

Contributions to Phenomenology 117

Anthony J. Steinbock *Editor*

Phenomenology and Perspectives on the Heart

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Anthony J. Steinbock
Editor

Phenomenology and Perspectives on the Heart

 Springer

Editor

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To my brother, Ben
In memory of my brother, Bernie

Introduction to *Phenomenology and Perspectives on the Heart*

The matter of the “heart” is attaining a notable prominence in contemporary philosophical discussions for motives the reader will discern below. But it is only seemingly a new topic. The heart is only *seemingly* new because there are long and varied traditions dealing with the heart, traditions that reach back thousands of years in a variety of Eastern and Western cultures; they firmly recognize the importance of the heart as an emotional center and cognitive source. In the Western philosophical tradition, the heart has come to the fore in the retrieval of the emotional center of our lives, the significance it has in interpersonal and interspecies frameworks, and its evidential cognitive dimension, a dimension that has been excluded in the dualism of rationality and sensibility.¹ In this dualism, evidence and knowledge had been restrictively assigned to rationality, while the heart (with the emotions, as well as the entire affective life) had been relegated to sensibility, where the latter achieves its meaning-justification only by being tethered to a rational custodian.

Part of the effort of retrieval consists in putting our contemporary concerns in dialogue with the past appreciation and negotiation of the heart in our lives; it involves examining the makeup of the heart, while challenging long-accepted presuppositions, and investigating more critically certain key emotions of the heart.

Such a retrieval can be discerned in the chapters making up this volume. The first part, “In Dialogue with the Heart,” is composed of an examination of the heart by Jeffery Bloechl’s Pauline personalist anthropology (Chap. 1). Bloechl critically discerns the meaning of heart/*kardia* in Paul of Tarsus as well as its complex place among other key concepts in Paul’s anthropology. Chapter 2, by Christina M. Gschwandtner, thoroughly explores early Christian desert ascetics in the context of their practices pertaining to purifying the heart. By relating the process of heart-attentiveness to self-understanding in the pursuit of holiness, she suggests the phenomenological import of such practices. Antonio Calcagno takes up the treatment of the constitutive roles of the heart and heartlessness where personhood is

¹A very brief and initial overview of this is presented in the introduction to Anthony J. Steinbock, *Knowing by Heart: Loving as Participation and Critique* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021).

concerned and, in a pioneering interpretation, develops it in the phenomenological thought of Edith Stein and Gerda Walther (Chap. 3).

Part II of this volume, "Orientations and Dimensions of the Heart," begins with Edward S. Casey's challenge to prejudices present in most theories of emotions in the Modern era, namely, that they are placed "inside" the subject (Chap. 4). His original approach suggests how emotions come to us from the outside of ourselves, circulating in the interstices of experience. Further examining the structure of the heart in Chap. 5, Anthony J. Steinbock distinguishes between feelings as dynamic relational movements, and feeling-states as "states" and conditions, showing the way in which they are related through auto-affection. In Chap. 6, Ignacio Quepons clarifies the fundamental dimension of vulnerability in affective experience. Through nuanced analyses, Quepons interprets the place of vulnerability in the constitution of human existence and the sources of normativity. Concluding this part (Chap. 7), Natalie Depraz deploys what she calls a "cardio-phenomenology," innovatively exploring the relation between the body and the emotions at the intersection of the heart. She does this by focusing on the practice of praying (e.g., the "heart prayer"), with a phenomenological sensitivity to first- and second-person investigations, with the possibility of integrating third-person ones.

Part III, "Emotions of the Heart," highlights key emotions, like love and joy in a phenomenology of the heart, signifying the heart's cognitive and critical roles. Ellie Anderson leads the part in Chap. 8 with her subtle examination of affective consciousness in various figures within the phenomenological tradition and by evaluating the revelatory character of loving: she shows how we not only receive others in loving, but how loving and being loved reveal us to ourselves. Developing the theme of personal love, Sara Heinämaa creatively elaborates upon Edmund Husserl's late ethical reflections. In so doing, she distinguishes a range of values of loving in order to explicate the emotive and axiological features of intersubjectivity and a human community of love (Chap. 9). Appealing to similar resources, Rosemary R.P. Lerner examines the role of instincts in Husserlian phenomenology. Lerner investigates in Chap. 10 the ways in which even theoretical rational activity is related to the emotions and the lived body. Chapter 11 closes the volume with Mariano Crespo's contribution on emotional intentionality. Using the experience of joy as his guiding thread of phenomenological interpretation, Crespo highlights the cognitive as well as the ethical and intersubjective character of such an emotional experience.

