IV The anxiety (Sorge) of the human self: Paul’s notion of μέριμνα

1. Paul’s ultima verba on anxiety in Philippians

In ancient and modern discourse, the phenomenon of “anxiety” and “care” is much debated. In the Greek-speaking world, μέριμνα primarily reflects human ‘anxiety’ and ‘worry’, and, as such, the Septuagint writings as well as early Christian literature tend to adopt a relatively uninformed or critical view of human anxiety and care: Matt 6:25-34, the passage “often entitled ‘On Anxiety’”, contains the strong Jesuanic imperative “do not be anxious” (μὴ μεριμνᾶτε; Matt 6:25). In combination with Jesus’ admonition of Martha – “… you are anxious and troubled about many things (μεριμνᾷς καὶ θορυβάζῃ περὶ πολλά)” (Luke 10:41; cf. also: Luke 21:34) –, μέριμνα is generally seen as an expression by which (the Matthean and Lukan) Jesus devalues and criticizes the attitude of “anxiety,” and New Testament researchers have devoted little scholarly attention to investigating this phenomenon.

The Latin expression cura, in contrast, is considerably more ambivalent in its meaning. It can mean anxiety and worry as much as ‘care’, and it is therefore largely equivalent to the German expression “Sorge,” which is a central term in Heidegger’s existential philosophy. From Hyginus’ myth (fabulae 220) it can mean anxiety and worry as much as ‘care’, and it is therefore largely equivalent to the German expression “Sorge,” which is a central term in Heidegger’s existential philosophy.

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2 H. D. Betz, Sermon, 460.
3 Μεριμν-: Exod 5:9; Esth 1:1; Ps 54:23; Ps 37:19LXX; Prov 17:12; Sir 30:24; 31:1f.; 42:9; Dan 11:26. To the Hebrew lexicon and terminology, cf.: T. Muraoka, Index, 78. – On only related Greek expressions for taking care or being anxious: Ps 12:3LXX; 39:18LXX; 126:2LXX; Sir 30:26; 34:1. Cf. also: Or Sib 2:316; 2:326; 3:89; 5:440. – References among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers are limited: Herm 19:3 (Vis III:11); 23:4 (Vis IV:2); 25:3 – cf. H. Kraft, Clavis, 287. Cf. only few instances in Patristic literature: G. W. H. Lampe, Lexicon, 843. – Translations of NT texts in general follow NRSV.
4 Instead – Jesus continues – “one thing is needful, Mary has chosen the good portion…” (v. 42).
5 Cf. D. Zeller, Brief (on 1 Cor 7); in general: R. Bultmann, “Μεριμνάω κτλ.”; R. Bultmann, Theologie, 242 (on 1 Cor 7); M. E. Thrall, Epistle (on 2 Cor). See also H. D. Betz, Sermon, 460-465.
6 “When Cura {‘Worry’} was crossing a certain river, she saw muddy clay, picked it up, pondered for a moment, and then molded a human. While she was thinking about just what she had created, Jupiter arrived on the scene. Cura asked him to give breath to the human, and Jupiter readily agreed to do it. But then, when Cura was about to name this
The origin and nature of human anxiety (*cura*) to Heidegger’s philosophy, it is thus possible to see how anxiety and care are two sides of the same coin; since they refer to human temporality, they are simply basic human reactions to the experience of time and mortality, in which the attitudes of fear and concern cooperate. In this article, I will show how such a broadening of the semantic field of μέριμνα and *cura* inspires our reading of Paul and provides fundamental insights into Paul’s understanding of selfhood.

