Too Far from Ideal?

Disability and New Testament Writings

by

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ABSTRACT

Too Far from Ideal? Disability and New Testament Writings

by

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Disability is a modern concept that, according to a cultural model, outlines how impairment is judged as "other." Whilst, technically, the named concept of "disability" does not appear in New Testament writings, this thesis demonstrates that the judgement of "other" is formed from a comparison with an ideal or standard. No texts define a specific ideal, yet the notion permeates considerations of corporeality throughout New Testament writings. In each evaluative reference to corporeality, it is this ideal or standard that is used to judge whether an impairment is outside of the boundaries of corporeal acceptability.

When defined as being deemed outside of cultural corporeal acceptability, disability can be examined in New Testament writings. This thesis provides examples to show how those judged "too far" from an ideal standard are effectively placed within metanarratives of disability or impairment. It also examines how texts can both use and challenge metanarratives, in relation to perceived boundaries of cultural acceptability. Importantly, this thesis demonstrates that agency, denied to "othered" individuals by ableist textual presentation or interpretation, can actually be found in gaps in the narrative or in overlooked details.

The reasoning process is a corporeal function. This thesis demonstrates that those reasoning processes deemed “problematic” are associated with personal choice, false teaching and a lack of faith; failure to understand is, therefore, blamed on a corrupt or depraved reasoning process, the responsibility for which is attributed to the individual. Through an exploration of references to the blended metaphor domain of see-knowing, this thesis also argues that whilst blindness and lack of understanding, in terms of linguistic meaning, are almost fused inseparably together in New Testament writings, the correlation between sight and understanding is both upheld and disputed by various narratives.

Assumptions and expectations regarding impairment cannot be completely separated from cultural values implicit or explicit within a narrative. However, some New Testament writings use the language of a metanarrative of disability whilst concurrently challenging its values. When biblical scholars ignore relevant insights from the disability studies discipline, alternative interpretations of New Testament writings are neglected in favour of a presumption of ableism.

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INTRODUCTION

When defined as being judged outside of corporeal acceptability boundaries, disability can be examined in New Testament writings. Those judged "too far" from an ideal standard are effectively placed within metanarratives of disability or impairment, metanarratives that are both used and challenged. This thesis explores how corporeality is judged against an assumed standard in New Testament writings, constructing boundaries of "other" or exclusion for those who are deemed too far from that standard. It claims uniqueness in establishing the presence of assumed corporeal ideals and in the application of the metanarrative of disability to New Testament writings.

The body 'does not exist in a vacuum because it is labelled, evaluated, named, and crafted by texts.'[1] It is, therefore, important to take a text-based approach, but also pay attention to the 'blanks and intonations.'[2] The agency of those "othered" by textual presentation or ableist interpretation can be found in gaps or overlooked details.

New Testament writings are not just literary accounts, but share the quality of being 'an inventory' of cultural values, including those values regarding corporeality.[3] James Cherney states that 'words, language, and texts construct

[1] James L. Cherney, *Ableist Rhetoric* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), p. 133.

[2] Jay Timothy Dolmage, *Disability Rhetoric* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), p. 15.

[3] Dolmage, p. 11.

political identities, hierarchies and power.'[4] Within New Testament writings, corporeality is used, both implicitly and explicitly, to construct identity boundaries in relation to cultural acceptability: the named concept of "disability" does not appear in New Testament writings, but the textual judgement of "other" is formed from a comparison with an ideal or standard. "Other" is measured against a paradigm of what corporeality should be. For that reason, this project focuses on the attitudes conveyed in the texts themselves, not on how the texts functioned within the contexts in which they originated. Therefore, this thesis cannot be a New Critical study because elements of historical context are relevant to interpretation; neither can it be historical in outlook, since it is the textual perspective that is maintained as the point of reference. This biblical studies project is also informed by the discipline of disability studies, in that evaluative judgements of corporeality construct boundaries of "otherness" and, consequently, what can be considered as disability within texts. The overlooked, ignored, or denigrated characters and metaphors become important.

Research Question

The main issue considered by this thesis is how New Testament writings present corporeality that is considered as "other" and, from a modern perspective, might be considered as "disability". According to the cultural model, disability is effectively created by the judgement of "other," meaning that whilst the concept of "disability" by name is not present in New Testament writings,

[4] Cherney, p. 3.

exclusionary corporeal judgement is. Metanarratives of disability, as well as their implicit effects, can be examined.

Three sub-questions are addressed by this research:

- Is there a corporeal ideal in New Testament writings? What is “other” judged against?
- What is the relationship between the “mind” and an ideal corporeality?
- How is impairment presented as “other” and why is the judgement important?

Although there is not a single standard or attitude that all New Testament writings propose or adhere to with respect to corporeality, it is important to consider whether, in general, judgements are present. Texts making such negative, or positive, judgements are selected from across the corpus of New Testament writings in order to highlight the importance of examining “disability” within what would eventually form the New Testament canon.

This thesis demonstrates that whilst there is not an explicit set of corporeal standards explained in or by New Testament writings, an ideal is implicit in references to corporeality. It also shows that what English translations designate as “mind” is actually the function of reasoning. Reasoning is attributed to the body, meaning that it must directly form a part of any consideration of corporeality.

From the perspective, that there are non-homogenous standards of ideal corporeality for those following Christ within New Testament writings, the

question is asked as to how those who do not meet those corporeal standards are portrayed and what the implications are of that portrayal, from a textual viewpoint.

Having established that texts contain implicit expectations of corporeality, including for the corporeal function of reasoning, this thesis shows that impairments carry meaning through textual usage of metanarratives. Impairments in and of themselves are always negative and not desirable, but negative corporeal judgements can be nuanced and agency attributed to individuals judged "other" by a text.

The Importance of the Issue

In drawing these observations together, this thesis demonstrates the importance of considering how New Testament authors 'use disabilities to promote broader theological or social agendas.'[5] By asking questions of texts where ableist interpretations may have previously been assumed, this thesis challenges those interpretations where disabled characters are given no agency, demonstrating that agency can be identified in some cases, even where impairment is negatively valued and depicted.