This volume, *Phenomenology and Perspectives on the Heart*, is a collection of papers inspired by a conference sponsored by the Phenomenology Research Center and the Department of Philosophy at Stony Brook University. Held in October of 2020, it was relegated to an online format, like so many other planned in-person events during this time. The unanticipated silver lining was that well over 200 people from 33 countries were able to register and attend this 3-day event.

I would especially like to thank Stephanie Struble who assisted me in converting this conference from an in-person gathering to a successful online format. Her assistance was invaluable in negotiating time zones, communicating with presenters, and in coordinating the moderators for each presentation from the pool of our graduate students at Stony Brook.

Regarding the publication of this volume, I am grateful to Springer Publishers, and especially to Christopher Coughlin, Senior Editor, for his immediate and unbridled encouragement of this project. It is a pleasure working with him. I would also like to thank the series editors, Nicolas de Warren and Ted Toadvine, for their interest and support in publishing this collection. I am grateful to Stephanie Struble for her editorial assistance with the first draft of articles that compose this volume. I am likewise grateful for Caleb Faul's editorial assistance, and for assiduously assembling the bibliography for each individual article presented here.

Stony Brook, NY, USA

Anthony J. Steinbock

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Part I
In Dialogue with the Heart

Chapter 1

Kardia in the Pauline Anthropology



Jeffrey Bloechl

1 Introduction

The notion of “heart” enters the Christian tradition as an inheritance of its Jewish root. When Jesus enjoins his listeners to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk 12:30), he repeats what has already been written in *Deuteronomy* 6:5. We find an attempt to define the place of this notion in a complex understanding of human being in the letters of Paul of Tarsus, himself at once Jewish and a follower of Jesus. For Paul, we are flesh, mind, spirit, and heart, with these various aspects both qualifying and enriching one another without final reduction to any single one of them. Paul thus is a personalist—*avant la letter*, if one insists. This cannot be said of a great deal of modern thought, and of the modern ethos that it informs. In order to understand the Pauline anthropology, it is necessary to rid ourselves of certain modern prejudices, not least of which thinks in terms of subjectivity. A person is not merely a subject standing over against objects. There are other difficulties. Paul is not a theorist or even a teacher, but a preacher. His discourse is adapted to the needs of each community, though this does not mean that it is without a reasonably stable core. Paul’s thinking is neither fully Greek nor fully Hebraic, though as we will see the latter is, for present purposes, decisive. As for what Paul precisely means by “heart,” this is elusive. One must approach this matter by way of distinguishing it from what it is not. We have already anticipated a central claim: it is by “heart” that one is open to God. This enables us to risk a general proposition: Paul’s religious personalism contains a theory of being in the world, among things, and with other persons.

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2 Person and Heart

In contemporary philosophy, interest in the notion of “heart” generally goes together with an understanding of human being as person rather than as subject. Whether or not the philosophy that would think of us as subjects is keyed by an epistemological concern, as some readings of Kant and Husserl might suggest, it lends itself to the thought that we are first of all, most fundamentally, one thing or capacity on which the others rest (will, cognition, drive, etc.). Is the effort sustainable? Let us only note that the legacy of Cartesian philosophy, in which this approach is first sketched, is impressively uncertain. On one hand, the effort to ground the subjectivity of the subject, whether in itself, God, or others, appears unresolved nearly three centuries after Descartes’ *Meditations*. On the other, those who refuse the effort from the beginning—Nietzsche, Freud, and their schools, for whom we are most fundamentally an unresolvable conflict—are still kept at the margin of a great deal of philosophical research. Much to their liking.