Near the end of his letter to the Philippians (4:6), Paul analyzes human existence by admonishing his readers: “Have no anxiety about anything ...” (μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε ...). At first, it may appear as though Paul simply rejects various kinds of daily-life “anxiety” that could occupy or even worry the Philippian community; we might imagine that Paul is recalling Jesuanic language here (Luke 10:41 – s. above). And indeed, most New Testament scholars take this path. Some argue that, in his admonition in Phil 4, Paul practices “pastoral care.” Other scholars see a direct connection to Jesus traditions here – depending on the overall interpretation of Philippians. In fact, in Matt 6 (= Q; Luke 12:22ff.), Jesus teaches more comprehensively about “anxiety” and “care”; he says: “... do not be anxious about your life ... (v. 25: μὴ μεριμνᾶτε τῇ ψυχῇ ὑμῶν) ...; do not creature after herself, Jupiter stopped her and said that it should be named after him. Now, while Cura and Jupiter were debating over the name, Earth rose up as well and said that it should be named after her, seeing how she was the one who had furnished her own body. They took up Saturn as the judge of their case, and it appears that he judged fairly in their case: ‘Jupiter, because you gave it breath, you shall reclaim the breath after death; Earth, because you offered up your body, you shall reclaim the body. Because Cura first molded it, she shall possess it so long as it lives. But because there is some disagreement about the name, it shall be called ‘human’ {*homo*} because it was clearly created from earth {*humus*}.” Translation according to Scott Smith/Trzaskoma, *Fabulae*, 166f. To Hyginus’ collection of *fabulae*, published by Hyginus Mythographus (2nd century CE): Schmidt, “Hyginus.” – The myth is also quoted in Heidegger, *Sein*, 197f.

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7 Cf. Heidegger’s description of “Selbstauslegung des Daseins als ‘Sorge’” (*Sein*, 197f.). In § 41 of “Being and Time” (1927), Heidegger explains how being in the world in its existential dimension is characterized by "fear", “anxiety” and “care”: “... Weil das In-der-Welt-sein wesenhaft Sorge ist, deshalb konnte ... das Sein bei dem Zuhanden den als Besorgen, das Sein mit dem innerweltlich begegnenden Mitdasein Anderer als Fürsorge gefaßt werden” (192). – S. also Heidegger’s earlier reflections on “Bekümmerung” in GA 60: “Phänomenologie,” 52-54. In the frame of his lecture on “Einleitung in die Phänomenologie der Religion” (1920/21), Heidegger also presents his reading of Pauline letters, in particular: Gal, 1 Thess, 2 Thess (§§ 14-16; 23-29). Foucault’s idea of the Socratic concept of ἐπιμέλεια (e.g. M. Foucault, “Ethik”) can be viewed less as existentialism and more as a polemic against Heidegger’s existentialism.


10 Lohmeyer’s martyrology interpretation in E. Lohmeyer, *Brief*, 169, has Matt 10:19 in the background here.
be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself ... (v. 34: μὴ οὖν μεριμνήσητε εἰς τὴν αὔριον, ἡ γὰρ αὔριον μεριμνήσει ἑαυτῆς) ... But seek first his (= God’s) kingdom ... (v. 33).” In the Sermon on the Mount (Q-Text: 12:22, 25f., 29; cf. also: 12:11), Jesus’ final commandment is: “... seek first (ζητεῖτε) his kingdom and his righteousness ...” (v. 33).

So, in Phil 4, does Paul adhere to Jesus tradition – a tradition that even echoes the Stoic critique of “anxiety?” Indeed, Epictetus also devalues “anxiety.” For him, “anxiety” is ἀγωνία (Diss 2:13); it arises when a man looks for something that is outside of his control: “When I see a man in anxiety” – Epictetus states –, “I say to myself, What can it be that this fellow wants? For if he did not want something that was outside of his control, how could he still remain in anxiety?” (2:13:1). Paul surpasses such a general critique of “anxiety” reminiscent of sapiential teaching, which tends to focus on stereotyped concerns and principles, and instead he proposes an individual approach to “anxiety” and “care” that reveals the existential dimensions of μέριμνα. This becomes clear if we study Philippians in its entirety.