Disability might be a modern category, but if we treat it as such in relation to New Testament writings, we risk 'bringing our own culture's ableism to those

[5] Hector Avalos, 'Disability Studies and Biblical Studies: Retrospectives and Prospects', in *Interpretation*, vol. 73.4 (2019), pp. 343-354: p. 346. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964319857604>

texts.'[6] It is impossible to avoid this entirely, though minimising the damage should always be the goal. Antiquity did have its own version of ableism, judging corporeality that differed from the normate to be 'deviant' or 'undesirable,'[7] but the societies in which New Testament texts were written constructed "other" against a context where no one met the ideal corporeal standard: this is an *essential difference* to the modern perspective.

Disability is 'discursively defined,' so that 'the way people talk about bodies in a given society determines the significance of those bodies.'[8] New Testament writings culturally define corporeal value judgements both within their own narratives and in those cultures for which they are foundational texts. Instead of taking New Testament writings as they have traditionally been presented to us, we need to ask what the texts do and do not allow us to see, as well as why. If the tendency, derived from biblical scholarship and a general ableist perspective, is that disability is seen as evidence of ignorance, stubbornness, or moral failure, then, to quote Candida Moss, 'Demonstrating that in its own time and in its own composition the Bible does not unequivocally endorse ableism is, to my mind, an important project.'[9]

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[6] Meghan R. Henning, *Hell Hath No Fury - Gender, Disability, and the Invention of Damned Bodies in Early Christian Literature* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2021), p. 17.

[7] Henning, p. 17.

[8] Henning, p. 18.

[9] Candida R. Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', in *The Bible and Disability – A Commentary*, eds. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikael C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (London: SCM Press, 2018), pp. 275-301: pp. 276-279.

Positionality

To borrow Grant Macaskill's phrasing, I approach the question of the portrayal of disability within New Testament writings from 'a distinctively Christian' perspective, viewing biblical texts as Scripture.[10] Although it is true 'Discussions of the Bible's influence often focus on whether biblical texts *should* or *should not* impact people's lives,'[11] from my standpoint those texts already do, albeit in different ways and to varying degrees. New Testament writings are cited in relation to disability, with interpretations focused on what disability communicates to those who are non-disabled, rather than how that disability is itself portrayed. In taking a textual approach, I am not attempting to redeem or reject texts, but evaluate what might be present when the discussion or judgement of disability is acknowledged.[12] Too often a historicist approach ignores the consideration of disability, so in many ways I am responding by considering Scripture as conveying historical viewpoints by examining how disability is portrayed in texts. I am not attempting to construct a theology of disability or liberate a text, but, as far as possible, analyse New Testament writings without assuming the automatic presence of modern levels of ableism. I

[10] Grant Macaskill, 'The Bible, Autism and Other Profound Developmental Conditions: Regulating Hermeneutics', in *Journal of Disability and Religion*, vol. 26.4 (2022) pp. 414–38: p. 415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23312521.2021.1881024>

[11] Michal Beth Dinkler, *Influence: On Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2019), p. 4.

[12] Hector Avalos, 'Redemptionism, Rejectionism and Historicism as Emerging Approaches in Disability Studies', in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 34.1 (2007). In terms of Avalos' categories, my position is broadly historicist. I am not trying to redeem texts, but I am also looking to be aware of where previous interpretations have taken the negative portrayal of disability further than might be within the texts, or not asked disability-oriented questions.

do acknowledge that negative judgements are made of impairment, that historical contexts have to be considered, but I want to look through a disability lens at texts, rather than reject them in their entirety.

I do not consider myself to be disabled, but I have watched family members be treated as “other,” [13] looked upon as less than human because they have not met a particular socially constructed standard. I have been the child not understanding why this is the case, since my blind grandfather still took me to the park and won every time we played cards. I loved riding on the back of my aunt’s wheelchair because she knew how much I hated walking, whilst we looked for every ramp we could find to see how fast we could go. Whilst not to the same extent as some, I have been at the receiving end of ecclesiastical judgement as to my purported lack of faith, when prayer has not provided an immediate “cure” for depression. It is these, amongst other experiences, that led me to question church leaders as to why disabled people are treated as “less than” by many in the Christian church, their bodies or minds a problem to be solved. Often the response would be “But it is in the Bible” and that is where I felt I needed to begin: what standards are bodies measured against? Is disability always depicted negatively in New Testament writings? Or are there elements of disability representation that are overlooked when modern corporeal judgements are assumed?

[13] "Other" is used here as the equivalent to an adjective describing someone outside of social or cultural acceptability, with the nominal equivalent being “the other” or person in possession of the quality or state of “otherness.”

Disability studies, as a discipline, is essential to the consideration of New Testament writings which mention any kind of corporeality, but particularly where a negative judgement is made against an embedded standard. Disability might seem an anachronistic concept, but it is one based on corporeal judgements. Corporeal judgements are evident in New Testament writings. In the same way that we are prepared to study gender, sexuality, and ethnicity in historic texts,[14] disability must be part of any textual examination.

This is not to say that applying "disability" to New Testament writings is straightforward,[15] but just because it is challenging does not mean we should avoid asking important questions. Non-disabled scholars, in particular, need to listen and learn from those with embodied experience. Without scholars objecting to marginalising interpretations of texts, these "traditional" interpretations continue and underpin much of the modern theological and ecclesiastical work that takes place.

'Theology of disability is…dominated by non-disabled scholars,'[16] who cannot understand the embodied experience of disability. I recognise that I am one of those scholars and, as such, I will focus on the narrative portrayal of disability. Where it is germane to relate narrative to embodied experience, I will

[14] Ellen Adams, 'Disability Studies and the Classical Body: The Forgotten Other - Introduction', in *Disability Studies and the Classical Body: The Forgotten Other*, ed. Ellen Adams (London - New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 1-36: p. 1.

[15] Adams, 'The Forgotten Other', p. 8. The relationship between historical cultures and our own 'rests on shifting sands' as both are 'continually re-evaluated.'

[16] Naomi Lawson Jacobs and Emily Richardson, *At the Gates: Disability, Justice and the Churches* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2022), p. 133.

defer to the voices of those with such authority, such as John Hull,[17] Amy Kenny,[18] Candida Moss,[19] Naomi Lawson Jacobs and Emily Richardson. Throughout what follows I examine some of the biblical texts I was raised on, often explained to me from the stance of “disability as deficit;” they were problematic to me, but I never questioned what I was taught, because you didn’t question “the Bible”. However, as stated previously, biblical texts are ones that can and must be questioned. Reading historical literature uncritically, without seeking to understand cultural context, leads to the reading in of our own, modern prejudices.[20] There is a danger we are creating a continuous loop of interpretation, an echo chamber of sorts: many aspects of modern ableism are based on interpretations of biblical texts, interpretations themselves based on ableist assumptions.