All of this time, there has also been the possibility of a richer and less hierarchical conception of human being in the concept of “person.” Without questioning the reality and importance of mind or will or desire, one might instead consider them to be aspects or facets of a being who is irreducible to any one of them, and then seek the riddle of our existence in their relation. *All of this time*, because the word itself and eventually the sense that we have just given to it have been with us since Antiquity. The Greek antecedent, *prosopon*, originally characterized a role, or rather the surface, face, through which it was expressed in drama. According to Maurice Nédoncelle, this word, which was eventually translated into Latin as *persona*, did not signify human being in the ontological sense until called upon to augment the legal definition that was for a time invested in “body.”¹ It is of course difficult to say of those with full rights that only they are “body” when it is all too evident that so, too, are those without rights. In response to this difficulty, the word *persona* was reserved for those with full rights, which is to say with freedom, creativity and a range of expressivity. It is not difficult to see already in this new term an interpretation of the human face as exhibiting any number of facets emanating, as it were, from within. It was for the biblical traditions, with their conception of a personal God, to go further. In *Genesis* 1:26, God says, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” And after he does so, he addresses them and permits himself to be addressed as a person.

So then, what of heart? The notion is on rare occasion present in Greek literature before the Jewish and Christian faiths come into contact with it. In the *Iliad*, Zeus laughs deep in his heart (*kardia*), which appears indistinctly as the seat of feeling and thought (XXI 441). Yet such instances are quite rare, certainly in comparison with the large number of close approximations of the term that are found in the Hebrew scriptures. In these writings, the theme of heart is underdeveloped not

¹M. Nédoncelle, “Prosopon et persona dans l’antiquité classique. Essai de bilan linguistique,” in *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 22, 3–4 (1948): 277–299.

because it simply comes up too little, but instead because little attempt is made to gather numerous subtle differences under a single definition. Neither of these things can be said of the writings ascribed to Paul of Tarsus, where the two traditions do flow together. The Pauline letters refer to “heart” several dozen times, and moreover with a usage that is sufficiently consistent as to offer us at least the outline of a clear definition. In order to see this, it will also be necessary to recognize, however briefly, that the Pauline anthropology is in some important respects a personalism, and indeed one in which the human is understood in and through a specific experience of the divine.

3 Notes on Reading the Pauline Letters

No serious reading of the relevant texts can do without mention of some hermeneutical complications. To begin with, there is the fact that scholars are not in perfect agreement about which texts traditionally ascribed to the author Paul were in fact written by him. Fortunately, however, there is something close to consensus that a common theological vision is shared, to varying substantial degree, by the letters included in the canonical bible. One thus speaks of the Pauline letters and Pauline theology, even if one hesitates to affirm that Paul is the author of a second letter to the Thessalonians, or letters to the Colossians and Ephesians. As for the epistolary nature of the texts, it is not enough to remind ourselves that what is said is directed to a range of communities with different problems and a different relationship with the author (e.g., the people of Thessalonika needed encouragement to remain watchful for the second coming of Jesus; in Corinth the problem lay more straightforwardly with their morality). This is true enough, but does not reach the fact that in all cases, the letters are written specifically to preach and exhort. Yet this is where the Pauline theology, which necessarily contains an anthropology, is worked out—which is to say in a discourse that is kerygmatic and hortatory rather than analytic or demonstrative: the people of Thessalonika, Corinth, Galatia and so forth are called to recognize a particular content and urged to live up to its implications. As one might expect, a preacher is not necessarily as concerned with conceptual rigor and strict consistency, as with hitting the mark of a specific pastoral concern. This aspect of the Pauline discourse simply has to be recognized and sifted in order to get to some theological and anthropological bedrock. Meanwhile, though, there is also the matter of development to consider. After all, even if we restrict ourselves to the letters that scholars all agree were written by Paul himself, authorship is extended over a period of fifteen to eighteen years (roughly AD 51–68), during which time Paul is evidently forced to reconsider, deepen and reformulate various aspects of his preaching and exhortation. In short, even as he addresses himself to a series of communities which, again, have different problems and different relations with Paul himself, his thinking is maturing. Together, these features of the Pauline corpus can fairly seem to weigh against assuming that the same term necessarily means the

same thing from text to text and even against assuming that the author himself has complete control over its meaning.