First, in chapter 2, Paul presents his co-worker Timothy as the perfect example of anxiety to the Philippians: “I have no one like him” – Paul says –, “who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare” (v. 20: τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν μεριμνήσει); they all “look after their own interests (τὰ ἑαυτῶν ζητοῦσιν), not those of Jesus Christ” (v. 21). In the Greek tradition, μέριμνα is an expression for the type of anxiety that tends to completely occupy a person. Timothy is fully occupied with “anxiety” for the Philippians. Paul does not criticize μεριμνάω; instead, he proposes it as a crucial attitude in the ministry of Christ. Second, Paul’s reflection on “anxiety” in Phil 4 exceeds any sapiential teaching about overcoming the concerns of daily life, because Paul interprets anxiety as biographical and existential experience. In this last letter(s), Paul is a prisoner in Caesarea or Rome; he is facing his impending trial and expecting his imminent death (Phil 1). The admonition not to be anxious should be viewed in the context of various personal remarks about Paul’s internal state of mind as well as his eschatological hopes: Paul wishes to participate in Christ’s resurrection or to be transformed into the “Gestalt” (μορφή) of Christ. Ernst Lohmeyer has even suggested a martyrlogical reading of Phil 4 and, as such, reads v. 6 in relation to Matt 10:19. Irrespective of whether we agree with Lohmeyer’s reading, Phil 4:6 remains an admonition in light of existential danger.

11 Translation according to: W. A. Oldfather, Epictetus, 291. For Epictetus and ἐπιμέλεια, s. above.
13 Cf. E. Lohmeyer, Brief, 169f.
Third, similar to Heidegger’s analysis, Paul also approaches human “anxiety” as an existential phenomenon, since he relates it to temporality (‘Zeitlichkeit’). When Paul admonishes his readers not to be anxious in Phil 4, he perceives temporality by expressing a specific eschatological expectation included in an announcement of time: χαίρετε ἐν Κυρίῳ πάντοτε ... ὁ Κύριος ἐγγύς – “Rejoice in the Lord always ... The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:4). In Phil, Paul does not ignore human “anxiety” as such; in fact, he even recommends it. In revealing his own experience as a prisoner and pointing to Timothy’s example of an anxious ministry, he turns “anxiety” into an existential phenomenon of life experience. Only eschatological, Christ-centered hope can finally de-activate existential anxiety. In ancient discourse, it is this idea of biographical experience as much as eschatological hope that marks the difference between the sapiential, philosophical or moral and the Pauline approach to “anxiety.”

2. 1 Cor 12 and 2 Cor 11: anxiety in community politics and ethics

Earlier in Paul’s letter-writing, “anxiety” and “care” appear as anthropological tools to guide ethics and community life. And already in these letters, Paul elaborates on his personal experiences and perception of “anxiety.”

2.1. Paul’s anxiety as apostle: 2 Cor 11:28

In 2 Cor 11, Paul confesses that his apostolic duties continuously worry him: “And, apart from other things” – he says –, “there is the daily pressure upon me of my anxiety (μέριμνα) for all the churches” (v. 28). Apostolic ministry is busy and exhausting, and it involves dealing with conflicts and missionary competition. In 2 Cor 10-13, the conflict with the Corinthian community is escalating. In Paul’s opinion, the apostolic ministry is full of personal “anxiety.” Nevertheless, commentators on 2 Cor – such as Margaret E. Thrall – tend to interpret the Pauline reference to “anxiety” as either insignificant or a negative expression. We might follow Thrall in valuing “anxiety” as something negative here – Paul is seemingly troubled about the Corinthians. However, the letter of Aristeas offers a different interpretation (271). In this letter, it is stated: “... to the question ...

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14 “This eschatological dimension ... has no real parallel in the thinking of Greco-Roman philosophers” either (F. E. Brench, “Most Beautiful,” 108 in regard to 1 Cor 7).