Terminology

A major consideration when discussing disability is that the 'fluidity of our language for disability reflects in part the discomfort of the dominant culture with

[17] John Hull, *In the Beginning There Was Darkness* (London: SCM Press, 2001); John M. Hull, ‘Difficult Texts: Matthew 23.16-26 - Blindness as a Term of Abuse’, in *Theology*, vol. 117.1 (2014), pp. 34-36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X13510230>

[18] Amy Kenny, *My Body Is Not a Prayer Request* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2022).

[19] Candida R. Moss, *Divine Bodies: Resurrecting Perfection in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2019); Moss, ‘Mark and Matthew’; Candida R. Moss, ‘Heavenly Healing: Eschatological Cleansing and the Resurrection of the Dead in the Early Church’, in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 79.4 (2011), pp. 991-1017.

[20] Mikeal C. Parsons, *Body and Character in Luke and Acts: The Subversion of Physiognomy in Early Christianity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), p. 73.

talking about issues that people fear or don't understand.'[21] The use of the term "disability" is often generic, in terms of attempting to be inclusive of a whole spectrum of experience. It effectively ignores the variety of experience, whilst paying attention to the variation of those not included within the point of reference. Yet those who experience disability 'resist generalization'[22] and, as Lennard J. Davis states, the term “disabled” is ‘used to obscure or repress the fact that disability is not a static category but one which expands and contracts to include “normal” people as well.’[23] The term “differently-abled” is also inappropriate because it ‘strictly needs to be applied to everyone, since all people, not just those who are paraplegic or autistic, are differently abled.’[24] It also can be seen as a euphemism for “disability” or used to try and hide a reductive attitude.[25] What is directly referenced in New Testament writings is a person’s apparent impairment, whatever it is about their corporeality that is judged to be “other” or to be in contrast to an expected standard. These will be referred to by specific detail where possible, using the more general “impairment” if not. “Disability” is understood, in what follows, to be created around the impairment and not by it.

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[21] Amos. Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church: A New Vision of the People of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 8.

[22] Yong, *The Bible, Disability and the Church*, p. 9.

[23] Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (London - New York: Verso, 1995), p. xv.

[24] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. xiii.

[25] Nancy L. Eiesland, *The Disabled God: Towards a Liberatory Theology of Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), p. 26.

Language is powerful and 'our choice of terminology is inherently problematic.'[26] It is important to 'not succumb to the linguistic trap of reducing people to their disabilities.'[27] Phrases such as "the deaf" or "the blind" de-personalise individuals by referring to them as their impairment.[28] Although Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer avoid person first language, such as the phrase "people with disability" because they say that it 'blurs the conceptual division between impairment and disability,'[29] Davis argues that "person with disabilities" is to be preferred since it 'implies a quality added to someone's personhood rather than the…reduction of the person to the disability.'[30] Identity-first language is 'used by UK-based disability campaigners,' so this research follows their example.[31] Where a New Testament text refers to a group of individuals by their impairment, this is presented as a quotation, such as "the blind" or "the lame," because the grouping is relevant to organisation of corporeality within the text, yet the depersonalisation needs to be noted as linguistically exclusionary.

There are also points at which identity first language is not necessarily appropriate. An example of this is in discussing John 5.1-15, as there is not

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[26] David Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-Reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), p. 16.

[27] Yong, *The Bible, Disability and the Church*, p. 9.

[28] Colin Barnes and Geof Mercer, *Exploring Disability* (Cambridge - Malden: Polity Press, 2010), p. 11.

[29] Barnes and Mercer, p. 11.

[30] Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*, p. xiii.

[31] Lawson Jacobs and Richardson, pp. 25–26. It is also recognised that 'Not all disabled people use the same language' and may define themselves differently.

enough information as to the precise nature of the person's situation. The person who is healed in John 5 has a mobility impairment and is frequently referred to as "the paralysed man," though not by the text itself: to call them "the paralysed man," when we do not know whether or not they were paralysed, reads in a description from traditional understandings. In cases where identity is not made specific, mostly where there are cases of assumed paralysis in instances of impaired mobility, or where a particular body part is paralysed, characters are referred to as "the man with impaired mobility" or "the man with the paralysed hand". With regards to impairments relating to the reasoning process, the example of *At the Gates* is followed: "people with intellectual impairment" or "people with learning disabilities".[32]

Impairment is judged in opposition to what is considered "normate" by a society. Rosemarie Garland Thomson coined the adjective "normate" to designate the 'social figure' which constitutes the assumed identity of those who identify their 'bodily configurations' as adhering to culturally constructed requirements.[33] Despite the reality being that normate is actually 'a very narrowly defined profile,' meaning that there is no simple normate/deviant dichotomy,[34] a

[32] Lawson Jacobs and Richardson, p. 30. Lawson Jacobs and Richardson, as disabled scholars, have outlined terminologies generally preferred by the disabled voices they have collated, thereby respecting the persons to whom they are referring and their preference. It is obviously impossible to reflect the preference of a person in antiquity, but approaching means of reference with respect, towards the preferences of those with the best understanding, seems the most appropriate way to approach this contentious issue.

[33] Rosemarie Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* (New York - Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 8.

[34] Garland Thomson, pp. 8-9.

normate perspective can be identified as the one assumed by those not considering themselves to have a disability. The term normate is used within this research to refer to a perspective without experience or awareness of disability, designating 'the privileged subject position of the supposedly (or temporarily) able-bodied person and the culture that valorizes' that position.[35] Normate within New Testament writings are those not judged to be "other."

Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 begins by outlining the theoretical framework which guides this thesis. The germane historical context is provided, as well as an outline of the relevance of the cultural model of disability to textual analysis of New Testament writings. Importantly, definitions are given regarding the concepts of metanarrative of disability and narrative prosthesis, as applied to this research.

