives on First Peter*, 98–99.

6 to submit to unbelieving husbands and to be characterized by *ἡσυχία*. It also resonates with attempts by various scholars to argue that *ἀλλοτρίεπίσκοπος* has political ramifications, since good citizenship in the sphere of the household helps to ensure the same in the *polis*.⁶⁷ Viewed from an ancient perspective, transgression of social boundaries by moving beyond acceptable sociocultural roles sows seeds of political unrest, since such behavior encourages insubordination to the *polis*.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *ἀλλοτρίεπίσκοπος* in 1 Pet 4:15 fits the parameters of the Greco-Roman topos of meddling and likely refers to movement outside of culturally appropriate social boundaries. This type of interference in the social order has political ramifications and as such would be understood as involving insubordination to the *polis*. The admonition in 4:15 to avoid this insubordinate behavior fits the Petrine concern for ensuring that Christian behavior reproached by pagan neighbors is truly good and not evil (cf. 2:11–12; 4:15–16). In fact, the prohibition against behaving as an *ἀλλοτρίεπίσκοπος* provides a thematic parallel to the submissive behavior commended earlier in the domestic code (2:11–3:12).

This proposed reading contributes to the ongoing discussion of the purposes of 1 Peter, with the focus on accommodation or distinctiveness at issue. Balch has argued that the purpose of the Petrine household code is acculturation in order to minimize local persecution currently being experienced by the Christian community. Elliott has countered that accommodation does not do justice to the overarching goal of the letter, which focuses on Christian distinctiveness in society. For Elliott, the letter is in part “advocating means for preserving the distinctive identity, internal cohesion, and continued commitment of the addressees.”⁶⁸ Balch has answered Elliott’s critique by pointing out that his own work has focused specifically on the household code, which in his assessment involves acculturation. Nevertheless, for Balch, the whole of 1 Peter “is written in the context of an active Christian mission” (i.e., distinctiveness is a factor in the letter as well).⁶⁹ Given the contributions of both Elliott and Balch, it would seem wise to maintain this tension in any construal of the purposes of 1 Peter.⁷⁰ As

⁶⁷ See n. 33 above. Interesting in this regard is the direct contrast between *φιλοπράγμων* and *φιλόπολις* in Lycurgus (*Leocr.* 3), with the implication that meddling is antithetical to loyalty to the *polis*; as cited in Ehrenberg, “Polypragmosyne,” 58. See also in this regard Cicero’s call to foreigners “to attend strictly to [one’s] own concerns, not to pry into other people’s business, and under no condition to meddle (*curiosum*) in the politics of a country not [one’s] own” (*Off.* 1.125).

⁶⁸ Elliott, “1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy,” 69.

⁶⁹ Balch, “Acculturation in 1 Peter,” 82 n. 13.

⁷⁰ As both Elliott and Balch seem to do, despite their decided differences.

Miroslav Volf notes, “There is a strange tension in 1 Peter between the stress on difference and attempts at acculturation.”⁷¹

My work suggests that the tension between acculturation and distinctiveness in 1 Peter arises not only through the prominence of the Petrine household code in 1 Peter 2–3, which itself points toward distinctiveness as well as accommodation.⁷² The author reiterates accommodation to existing social structures in 4:15–16, while also providing a counterbalancing emphasis on Christian distinctiveness. “Let none of you suffer . . . as one who moves outside of your assigned role, but if any of you suffers as a ‘Christian’ . . . you ought to glorify God because of this name that you bear.”⁷³ The Petrine community is to ensure that any suffering they experience arises from their identity with and allegiance to Christ rather than from a lack of conformity to societal designations and expectations. In this way, a distinctive Christian identity is the primary lens through which to understand and evaluate suffering and persecution.

In the very movement between accommodation when possible and distinctiveness when required, the reader of 1 Peter is guided toward the higher purposes of God’s honor and Christian mission (see 2:11–12; 3:1–2, 15–16; 4:15–16). By fulfilling the exhortations of the household code and refraining from acting as an ἄλλοτρίεπίσκοπος, these higher purposes are served.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Miroslav Volf, “Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation between Church and Culture in 1 Peter,” *Ex Auditu*, online at <http://www.northpark.edu/sem/exauditu/papers/volf.html> (accessed October 18, 2005).

⁷² It is precisely at the moment accommodation to societal roles is emphasized that we hear the surprising and rather implicit call to remain true to Christian allegiance and mission (3:1). See Brown, “Silent Wives, Verbal Believers,” 399–400. For a discussion of the importance of discerning implications in the interpretive process, see Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming).

⁷³ My own periphrastic rendering of 4:15–16.

⁷⁴ See the fuller discussion of purposes such as Christian mission in relation to the household code in Brown, “Silent Wives, Verbal Believers,” 402–3.