There is also the considerably more difficult, and deeper matter of the relation between Greek and Hebraic elements in Pauline thought. Greek thought is oriented to distinctions taken to express *parts*. A Greek conception of human nature thus proceeds partitionally, by distinguishing and then relating body and soul, and then within soul its appetitive, spirited and rational parts (respectively, *epithumetikon*, *thumetikon*, and *logistikon*). In comparison, Hebraic thought is oriented to a whole that exhibits different dimensions or *aspects* each of which permeates the entire person, and which are therefore articulated with somewhat less precision than are the Greek “parts.” This puts us on notice in two more ways. First, as one sorts through the possible Hebraic and Greek antecedents of a particular key Pauline concept, it sometimes turns out that the Hebraic and Greek instances do not line up, as seems to be the case for the Greek sense of *soma*, or lived body, which seems without strict correlate in Hebraic thought, and which appears in many of the Pauline letters.² Of course, this much amounts only to confirming that the two sources truly are different. Second, however, the Pauline conception is, as we will see, rarely if ever dualistic about key pairs of concepts, as if there were boundaries of mutual exclusion between them (and the anthropology does involve a number of them). It is more often a matter of relations among aspects that flow in and through one another. This suggests the predominance of one strongly Hebraic element in Pauline thought, though it does not at all rule out the presence of others that are more clearly Greek, at least in the terms proposed a moment ago.

4 Key Terms in the Pauline Anthropology

There can be no question that the theme of “heart” is of great importance for Pauline thought. The letters make use of the word over fifty times, not counting variants like “hardness of heart” (*sklérokardia*), and so forth. It is not known whether Paul came into contact with the oral accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus that later made their way into the written gospels,³ but if he did then he may have known of passages like *Matthew* 5:8, in which Jesus says “blessed are the pure in heart [*katharoi*

²“Strict separation between body and soul is [in Hebraic thought] unknown. Man does not have a body and a soul, he is both of them at once.” W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, trans. J. Baker (London: SCM, 1967), p. 124.

³Dunn outlines what I take to be a moderate position, when he claims that “The largest consensus [among biblical scholars] still maintains that Paul knew or cared little about the ministry of Jesus apart from his death and resurrection, though the theological corollaries of that conclusion are less often pursued.” J.D.G. Dunn, “Jesus Tradition in Paul” in *Studying the Historical Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 155. This would seem to leave aside the passage in 1 Timothy that warning that “If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with *the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ* and the teaching which accords with godliness, ⁴ he is puffed up with conceit,” (1 Tim 6:3–4), but for the fact that authorship of the letter is disputed.

kardia], for they will see God” (I will come back to this passage briefly). He certainly did have a deep understanding of the Hebrew scriptures, in which there are many dozens of direct occurrences of the corresponding Hebrew word, *lêb*, and its close cognates.⁴ Moreover, one finds among them, in the *Psalms*, an interesting cluster of references that are plainly congruent with *Matthew* 5:8. God saves, bestows living kindness on, and grants refuge and glory to the “upright in heart” (Ps 7:10, 36:10, 64:10). One does not need a primer in Pauline thought to know that these passages bring us to the question of the difference between the Jewish experience of heart in accord with the law and the early Christian experience of heart in accord with the example of the self-emptying Christ.

Given these stakes, it is disappointing to find that a rich and nuanced understanding of heart in the Pauline anthropology proves elusive. There are nonetheless important clues. The anthropology itself is developed around six concepts, which appear organized in three pairs, and in this context accords a recognizable place for “heart.” Let me first review simple definitions of the six terms, in their respective pairings:⁵

- 1.a. *Soma* is the Pauline word for *body*, understood in what the phenomenologists remind us is the ordinary sense, that is to say lived body and not at all—never in any of passage in any of the letters—corpse.
- 1.b. *Sarx* is *flesh*, in the sense of primary attachment to the world and to everything in it; flesh has multiple valences ranging from weakness in the sense of perishable (as in 1 Cor 15:50) to a dimension that is hostile to God and to God’s law (Rom 8:7).

The nature of the relationship between *soma* and *sarx* shows up in the fact that whereas body is a dimension of our being *in* the world, flesh is the form of our belonging *to* the world.

- 2.a. *Nous* can be translated as *mind*, if by this we mean only the thinking by which the person is integrated in his or her diverse aspects sufficiently for interaction in the world and with others.
- 2.b. *Kardia*, *heart*, represents a person’s innermost dimension, the seat of the emotions and, it would seem, also the seat of thought and will (1 Cor 7:37 observes that the one who is “firmly established in his heart and under no constraint [...] will do well.”).