Following this, the general *status quaestionis* of discussions around the portrayal of disability in New Testament writings is provided, as a background to the application of the theoretical framework to the biblical texts examined in this research. It outlines key aspects of relevant research on identifying the "ideal" and the relationship between "mind" and corporeality, as well as the presentation of impairment as "other" within interpretations of texts.

Chapters 2 to 7 contain textual analysis conducted in response to the research question outlined above. There are different ways that this could be organised, especially considering that body/mind is a modern separation. An

[35] Dolmage, p. 22.

organisational distinction is made between more physical aspects of corporeality (what modern readers would recognise as the body) and the reasoning function or process. This is because there are specific questions that arise relating to this aspect of corporeality.

The nature of ideals being evidenced by deviation from what is acceptable means that the discussion could have been structured by examining physical corporeality and then the function of the reasoning process. Disability is a judgement of “other” and is made against an ideal or standard. The presence of that standard needs to be evidenced prior to the discussion of corporeal deviance, hence why chapters 2 and 3 are included first. By discussing the presence of ideal in both contexts prior to judgements of deviance, the structure attempts to acknowledge the textual foundation of judgement before attempting exegesis based on that information, and also not artificially separate the different aspects of corporeality any more than is practically necessary. However, it does mean that there are certain unavoidable overlaps, where key texts need to be mentioned in the establishment of the presence of an ideal and then discussed with more detail in later chapters pertaining specifically to judged deviance. The structure outlined below attempts to balance the requirements of the questions being asked with the acknowledgement that corporeality is perceived differently in New Testament writings.

Chapter 2 demonstrates that, within New Testament texts, there is an ideal or standard expected with regards to corporeality, specifically the physical body and its functionality. This provides evidence for the argument, in later

chapters, that the judgement of “other” is formed from a comparison with an ideal or standard. Whilst there is no specific text defining corporeal “perfection,” the concept permeates considerations of corporeality. The physical body might be stated to be relatively unimportant, in the Synoptic Gospels[36] for example, yet New Testament writings, including the Synoptics, contain expectations of completeness, functionality and strength. These expectations prove that corporeality is both valued and judged according to ideal standards. This chapter demonstrates how ideal corporeality can be glimpsed through the use of physicality in metaphor, both in descriptions using corporeality and in the use of representations of the body.

Chapter 3 examines how “mind” is actually a corporeal function within New Testament writings. It shows that the verbal descriptions of “reasoning” or “understanding” are more appropriate translations of a process, rather than the existing English representations of “mind” as a discrete entity. Being “in one’s right mind” is, therefore, more accurately described as reasoning correctly according to expected standards. Since ideal corporeality is not explicitly defined in New Testament writings, this chapter argues that presumed expectations are evident through exhortations of how an individual is expected not to reason and through negative evaluations of incorrect reasoning, such as being “out of one’s mind”. With the ideal standard of reasoning relating to a process, being “of the

[36] For the purposes of this project the Synoptics versus John division of the gospels will be loosely adhered to, as the relationship between the canonical gospels is too broad a discussion to take place here. However, for further information on the potential relationship between the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of John, see the collected essays contained within Eve-Marie Becker, Helen K. Bond, and Catrin H. Williams, eds., *John’s Transformation of Mark* (London - New York: T & T Clark, 2021).

same mind" is, therefore, not an instruction to have exactly the same opinions, but to follow the ideal reasoning process.

Having established the presence of ideal corporeal standards in chapters 2 and 3, chapters 4 and 5, then chapters 6 and 7, examine how corporeal judgements are made and the metanarratives involved. The first chapter in each pair provides a general picture of how negative judgements are outlined (physicality in chapter 4 and reasoning process in chapter 6), then a more detailed discussion is provided on a particular topic in the chapter that follows. Chapter 4 begins to discuss how bodies which deviate from those ideals are portrayed. It explores how negatively judged bodies can both uphold and challenge the metanarratives attributed to them. Although "disability" is a modern term, without an equivalent in the Greek of New Testament Writings, notional groupings of those who are designated as "other" are mentioned. Chapter 4 demonstrates how these groupings, whilst not evidencing "disability" as such, do show the presence of a boundary between social acceptability and "otherness". As part of discussing those grouped as "other," this chapter will consider the feast imagery in Luke 14 in terms of how the boundary of acceptability can function in placing "others" in relation to "acceptable" society.

Unnamed healings have a different narrative function to carefully curated and named deviant bodies, specifically those of Jesus and Paul. Healing narratives are a type of text situated on the boundary between bodies that are textually deemed in need of correcting and those that are not, in that "wrong" bodies are turned into "right" bodies. Often those healed are unnamed and

although unnamed individuals represent examples of narrative prosthesis, with the focus of the texts being mainly on Jesus, chapter 4 will show that gaps in description or ignored details provide the possibility of interpreting previously ignored agency. This chapter will also consider the implications of non-ideal bodies that are specifically not healed, in that no attempt is made to heal them, since these are bodies which challenge expectations of aiming towards ideal corporeality.

The idea of agency is built upon in chapter 5, through paying detailed attention to the metanarrative of “paralysis” in order to explore the functioning of a specific metanarrative of disability. The metanarrative of “paralysis” demonstrates the assumption that impaired mobility denotes voluntary dependence and lethargy, the responsibility for those characteristics being given to the individual affected. Texts such as John 5.1-15 have been interpreted as the subject needing healing being attributed with laziness of character, on account of their prolonged wait. However, alternative readings of both the individual’s actions and character are possible. Gaps in healing accounts are analysed to show that a “paralysed” character is placed in the narrative to be evidence of someone else’s power, but that looking beyond a metanarrative of disability continues to demonstrate that agency is present. The characteristics linguistically attributed to a character, by the metanarrative associated with their impairment, are not automatically present.

Chapter 6 returns to the wider perspective of deviance in corporeality. It provides examples where reasoning processes that do not adhere to an

expected standard are viewed as problematic corporeal functions and somehow defective. It discusses texts which indicate a problematic “mind” having little do with modern notions of mental health: correct intellectual operation within New Testament writings is judged according to standards of reasoning and understanding. This chapter will show how reasoning processes deemed problematic are not attributed to possession, but are associated with personal choice, false teaching and lack of faith, the responsibility being attributed to the individual. Intentionality in choosing problematic reasoning has eschatological consequences. Chapter 6 will also demonstrate that the boundary of acceptability, specifically with regards to impaired reasoning, varies between different New Testament writings. Some texts address members of the believing community who are not following correct reasoning processes, whilst others describe those without correct reasoning process as existing as “other,” either as heretics or as subhuman creatures.

