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.15 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 ..., 14

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 still cataloguing 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.”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.”17

Unlike E. R. Dodds (s. above) or Gerd Theißen,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.

2.2. 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.”19

17 M. E. Thrall, Epistle, 749.
18 Cf., e.g. G. Theißen, Erleben, 164ff.
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