The nature of the relationship between *nous* and *kardia* shows up in Paul’s indications that heart is not without reason, but instead has a reasoning of its own (Eph 1:18: “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know”).

- 3.a. *Psyche*, or *soul*, has a sense close to the life force of the whole person, and not only what animates the material body. Whether this is sometimes meant in a

⁴See Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, pp. 142–147.

⁵I closely follow J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 70–77.

sense close to the Greek and robustly Christian notion of a soul that survives dissolution of the body or only as life of the whole body until death is not easily discerned. To the degree that the former, Greek sense comes into it, as one would think it must for a thinker as intent on resurrection as is Paul, this is an instance of a Greek inflection in Pauline thought.

- 3.b. *Pneuma, spirit*, designates the dimension by which a person is related directly to God. Many passages in the letters underline the close affiliation of human spirit with Holy Spirit.

One important conclusion to be drawn from what is said about soul and spirit is that according to Paul we are more than soul and indeed more than soul and body, or as the phenomenologists put it, more than our being in the world. We may also surmise that psyche would be brought into close agreement with pneuma in the course of efforts to live in the world as God wills.

This is already enough for it to be clear that there are important insights to be gained by way of exploring distinctions between terms that appear to be particularly close. Moreover, this will involve points of considerable overlap among some of them even if also tension among others. Whatever their differences, both body and flesh are modes of corporeality, heart is not strictly opposed to mind, and soul can be brought into agreement with spirit. Greater differences no doubt lie between the distinct pairs, but once again without sharp opposition. If our corporeality includes impulses emanating from flesh that are at odds with the tendency of reasoning to seek an integrated engagement of the world and everything in it, each of these must surely permeate the other, or else our corporeality is sheer animality and our minds and hearts are disincarnate. Likewise, whereas our reasoning is not strictly one with our orderedness to God, it is still necessary to think that there is important affinity between them, or else spirit suspends our reasoning which for its part knows nothing of God's call to us. All of this means that the Pauline anthropology is relational, in the sense of a reciprocal implication of the components and the whole. In short, our nature is both one and many, as is the God who Christian theology would soon understand as triune—and indeed, sometimes with an explicit interest in exploring analogies between the two.⁶ It is here, in its religious root, that the Pauline anthropology becomes a personalism. For Paul, a human being is a person, richly multifaceted, fundamentally according to his or her relation with a God who is also a person, or perhaps better, who is revealed as the original person.

The insight does not solve every difficulty. When, as does sometime happen in the scholarship, the complex set of relations that is our make-up is reduced to only a tripartition, or triad, and when the three parts or aspects in question are specifically *sarx* and some combination, often uncertain, of *pneuma* and *psyche*, the theme of *kardia* is necessarily marginalized. Of course, the danger is increased by the fact that, due to the hortatory nature of Pauline discourse, the theme itself is not as clearly defined as we philosophers might like. With little difficulty, we know what

⁶I leave aside the disputed question of whether Paul himself recognized God as Trinity. The major effort in illumining the divine and the human along these lines is of course Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

body is and what flesh is, and with only slight exertion we recognize what distinguishes soul and spirit. Of heart, we have just said that it is both like mind inasmuch as it reasons and unlike mind inasmuch as it does so in its own way. We are also able to say, with little difficulty, that Paul must align it with spirit, since he has written that those who are rightly resolved at heart are in full accord with God. This remark, furthermore, closely matches his thought that human spirit is that dimension of ourselves which is, as Dunn puts it, “Godward.”⁷ The fact that these relations—heart and mind, heart and spirit—are positive might lead one to think that heart is therefore opposed or resistant to flesh and for that matter, body as well. And yet, heart is plainly an *anatomical* metaphor, albeit indeed, a *metaphor*: there appears not to be a single case in the Pauline letters where heart is meant only or strictly in the anatomical or biological sense.⁸ What are we to make of this? At minimum, the anatomical sense of heart inscribes it in space, so that it can be expected to exhibit relations with other dimensions of our personhood that plainly move and are moved in space. If we conceive of heart as an organ, we thus conceive it as in the world, among things, with others and, as Paul would hasten to add, all in the presence of God (*coram Deo*).