Chapter 7 provides another focused examination of a particular metanarrative of disability. Lack of understanding and blindness are, historically, a blended metaphor. This chapter will consider how this corporeal metaphor is used in New Testament writings, as a means to look at aspects of problematic reasoning in more detail. The correlation between sight and understanding is both upheld and challenged by various narratives; lack of visual ocuity is not desirable in New Testament writings, but there are those considered “blind” who display understanding, as well as occasions where “blindness” is either an occasion for teaching or a punishment. This chapter will also demonstrate how

the specific word “blind” correlates to a negative metanarrative. Paul’s lack of sight is never defined as “blind” and, therefore, the writer of Acts never associates him with the metanarrative of blindness.

Overall, this thesis evidences that assumed corporeal expectations are present within New Testament writings and that “disability” can be identified within New Testament writings through the narrative judgement of “otherness,” against those assumed corporeal standards. Each text demonstrates separate embedded expectations, but this thesis shows a commonality between New Testament writings in that metanarratives are associated with the various impairments mentioned. However, where a disabled individual has the status of “other” conferred upon them, there is space within texts for metanarratives to be both used and challenged, allowing for more nuanced interpretations of New Testament writings concerning disability.

CHAPTER 1

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The nature of examining the portrayal of disability in New Testament texts requires an interdisciplinary approach, since there are issues which cannot be addressed within a single discipline:[37] aspects of biblical studies, literary theory and disability studies are all relevant. Irene De Jong comments that theories should be 'applied to texts' for the purposes of sharpening and enriching our interpretation, never becoming 'a straightjacket'.[38] So instead of a rigid or prescriptive approach, this research uses the background of the three aforementioned disciplines to attempt to bring to the fore what has been left implicit, unexamined or both, with regards to what can be identified as disability in New Testament writings. The ethical and/or political motivation behind being informed by disability studies does not mean a distortive approach; what it does allow is the asking of crucial questions about New Testament textual illustrations and accounts.[39]

Both English translations of New Testament writings and the NA28 have been used in the textual analysis for this project. This thesis has been and will be read by non-specialists, some of whom use reading technology on account of visual impairment. With interdisciplinarity and accessibility being essential, to

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[37] Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002), p. 15.

[38] Irene De Jong, *Narratology and Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). p. v.

[39] Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary Theory and the New Testament* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 124.

facilitate all readers biblical quotations will be provided in English (with the NA28 Greek in brackets) for the ease of using adaptive technology.[40] English translations will be from the NRSV, unless otherwise stated. There are occasions where the Greek cannot be easily translated and the Greek term must be used, but this is avoided for the above reasoning where possible.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

This thesis contributes to the field of biblical studies by highlighting how disability can be examined within New Testament writings, particularly by engaging with disability studies and the concept of metanarrative.[41] Acknowledging that the corpus of the canonical New Testament contains material that varies in genre, as well as purpose, this research is deliberately interdisciplinary, making an 'eclectic methodology' essential.[42] This theoretical framework outlines the principal concepts relevant to the overall thesis: where specific additional information is needed for a particular chapter, it will be located there.

[40] Not all reading technology used by readers of this thesis can easily adapt to the NA28 Greek text, hence the formatting decisions described here.

[41] As mentioned elsewhere, metanarratives of disability is a concept not previously applied to biblical texts.

[42] Jaime Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John, and Revelation', in *The Bible and Disability - A Commentary*, eds. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), pp. 333-378: p. 334. Although methodologically Clark-Soles is referring to the suite of Johannine New Testament texts, the approach is equally valid when approaching a range of texts from elsewhere in the New Testament corpus.

1.1.1 Historical Context

In antiquity ‘the norm was embodied in different but connected ways,’ allowing recognition and representation of disability.[43] Whilst it is true that disability is a modern category and there is no equivalent term in ancient Greek,[44] this does not mean that New Testament writings do not contain references to what we would consider to be disability. Although 'One should not expect to find a unitary biblical view of the body or “disability",'[45] and it is important not to synthesise the different viewpoints 'encoded' in the text,[46] it is possible to consider New Testament writings in terms of how they evaluate corporeality.

No real recorded discussion of the lived experience of disability took place and, therefore, there is ‘no trace in the record of any consciousness’ of disability identity.[47] This lack of “voice” means that it is impossible to accurately recreate the lived experience of figures depicted in New Testament writings:[48] it would be arrogant to assume to know their perspective. Textual representations are all we

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[43] Dolmage, p. 23.

[44] Anna Rebecca Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body: Representations of Disability in Early Christian Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2018), p. 12.

[45] David Tabb Steward, 'Sexual Disabilities in the Hebrew Bible' in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, eds. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) pp. 67-87: p. 69.

[46] Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper, 'Introduction', in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, eds. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) pp. 1-11: p. 6.

[47] Robert Garland, *The Eye of the Beholder* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2010), p. xii.

[48] Saul M. Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew Bible - Interpreting Mental and Physical Difference* (Cambridge - New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 3.

have, but these represent attitudes towards disabled people, not their experiences.

The perspective of the writer naturally influences the message or depiction of events. That writer cannot be separated from culturally constructed values, even of those they are in opposition to. For example, to simply say the writer of Luke 'rejects the ritualistic implications of the illness in favour of a medical interpretation'[49] would ignore the ritual within the society that has influenced the writer of Luke. New Testament writings contain socially constructed standards, as well as the view of the writer and any potential message. Messaging can be either explicitly argued for or against, or be present implicitly within the author's chosen language. Embedded linguistic values, social or cultural, do not have to directly correspond to the stance taken by an author.

Anna Rebecca Solevåg outlines how, in ancient Mediterranean cities, 'statues of gods and rulers would make clear what the ideal body looked like' thereby communicating what corporeal perfection was expected to be.[50] Nobody would meet those standards and some individuals would "deviate" from them 'more conspicuously than others;'[51] there may not have been an ability/disability dichotomy in antiquity, but individuals would be judged as "other" if they were further away from a culturally constructed ideal than the supposed normative

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[49] Annette Weissenrieder, 'The Plague of Uncleanness? The Ancient Illness Construct "Issue of Blood" in Luke 8.43-48' in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, eds. Wolfgang Stegeman, Bruce J. Malina and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), pp. 207-222: p. 207.