15 “... μέριμνα is somewhat negative in its connotations ... Since Paul is stillcataloguing his apostolic trials, it is this sense that is appropriate, rather than a more general notion of pastoral care,” M. E. Thrall, Epistle, 749.
‘what preserves a kingdom?’ the answer is given, μέριμνα καὶ φρόντις..., ‘care and watchfulness to see that no injury is inflicted by those who are set in positions of authority over the people.’\textsuperscript{16} A more positive connotation of Paul’s view on μέριμνα is plausible; namely, that Paul views μέριμνα as a part of his job description in a leading position. Interpreters like Thrall thus miss some crucial points. By expressing his personal “anxiety”, Paul interprets his apostleship in individual terms. He does so quite comprehensively – and here, Thrall is right in her overall analysis of 2 Cor 11. “Furthermore,” she concludes, “the following verse suggests anxiety. From Paul’s point of view, he has had, and at this point has still, ample cause for anxiety about the Corinthian congregation.”\textsuperscript{17}

Unlike E. R. Dodds (s. above) or Gerd Theißen,\textsuperscript{18} I am less interested in “anxiety” as a religious tremendum or a psychological phenomenon. Instead, I suggest that, in order to describe his current situation as an apostle, Paul makes use of an anthropological pattern which he further develops toward selfhood and individuality. And this is true even though Paul might use his expression of “anxiety” as a rhetorical strategy: He certainly intends to legitimize his personal engagement in Corinthian affairs (cf. 2 Cor 10-13). Paul explores “anxiety” as a pattern of selfhood primarily as a personal rhetorical strategy to authorize his public ministry.

\subsection{Anxiety in community life: 1 Cor 12:24f.}

Although Paul applies the phenomenon of human “anxiety” and “care” to community life, he is particularly interested in the role of the individual community member. In 1 Cor 12, Paul describes the body of the ecclesia as being guided by “anxiety” and “care”. He states, “But God has so composed the body ..., that there may be no discord of the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another (ὑπὲρ ἀλλήλων μεριμνῶσιν)” (v. 24f.). Paul writes about the concrete need to “take care” of one another because the Corinthians are “individual members” of the body of Christ (v. 27). In light of the desire for higher, spiritual and eschatological gifts (χαρίσματα, v. 31), being engaged in communal “care” appears as an individual activity of “anxiety.”\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Cf., e.g. G. Theißen, \textit{Erleben}, 164ff.
\item[19] The communal engagement in welfare and care is also significant for Paul’s status as apostle. The whole project of collecting money for the Jerusalem community (e.g. 2 Cor 8-9) can be seen as a concrete action of welfare and represents the most prestigious and determining project of Paul’s individual legitimacy as apostle (Gal 2:10). Biographically, Paul must have been extremely “anxious” to succeed in making the collection mission a communal endeavor of individual activity. The duty of communal care and welfare based
\end{footnotes}
In this approach to “anxiety” and “care,” Paul even sees himself as a paradigm: “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do ...” (Phil 4:9). Paul is an example of personal anxiety. But how does Paul deal with “anxiety” and “care” when it concerns the issues of daily life – especially those issues that do not concern him? Can Paul also act as a personal example in the field of anxiety and family life when he himself refrains from living in wedlock (1 Cor 9)? Does he adhere to ancient ascetic verdicts – expressed by Menander and others – according to which “having a wife and being the father of children ... brings many anxious moments in life?”

To answer this question, I will examine 1 Cor 7, where Paul conceptualizes another type of individual “anxiety” and “care”. It is in the discourse about sexual ethics that μεριμνάω occupies its most prominent place – even as wordplay (v. 34a: μερίζομαι).

3. 1 Cor 7:32ff.: anxiety and individual decision-making

In 1 Cor 7:32ff., Paul remarks: ‘Take your existential μέριμνα as a tool for deciding about your sexual behavior and your family life.’ Here, Paul makes human “anxiety” into a criterion of individual ethics. In doing so, he contributes to a broader ancient discourse about “selfhood”. In her analysis of early Imperial Roman literature, Shadi Bartsch argues that the sense of the human Self is especially developed in its encounter with sexuality and ethics.