Let us therefore consider heart in relation to living body (*soma*) and its close affiliate, flesh (*sarx*), on the understanding that what we learn in that context might also shed more light on the agreement of heart with mind (*nous*) and spirit (*pneuma*), where Paul has rested his call for believers to bring themselves to God (I will in fact only barely touch on heart and *mind*, since that theme is developed at length in Crina Gschwandtner’s essay in this same volume).

I have already observed that in the Pauline letters *soma* never signifies corpse. But it is also not merely the living physical mass—flesh, bones, blood—of a sentient being. To be sure, the word is sometimes used in a somewhat neutral sense that might suggest such an understanding, as when Paul writes from Ephesus to the people of Corinth that although he is absent in body, he nonetheless is present in spirit (1 Cor 5:3). But simple and after all unimportant passages like this should not lead us to overlook a more important, moral sense in which *soma* seems not at all negative. And this shows up when one contrasts living body with flesh. In comparison, the dimension of flesh is much more consistently negative, as the principle of an attachment to the world that threatens to occlude a higher relation with God. Of course, as I have also noted, flesh is sometimes only barely negative, as when the expression “in the flesh” (*en sarxi*) only means life on earth. But then this “life on earth” is haunted by a vulnerability that renders us prone to a more robustly negative grasping for security that readers of Heidegger will associate with Dasein’s flight from its own death into the vicissitudes of care for its own existence. Yet Paul has the relation with God in mind, and so the flight that seizes finally upon this world and its things is the fall into the experience of sin that Heidegger’s analyses suspend

⁷J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, p. 76.

⁸It is a metaphor with some extension. Still among the Pauline letters, Eph 1:18 refers to “eyes of the heart.” A few centuries later, the Rule of St. Benedict refers to “the ear of the heart.”

from the interpretation of Dasein. Not that Pauline theology would have us think that sinfulness and personhood are one and the same. In his letter of the Romans, Paul admits “I myself am fleshly [*sarkinos*]” (Rom 7:14) but also frequently lets it be known that even while the flesh serves sin, one may strive to serve God (and implies, unmistakably, that he has done this well). This possibility helps us to see the important difference between living *in* the flesh, which is simply necessary for a being who has mortal needs and desires, and living *according to* the flesh (*kata sarka*), in which case those needs and desires have become central and definitive. It falls to the proper exercise of mind, *nous*, to focus our thinking in a manner that refuses the subtle depictions of flesh. The tension between *nous* and *sarx* thus is essentially moral and spiritual; if by flesh one would be dissipated in things of the world, by mind one may be joined to God (e.g., Rom 7:25).

If the dimension of living body is distinct from the dimensions where this moral and spiritual tension is found, it has a neutrality of considerably greater importance than that of mere physical presence and absence. But this still does not mean that the living body is without consequence of its own. As living body, a person is the unity of a sustained relation with the world and everything in it. It is thus as living body that we perceive what we encounter, and on that basis, interact with it. There is in this feature of Pauline thought a remarkable step toward positions taken by Merleau-Ponty nearly two millenia later, but with the crucial difference that for Pauline thought the specific nature of our perception is always already an expression of our moral and spiritual condition—which, as no one will deny, varies in time. What does this mean? Put crudely, perception can be wrong because one sees under the domination of flesh, which is to say fundamentally in the service of need and desire. What mind knows is that everything we perceive—the world, things, other persons—are created by God, and therefore given to us already before any claim to possess and enjoy them. Furthermore, if Paul is consistent to the end, this must also be said about our own living body in all that it entails: the living body is our insertion into the limitless domain of creatureliness that we can either disrupt and abuse under the domination of flesh, or else freely participate in according to the created nature that is specific to human persons.⁹ It seems to me that this free participation in the created order as properly understood would be the proximate effect of prayer.¹⁰ Prayer, in turn, grounds a form of perception that is essentially theological.