[50] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 1.

[51] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 1.

range. One of the current issues in biblical discussions on the portrayal of disability is that, whilst it is acknowledged that 'deformity is in the eye of the beholder,'[52] the standard which "other" is measured against is not considered. Instead, an assumption is taken regarding basic human reactions.[53] Consequently, 'anachronistic assumptions about modern standards of normalcy'[54] have been used in the interpretation and analysis of New Testament writings. This research will begin by asking whether a corporeal ideal exists within New Testament texts. There is relatively little evaluative corporeal reference, therefore not allowing ideal standards to be constructed for each text, but analysing available references will show the presence of an ideal that is textually used for a judgement of "other". This will not be for the purposes of establishing a dichotomy, since each New Testament book or letter must be acknowledged as constructing the body and any connected ideal in its own way.[55] Solevåg's argument that there is a spectrum of distances from an ideal, from the perspective that 'the idea of attainable perfection…is modern,'[56] predicates there must be a starting point from which distance is measured and against which the judgement of "other" is made. Judgement establishes the point where the distance is deemed to be too great.

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[52] Robert Garland, p. 1.

[53] Robert Garland, p. 2.

[54] Martha L. Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus : Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 31.

[55] Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 3.

[56] Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus* (2013), p. 37.

Corporeality is assumed to include both the modern aspects of “physical” and “mental”. Modern dichotomies ‘did not exist in the ancient world as dichotomies,’[57] but that does not mean questions should not be asked regarding the areas to which they relate. In this research, “mind” is initially considered separately to “body” only because, firstly, very specific questions need to be asked regarding how “mind” is referred to in New Testament writings. As a consequence of this, negative judgements of what is referred to as “mind” become specific questions of functionality. Additionally, modern distinctions, such as between mental illness and intellectual disability, were not recognised within ancient societies according to the evidence available.[58] Interest largely centred on whether a person was deemed “other,” so it was not necessary to examine the differences between those outside of the ideal, the crux was that they did not fit into the expected normate range.

Retrospective diagnosis is difficult and can be naïve, particularly if there is a failure to recognise 'the deep divergences between ancient and modern categories,'[59] but it is also dangerous to conclude that there is no connection with modern experience at all. Using Edgar Kellenberger's approach, that of attempting to examine intellectual disability whilst 'being aware of the danger of

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[57] Dale B. Martin, p. 3.

[58] Edgar Kellenberger, ‘Learning Difficulties: Intellectual Disability in the Ancient Near East, Classical, and Late Antiquity’, in *A Cultural History of Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (London - New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 117-136: p. 120.

[59] Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties’, p. 129.

imposing modern concepts on ancient culture,'[60] shows that it is not necessarily anachronistic to look for aspects of disability, since they must have existed: the issue is the avoidance of imposing modern value judgements on the portrayal of those aspects once they are found.

1.1.2 Models of Disability and Ableism

Societies, both ancient and modern, 'have bodily ideals.'[61] Whilst approaches to those ideals can vary, disability is constructed according to whether a corporeal state[62] fits within the boundaries of what is considered normate. Effectively a body or corporeality is inside or outside of a judgement boundary. The modern medical model of disability is not appropriate to New Testament writings, since the healthy to unhealthy binary cannot be measured and diagnosed retrospectively. The right or wrong body of a religious model is relevant, in terms of the divine element ascribed to the cause of an impairment; boundaries between medical and religious understanding in ancient societies were permeable, if there at all. Joel S. Baden describes a religious model of disability, with respect to the Hebrew Bible, as one in which disability is 'the result of divine anger or punishment,' where the person with a disability is 'demonized

[60] Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties', p. 129.

[61] Adams, 'The Forgotten Other', p. 13.

[62] As mentioned elsewhere, New Testament understandings of "mind" would be included within corporeality, given that reasoning was a process taking place within the body.

and ostracized for their disability.'[63] It is not 'uncommon' for religious perspectives to 'mimic' the medical model, in the sense of disabling conditions being linked with an 'individual spiritual deficiency.'[64] However, New Testament writings do not always present such a clarity of distinction and the "ideal" is not explicitly presented.[65]

If, as Caroline Husquin suggests, the body is 'a truly social construct contingent on communities,' then those contextual communities would have created their own standards of corporeal "wholeness" and functionality according to traits valued at that point in time.[66] It is not possible, by virtue of historical distance, to argue as Husquin does that the criteria used to designate a body as atypical 'must certainly have evolved in Antiquity itself.'[67] Yet first and second century societies must have had "ideal" standards: Myroslaw Tataryn and Maria Truchan-Tataryn assert that disability's 'negative stigma' is derived 'not from the

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[63] Joel S. Baden, 'The Nature of Barrenness in the Hebrew Bible', in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, ed. by Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), pp. 12–27 (p. 20).

[64] Darla Schumm and Michael Stolzfus, 'Editors' Introduction', in *Disability in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Darla Schumm and Michael Stolzfus (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. xi–xxii: p. xiv.

[65] It should be mentioned at this point that 'the concept of religion' is not as timeless as often presumed. Within first and second century cultures there were not separate spheres of society, private belief etc., with separated "religion" being somewhat anachronistic to those cultures. See Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2013); Brent Nongbri, 'Dislodging "Embedded" Religion: A Brief Note on a Scholarly Trope', in *Numen*, vol. 55 (2008), pp. 440-460. The point here, though, is that there is an element of right and wrong bodies within the so-called religious model of disability, with impaired bodies being the result of divine judgement.

[66] Caroline Husquin, 'Atypical Bodies: Extraordinary Body Treatment and Consideration', in *A Cultural History of Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (London - New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 15–30: p. 16.

[67] Husquin, p. 16.

specific attributes of individuals, but from the way society is structured to privilege some types of bodies or intellectual capacities.'[68] The social and/or cultural judgement or attitude shown to those individuals deemed to exist too far from that constructed "ideal" could be considered as them being "disabled" according to their own contemporary standards.