In Paul’s view, of course, the “action space” for developing selfhood via sexuality and ethics is primarily not Roman society but the sphere of ecclesia. Individual ethics is
thus framed by *communal identity*. Before I examine how Paul conceptualizes “anxiety” as a tool of individual sexual ethics, I will first outline Paul’s general concept of sexual ethics in its communal setting.

### 3.1. Paul and sexual ethics: 1 Thess 4 and beyond

From his earliest letter-writing, Paul deals with sexual ethics. Like other topics of ethical discourse, questions about sexual ethics primarily result from discussions within the community, but they also emerge from communication with those “outside” (ἕξω) the community. Paul expresses his goals of general ethical teaching most clearly in 1 Thess 4, by stating: “we exhort you ... to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we charged you; so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody” (v. 10-12pass.).

Like various other fields of ethical teaching – such as law, the economy, food and dress codes – in sexual ethics, the formal tools of Pauline rhetoric are also diverse.23 Hermut Löhr writes, “... Paul’s ethics seems to be on the border between ‘Gebotsethik’ (ethics based on commandments) and ‘Einsichtsethik’ (ethics based on insight or understanding);”24 the variety of ethical arguments indeed corresponds to the diversity of topics discussed; Paul frequently exposes something like “dispositional ethics”. In all ethical discourse, Paul is ultimately concerned with the “sanctification” or “holiness” (ἁγιασμός) of the community as a communal entity. This concern is *socio-politically* significant: Paul intends to strengthen the social attractiveness of Christ-believing communities25 and to organize communal life around a perfect “political environment,” as it is discussed in political theory in and beyond Aristotle (*pol* 9:1280b). By caring for the community’s sanctification, issues of sexual behavior seem to be most popular and most urgent – for the group *and* the individual (s. above).

Paul’s ethical admonitions are sometimes very concrete. This is most evident within the so-called catalogues of virtues and vices, for instance in 1 Cor 6:9: “... neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts ... will inherit the kingdom of God.” Here, by addressing groups of people, Paul almost exclusively incriminates what he believes constitutes sexual immorality:

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25 Hartmut Leppin identifies that, as opposed to the Roman widows, Christian widows, for instance, were not forced to re-marry. The law of marriage was much more liberal among Christian women than among Romans: “Das Christentum wertete die Jungfrauschaft oder das Witwentum höher als die Ehe, was manchen Frauen neue Freiräume erschloss,” *FAZ* 298 (23.12.2014), 40 (Rhein-Main Zeitung).
πόρνοι, ἀρσενοκοῖται. 26 However, as early as 1 Thess 4, Paul proclaims: “… this is the will of God, your sanctification (ἁγιασμός): that you abstain from unchastity (πορνεία); that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust (ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας) like heathen who do not know God … For God has not called us for uncleanness (ἀκαρθασία), but in holiness (ἀγιασμός) …” (1 Thess 4:3-8pass.).

Paul’s approach to sexual ethics here is exhortative. It addresses the collective of community members. The discoursal frame is religious. Since Paul aims at the sanctification of communal sexual ethics, current exegesis tends to argue that, in his sexual ethics, Paul wishes to implement cultic purity. It seems as though Paul combines various traditions of ethical teaching, which are partly derived from Jewish instruction and partly analogous to Stoic ethics: When Paul wants the Thessalonians to “abstain” (ἀπέχεσθαι) in a general sense from “immorality” (πορνεία), he also uses a “technical term” – ἀπέχεσθαι – which “aimed at distinguishing Christian from pagan morality.” 27 It is thus common for current scholarship on Pauline ethics to emphasize how, in his teaching about sexuality, Paul combines Hellenistic moral philosophy and Jewish parenesis. 28 Will Deming has worked extensively on this topic, especially in regard to 1 Cor 7. 29