For Paul, the evident way to this outcome is identification with Christ. This is made clear already in passages where the letters are still focused on the living body. To the Corinthians, he preaches, “Your bodies are members of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15), and to the Romans he seems to suggest that this means that in faith the living body is the very thing that must be given up to Christ (cf. Rom 12:1: “present your bodies

⁹The point seems to coincide with what Anthony Steinbock calls “participating-being” in his *Knowing by Heart: Loving as Participation and Critique* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2021), Chapter 3 *passim*.

¹⁰Whether the proximate effect would also be the ultimate effect is far from certain. One would have to show that the flourishing of our creatureliness in a worldly activity fully coincides with the union with God that is sought in highest prayer.

a sacrifice”). How are we to hear such exhortations? Do they not situate the living body of the believer squarely in contradiction? At least once, according to the letters, Paul himself will have crossed out the singularity of his embodiment—or had it crossed out—so that the sacrifice was briefly perfect even this side of death.

Although there is nothing to be gained [from this sort of boasting], I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. *Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know*—God knows. And I know that this man—*whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know*, but God knows—was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one may utter. (2 Cor 12.2-4; emphasis mine)

I will forego any attempt here to develop what is implied by the fact that a loss of unified identification with the body also places great pressure on the efficacy of language, and that this happens specifically beyond the heavens of atmosphere and then cosmos—which is to say, once again taking a word from phenomenology, beyond the inverse possibility of any spatial horizon. Let us instead follow the obvious theological clue toward the matter close at hand. The letter, in fact like all of the Pauline letters, is written in the grips of an identification specifically with the suffering Christ, who submitted his human will, and all of his human inclinations, to the will of the Father. The fact that this is most explicit during periods when Paul himself faces one or another kind of distress invites some suspicion that the identification serves to appease an underlying anxiety, but we might instead take the view that in binding himself to Christ on the Cross Paul traces a path away from the limited goods of the world toward a good that is unlimited and eternal. All of this is invested in the seemingly innocuous expression found in the passage I have just cited, and in many others, “a man in Christ” (*en Christo*).¹¹

Now, if it is a matter of identifying with Christ on the Cross, then we are suddenly close to the theme of heart, for theologians tell us that the center of gravity for Jesus’s suffering is precisely his pure heart. Kierkegaard framed this matter of a pure heart memorably, when he observed that it consists in willing one thing, and of course the only thing worth willing absolutely. According to his most general formulation, “the Good without condition and without qualification, without preface and without compromise is, absolutely the only thing man may and should will, and is only one thing.”¹² In terms much closer to Paul’s own (but they were not unknown to Kierkegaard), purification of the heart consists in withdrawing the will from all that is not willed by the divine will, until one is open to God alone in the innermost depth of one’s being. Recall what heart, *kardia*, means in the Pauline letters: seat of emotions, and of thought and will, wherein matters of choice are deliberated and action is decided (1 Cor 7:37; 2 Cor 9:7). If as Paul preaches, the way to union with God is through identification with Christ, then we for our part must take his heart as the paradigm for our own. In faith, one understands Jesus to have defeated the

¹¹ The expression appears between 150 and 200 times in the letters, depending on which variations are counted. For Albert Schweitzer it is the key to the whole of Pauline thought. A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 3.

¹² S. Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart is to Will One Thing* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1994), p. 37.

incitements of the flesh, thus relinquishing the world as flesh would have us know it, even losing that world, but in this way regaining it no longer as possession but now as gift of the Father. This is enough to tell us a little more about prayer in the Pauline mode: one meditates on the image of Jesus, taking its lessons past the obstacles of the flesh into one's own heart, which by this means may enter into conformity with His.

Heart thus is not the living body itself, but the dimension by which, as living body, we may perceive the world as the Father creates it. This alone, we should note, is enough for us to understand the importance of the anatomical metaphor, with its spatial extension. By heart, a person has access to things in their concrete givenness, in the phenomenological sense of that word. Heart is also not flesh, but the seat and origin Kierkegaard of affects capable of betraying what flesh would have us see and wants, betraying any movement toward addiction to the world and its things. Heart is not mind, it seems to me, but something more like the touchstone and familiar of mind, as mind conducts the image of Jesus to a place where it is already recognized and thus may be received. And finally, heart is not soul, or *psyche*, if this latter only means the life-force of the person; heart is animated by soul, but soul also animates the other aspects or dimensions of our personhood. Of the relation of heart to the five other key concepts in the Pauline anthropology, this leaves only the one with *spirit*, or what I earlier said Dunn calls the "Godward" dimension of our personhood. This last relation calls for separate attention.