Originally stemming from disability activism, the social model rejects the notion that there is a deficiency or problem with the individual, instead asserting that disability arises from modern society's failure to recognise or accommodate human diversity.[69] Disability, within this context, is presented as mainstream society not being organised in such a way as to allow the participation of those with impairments. The focus is not on an impaired body, which is not and cannot be a single entity, but instead on the 'series of attitudes.'[70] Molly C. Haslam summarises the social model's definition of disability as 'a stigmatized social condition needing redress through attitudinal changes' and the dismantling of 'discriminatory stereotypes.'[71]

When applying disability studies to New Testament writings, and by association societies of first and second century antiquity, it is the wider and less dichotomous scope of a cultural model of disability which allows for the

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[68] Myroslaw Tataryn and Maria Truchan-Tataryn, *Discovering Trinity in Disability* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2013), p. 36.

[69] Barnes and Mercer, p. 29.

[70] Lennard J. Davis, *Bending Over Backwards: Disability, Dismodernism and Other DIfficult Positions* (New York - London: New York University Press, 2002), p. 22.

[71] Molly C. Haslam, *A Constructive Theology of Intellectual Disability: Human Being as Mutuality and Response* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), p. 11.

examination of how “the other” is portrayed, the identity of “disability” effectively being created through that portrayal.[72] Cultural values are embedded within texts and these texts create, curate, and evaluate identity boundaries. The status of “other” is culturally positioned ‘at the extremes of social value’[73] and can be an indication of ‘cultural oppression’ on the basis of constructed values.[74] For the purposes of this research, the cultural model of disability will be considered as: impairment and disability not being clearly defined categories with an automatic causal link;[75] impairment being used to create categorisation and then form identity boundaries; and corporeal identity boundaries defining what is normate, as well as what deviates from cultural expectations in relation to the ideal. Disability is ‘a culturally defined experience, owing its very existence to the beliefs and practices built around the ways in which society responds to human difference.’[76] The modern concept named “disability” is technically without an equivalent in antiquity, yet the beliefs and practices creating cultural identity boundaries according to human difference are evident in New Testament writings. As Louise A. Gosbell contends, New Testament writers ‘use disability as

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[72] Adams, ‘The Forgotten Other’, p. 19.

[73] Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Cultural Locations of Disability* (Chicago - London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 5.

[74] Snyder and Mitchell, pp. 5-7.

[75] Anne Waldschmidt, ‘Disability Goes Cultural: The Cultural Model of Disability as an Analytical Tool’, in *Culture - Theory - Disability: Encounters Between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies*, eds. Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo Berressem, and Moritz Ingwersen (Verlag: Transcript, 2017), pp. 19-27: p. 24.

[76] David Bolt, *Cultural Disability Studies in Education* (London - New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 11.

a means of understanding, organizing, and interpreting the experiences of humanity,'[77] making judgements of "other" without using modern terminology, relying instead on preconceived ideas of, and connotations associated with, impairment.

1.1.3 Metanarratives

A disability metanarrative occurs within a text where 'an overriding narrative' displaces agency: normate reductionism assumes 'that impairment cancels out other qualities, thereby reducing the complex person to a single attribute' or impairment and to the assumed connotations intrinsically ascribed to that attribute within the language of a text.[78] From a modern perspective, it is evident that disability metanarratives expand into a wide range of aspects of the cultural imagination and are 'largely defined by non-disabled people.'[79] Metanarratives of disability is a concept that is not applied to New Testament writings by scholars. However, contextually specific disability metanarratives can be identified as present in texts, even though temporal distance obscures the exact implications of those metanarratives.

Although 'it can be useful to focus on a particular condition when illustrating or explaining the metanarrative,'[80] in the case of New Testament

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[77] Louise A. Gosbell, *The Poor, the Crippled, the Blind, and the Lame* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), p. 22.

[78] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 10.

[79] David Bolt, 'Prologue', in *Metanarratives of Disability: Culture, Assumed Authority, and the Normative Social Order*, ed. David Bolt (London - New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. xvi–xix: p. xvii.

[80] Bolt, 'Prologue', p. xvii.

writings, what must be established first is whether metanarratives are used when a judgement of "other" is made. Consequently, chapter 4 will establish the presence of metanarratives and then chapter 5 will consider "paralysis" as a particular metanarrative or group of metanarratives. Likewise, chapter 6 will consider problematic reasoning from a more general, overview perspective, then chapter 7 will examine the specific association between blindness and ignorance.

Within the narratives of New Testament writings few people with a disability are referred to by their personal name,[81] suggesting that metanarratives of disability replace personal narratives with culturally created and understood ideas.[82] The lack of a holistic "disability" category necessitates the consideration of which specific metanarrative might be relevant in individual cases, rather than searching for a general metanarrative of disability. Where relevant, the concept of metanarratives will be used to evaluate whether normate reductionism is accompanied by nominal displacement, as 'the strategic setting aside' of individualised experiences and norms 'in favour of labels,'[83] and to examine what effect an acknowledgement of this could have on potential interpretations.

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[81] Bartimaeus is technically the only named subject of healing in the Gospels. Zechariah, in Luke 1, is made "mute" and then has his voice restored. Zacchaeus, in Luke 19, remains "short in stature." Paul has his ability to see taken away, in Acts 9, and then returned; he, autobiographically discusses his "marks of Jesus" and "thorn in the flesh" elsewhere. Jesus' resurrected body displays impairment in John 20.

[82] Owen Barden and Steven J. Walden, 'The Metanarrative of Learning Disability: Vulnerability, Unworthiness, and Requiring Control', in *Metanarratives of Disability: Culture, Assumed Authority, and the Normative Social Order*, ed. David Bolt (London - New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 77-93: p. 77.

[83] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 36.