Such a description of Pauline sexual ethics might be adequate. However, this description focuses on either the collective or communal or the religious aspects of Paul’s moral arguments. Thus, as much as scholars tend to neglect Paul’s concept of “anxiety” and “care,” they also tend to overlook the individual implications of Pauline ethics. In 1 Cor 7 in particular, Paul does not restrict himself to a collective moral exhortation; rather, he presupposes and enforces a human self-understanding according to which ethical discourse can be developed in-

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26 For a discussion of whether ἀρσενοκοῖται in 1 Cor 6:9 means “homosexuality,” cf.: W. L. Petersen, Homosexuals; D. F. Wright, Homosexuals; J. Boswell, Christianity, 344, considers “male prostitutes” here.

27 A. J. Malherbe, Letters, 225. Πορνεία itself is a broad polemical expression against various kinds of illegitimate sexuality, F. W. Horn, “Heiden,” 297. As Abraham J. Malherbe identifies, Paul’s teaching against ἀκαρθασία κτλ. “was [also] part of basic Jewish instruction in moral behavior”, ibid., 226. At the same time, some elements of Paul’s language, for instance the expression “not in lustful passion”, “was derived from the Stoics. They defined pathos … as an irrational and unnatural movement of the soul, as an impulse in excess … It is a troubled movement of the soul, an imtemperate longing, disobedient to reason, that may rightly be termed desire or lust” (229f.; with reference to, e.g., Cicero, Tusc Disp 3:7; 3:23f.; 4:11). However, there is a significant difference between the philosophical and the Pauline incrimination of pathos: “Instead of understanding lustful passion as opposition to reason, as the philosophers did, Paul asserts that its cause was ignorance of God. In this he was Jewish” (ibid., 230).


dividually. He does so by taking himself as a paradigm and pointing to his own human “anxiety”: consequently, μέριμνα occurs as an anthropological viz. ethical criterion of individual decision-making.

3.2. Sexuality and anxiety: individual decision-making in 1 Cor 7

In 1 Cor 7:32, Paul states: “I want you to be free from anxieties (ἀμέριμνος).” This seems to be close to Paul’s admonition in Phil 4 (s. above). Again, Paul is concerned with the analysis of human existence because, in 1 Cor 7, the context is also full of various temporal, that is eschatological, motifs. Paul says, “the appointed time has grown very short (ὁ καιρὸς συνισταλμένος).” However, in this frame of correctly perceiving time, Paul does not only admonish his community; rather, he makes his engagement with individual anxiety into the final criterion of sexual ethics.

How does Paul achieve this? The general discourse about sexual ethics is raised by the Corinthians themselves, who write to Paul and ask him about various subjects (1 Cor 7:1; περὶ δὲ) which all concern the legitimacy of sexual practice among Christ believers. One central question is whether those who are unmarried should marry. If the Corinthians simply take Paul as an individual paradigm here, they will remain single and live unmarried. And, indeed, Paul recommends his unmarried lifestyle to the Corinthians (v. 8).

At the same time, Paul is well aware of the moral challenges of remaining unmarried. He argues that, if the Corinthians “cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion (πυροῦσθαι)” (v. 9). Paul is clearly aware of erotic affects, and he is realistic enough to consider these affects when responding to the Corinthian questions (cf. v. 36). Since he cannot refer to the Lord’s authority here (v. 10), everything Paul says about the status of being “unmarried” is based upon his individual view: “I have no command (ἐπιταγὴ) of the Lord, but I give my opinion (γνώμη) as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy” (v. 25). At this point, Paul actually reveals the principles of individual decision-making.