5 Circumcision of the Heart

The Pauline exhortation to open our hearts fully to God does not rest solely on appeals to imitate and identify with the suffering Christ. Among other things, we may note that if it did, the figure of Christ would be reduced to that of a great spiritual exemplar whose status, allowing for certain cultural differences, could not be appreciably different than that of the great souls in whom Aristotle would have us see the fullness of virtues that we ourselves may still stand in need of improving.¹³ But the anthropology already grounds a claim for somewhat more than this. As spirit, we are already attuned to God and seeking God, whether or not we know it *and whether or not we have achieved the proper focus*. In theological terms, this sense of spirit evidently anticipates some of what Augustine will begin calling "grace": God has already provided us with an intimation of salvation, or if one prefers, the Holy Spirit is already acting in us (Rom 8:16).

As for the matter of proper focus, this will evidently mean ordering one's heart truly to the God of Jesus Christ. Paul's striking expression for what is required is "circumcision of the heart." The expression is not a hapax legomenon. It appears

¹³Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* IV.3 1123b. *Status*, not specific character or deeds. Notably, Jesus Christ not only *does* not, but necessarily *would* not possess all of the virtues mentioned by Aristotle.

three times in the Pauline letters—once explicitly (Rom 2:29), and twice by clear implication (Eph 2:11; Col 2:11)—as well as at least three times in Hebrew scriptures that would have been known to Paul (Deut 10:16, 30:6, Jer 9:26). In terms of the Pauline anthropology, what stands out is that it is the *heart*, not the living body and not the flesh that is circumcised. It is the heart, in other words, that is submitted to the law of separation, for those who are circumcised are thus separated from those who are not. The Hebrew bible has been clear about precisely this since the beginning, when physical circumcision sealed the special relation that Abraham and, though time, his descendants would have with YHWH (Gen 17.7). Circumcision is the mark of the covenant and of election, of a people set apart. It is also the mark of subjection and obedience to a supreme authority, though this was not immediately codified. All that changes when it is instead a circumcision of heart is that the external mark of election, and of fidelity to God, is now the behavior of the people. In *Jeremiah*, the people are commanded to “remove the foreskins of their hearts” or else divine wrath will strike them for evil deeds committed in breaking the covenant with God (Jer 4:4). The perspective taken in *Deuteronomy* is perhaps more interesting. God circumcises the hearts of a people who are commanded to love him and who will in that way avoid the curses that are to fall on their enemies. And yet, this love is not in itself enough—or rather, it is not separable from the actions that express it: one verse after linking circumcision of the heart to love of God, it is said that in this way the people will “return to the commandments” that are given to them.

We know enough about the Pauline anthropology to understand that on its terms any reference to “circumcision of the heart” must be emphatically inward, even if Paul does not doubt that what is determined in the heart must necessarily yield corresponding action. There is no use speculating here on the sources for this emphasis, which may include a contemporaneous Chassidic strand in Judaism itself,¹⁴ and that may have influenced Jesus before Paul. Whatever the case, to the degree that Pauline thinking finds the common seat of emotion, thought, and will in heart, and considers heart a sort of inner organ of the living body, whereby the world is perceived in accord with its condition—to the degree that Pauline thinking holds this view, circumcision of the heart is an inward matter. And this in turn means that the relation with God is rooted there, though it is certainly not contained there.

None of this is to say that Paul has no further relation with what might rightly pass as “law.” Rather, he envisions a law, and an application of the law, that is internal before any external expression of it. Earliest Christianity frequently talks of overcoming the law, in the sense of prescriptions and restrictions imposed on outward action, but already with Jesus himself the sense of this is far from cancelation or suspension. The gospel of Matthew recounts Jesus’s claim to fulfill the law, and his admonition that it be followed and even taught (Mt 5:17–19). Paul’s more complex notion is of a suspension of its limitations in order to admit a more robust

¹⁴Chassid: gentle, pious, heartfelt. During Jesus’s own time, a current of Jewish teaching emphasized this approach to law. The *locus classicus* for research into this hypothesis is G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospels* (London: William Collins, 1973).