In light of eschatological hope, Paul would like the Corinthians to adopt an adequate type of Christ-believing “anxiety.” For this reason, he does not intend to “lay any restraint (βρόχος) upon” the Corinthians (v. 35). He therefore identifies various options for handling “anxiety” by, of course, sympathizing with how “anxiety” appears among those who are unmarried.31 “The unmarried man

30 Current studies on ancient emotions have revealed the extent to which Paul was aware of emotionality, which he also made use of as a letter-writer.
31 For Paul’s promotion of celibacy, see F. E. Brenk, “Most Beautiful,” 108ff.
is anxious (μεριμνᾷ) about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but
the married man is anxious (μεριμνᾷ) about worldly affairs, how to please his
wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious
(μεριμνᾷ) about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but
the married woman is anxious (μεριμνᾷ) about worldly affairs, how to please
her husband” (v. 32b-34). Paul concludes that getting married “is no sin” (v. 36),
but refraining from marriage is a better choice (v. 38).

Paul’s recommendation to remain single is remarkable, especially when seen
in the light of Hellenistic-Roman politics and culture: Augustan marriage legis-
lation was designed to increase the birthrate in the early Roman Empire, and
Aristotelian politics is rooted in the theory that marriage is the prototype of
communitarian life in the polis (pol 1:2).33 Most evidently, in 1 Cor 7, Paul elab-
orates on eschatological “anxiety” as an individual tool of decision-making. In
Paul’s argument, μεριμνα is a basic pattern of anthropology and ethics. While
Paul generally engages in communal affairs, such as the οἰκοδομή (“manner of
building”) of the Corinthian community, in 1 Cor 7, he is primarily concerned
with each person’s existential “anxiety”; in this way, he reflects on the female
and the male person equally. Reflections about “anxiety” and “care” help to de-
velop the experience of the human Self. It is precisely in this that the Corinthi-
ans can ultimately follow Paul’s personal example. It is the individual paradigm
of decision-making rather than Paul’s personal lifestyle or his case for celibacy
(Dieter Zeller) or practices of “temporary abstinence” that the Corinthians
should follow.

32 Lex Julia de Maritandis Ordinibus (18 BCE); Lex Papia Poppaea (9 CE) – cf. also: Suetonius,
Aug 34. Cf. also: Kolb, Rom, 367 etc.
33 Cf. also H. Flashar, Aristoteles, 108ff.
34 Although the topic might specifically allow for reflections on “anxiety,” Dieter Zeller
shows how, in antiquity in particular, the existential experience of “anxiety” applies to
the field of marriage and family life. D. Zeller, Brief, 264: “... Dieses existentielle Beset-
zein von den Ängsten um den Lebensunterhalt und die Angehörigen kennzeichnet aber
nach volkstümlicher Anschauung gerade Ehe und Familie” – with reference to Sopho-
36 Cf. D. Zeller, Brief, 278.
4. Paul’s exposure of the human self

In contrast to modern anthropology and ethics, Paul’s treatment of “anxiety” and “care” is not systematic. And although – as E. A. Judge claims – social “behaviour and training people in it was a major interest Paul shared with the popular philosophers,”38 Paul does not develop a consistent training program or a comprehensive anthropological or ethical concept. However, by reflecting on human “anxiety” and “care,” i.e. μέριμνα, Paul not only takes the conditio humana seriously, he also develops ethical discourse in the direction of individual decision-making. As a communal body, the ecclesia finally consists of the moral integrity of individuals. Since the community as such should imitate Paul, the apostle proposes existential “anxiety” and “care” as individual tools to face temporality and prove oneself in an ethical sense.

By shaping the pattern of individual “anxiety” and “care,” Paul thus surpasses the purpose of communal ethics: he finally explores the human Self. In doing so, Paul even prepares for some modern thoughts of individual ethics. “Anxiety” and “care” appear to be individual habits of Pauline anthropology and ethics. In the end, they connect Paul with modern philosophy, or perhaps more accurately, they connect modern philosophy with Paul. For this reason, I will conclude by suggesting that we apply to Pauline exegesis what Harold Bloom once said about the field of literary theory: He favors “a Shakespearean reading of Freud … over a Freudian reading of Shakespeare.”39 The same could be said about Paul and modern philosophers. Since Paul anticipates central ideas of individual anthropology and ethics, I dare to say that I favor a Pauline reading of philosophy over a philosophical reading of Paul.

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