In those New Testament writings where impairment is portrayed, with that impairment being deemed negative and "other" in some way, consideration is given to whether the impaired person has any agency within the narrative: is agency completely suppressed by the social values embedded in the narrative, or can overlooked elements of agency, made invisible by the employed metanarrative, be reconstructed? Metanarrative is often evident within New Testament writings through the use of recurrent tropes, such as the dependent and ignorant blind beggar or paralysis indicating passivity and lethargy; whilst there are occasions where these tropes are adhered to, there are also occasions where such tropes are challenged within the narrative. When analysing the implicit use of metanarratives in the judgement of "other", tropes will need to be considered from both the perspective of the linguistically embedded social values and the questions raised by the sequence of narrative events, or gaps therein. The theory proposed here is that whilst metanarratives of disability within the texts embed certain value judgements, there is space "behind" that metanarrative where it is possible for the metanarrative to be challenged and agency to be found.[84]

Since metanarratives are inherently linked to culturally constructed standards, of which any author is at least exposed to via their language usage,

[84] Louise Lawrence analyses how the identity of characters with sensory disabilities can be reclaimed. Instead of being 'stigmatized as "other"' and seen as 'nothing more that objectified beneficiaries of divine healing,' Lawrence proposes that disabled characters can be recast 'as individuals capable of employing strategies to destabilize the stigma imposed upon them and tactical performers who can subversively achieve their own social goals.' She also outlines how listening to disabled experience can affect biblical interpretation, leading to the rejection of nondisabled experience automatically being the force of a metaphor. See Louise J. Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 1-2 and 41-42.

any analysis of metanarratives of disability within New Testament writings must out of necessity sit somewhere between New Criticism, where the meaning of the text exists within itself[85] without consideration of the author's original intent,[86] and New Historicism, aiming to 'situate literary texts within their historical contexts.'[87] We cannot ascertain whether New Testament writings accurately evidence a particular historical society's metanarratives; there is a difference in "standards" between the potential experience of a purportedly historical character and the portrayal of said character in the narrative. Any metanarrative is evaluated as evidence of the social values of the narrative itself, leading to the potential for analysing the "empty space" or "missing details" left out according to the assumptions of the metanarrative; identifying those empty spaces can allow for aspects of agency, in some situations, to be reasserted.

Additionally, the socially and contextually specific nature of the metanarratives being examined mean that it is the metanarrative within the texts and not the modern narrative that will be the focus of any analysis.[88] New Testament writings leave out details relevant to embodied experiences that are not normate experiences, making the texts themselves ableist, insofar as a modern term can be applied. The common narrative perspective might include

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[85] Michal Beth Dinkler, *Literary* Theory, p. 53.

[86] J. A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p. 544.

[87] Dinkler, *Literary Theory*, p. 141.

[88] In as far as it is possible, given that true objectivity is, despite being an admirable aspiration, largely unattainable.

the assumption of “lack” by that normate subject position,[89] but identification of a negative “othering” is not automatically all encompassing. Metanarratives can be challenged when a character is given laudable abilities that the metanarrative itself would not permit. In one way, the extraordinary nature of the challenge proves the metanarrative, since what is laudable is not ordinarily associated with impairment. However, each example of challenge needs to be considered using a multi-layered approach; the question must be asked as to whether New Testament writings might not also attach positive qualities or abilities to negative corporeal judgements as a way to concurrently dispute embedded values, even if they appear to simultaneously uphold a negative metanarrative.

A metanarrative often functions via the connotations of particular words and “conditions,” from the perspective of what is effectively normate reductionism, to the extent that in the majority of cases there is nominal displacement and narrative prosthesis. Disabled characters are referred to by their impairment, since it is the impairment that provides their function within the narrative, such as proving the divine identity of Christ. On the rare occasions where disabled characters are named narrative prosthesis still occurs, but to varying degrees and effects, as well as for different purposes. Additionally, where a character is named, whether normate reductionism occurs needs to be specifically examined. Despite the importance of the impairment to the narrative,

[89] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 17. Lack can be ascribed to the normate subject position, through the use of terminology such as *people who have visual impairments* and *people who do not have visual impairments*.

can that named New Testament character avoid elements of the metanarrative to which they are subject?

1.1.4 Narrative Prosthesis

The term “narrative prosthesis” was coined by David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder to refer to ‘both the prevalence of disability representation and the myriad meanings ascribed to it.’[90] A ‘textual prosthesis’ provides a narrative shortcut to an intended meaning, ‘removing the unsightly from view’[91] without necessarily having to take into account the implications of the prosthesis itself. This process is particularly problematic in representations of disability where impairment is used as symbolic imagery or as a characterisation tool.[92] Disabled individuals in New Testament writings are generally present in the narrative to explain another character in more detail, or function as a catalyst for the plot. Although this is not the case in every reference to a disabled individual, recognition of narrative prosthesis and its function, often within the context of a metanarrative, is essential when ‘artistic narratives play a key role in forwarding a logic or system of explanation’[93] surrounding impairment.

Literary dependence on disability, either as ‘a stock feature of characterization’ or ‘an opportunistic metaphorical device,’ views disability as a

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[90] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis - Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), p. 4.

[91] Mitchell and Snyder, p. 8.

[92] Mitchell and Snyder, p. 16.

[93] Mitchell and Snyder, p. 26.

problem that needs to be solved. Though seemingly socially invisible, disabled characters have been pervasively used in literature 'since antiquity'[94] as a means of somehow resolving deviance or physiognomically displaying moral character.[95] Rhetoric, as a method to persuade,[96] within New Testament writings is concerned with good and evil, positive and negative judgement, which impairment is used to represent. Where narrative prosthesis or a particular metanarrative of disability is evident, a narrative's perspective on corporeality can be examined.

1.2 Status Quaestionis

'To write about disability is to reconsider our understandings of human embodiment'[97] and *The Disabled God*, published by Nancy L. Eiesland in 1994, was seminal in significantly challenging corporeal perspectives of God. Though essentially a theological text, *The Disabled God* highlights how New Testament writings can both support and contradict a causal relationship between sin and impairment.[98] Eiesland introduces the idea that a liberatory theology can deconstruct 'dominant symbolic meanings,' reconstructing them to be 'liberatory' for those marginalized and 'unsettling' for those previously dominant.[99] Amos

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[94] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 29.

[95] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, pp. 29-30.

[96] Dinkler, *Influence*, p. 4.

[97] Deborah Beth Creamer, *Disability and Christian Theology: Embodied Limits and Constructive Possibilities* (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

[98] Eiesland, p. 72.

[99] Eiesland, p. 98.

Yong, in *The Bible, Disability and the Church*, raises the issue of 'normate prejudice' in biblical interpretation, suggesting instead that it is possible and appropriate to use a disability hermeneutic, 'informed by the experiences of disability' and aiming to avoid readings which exclude.[100] Inclusive readings are possible, but ableist language cannot always be turned into something it is not.

Although the concept of metanarratives of disability has previously not been applied to New Testament writings, that is not to say texts have not been looked at from a disability perspective. What follows below is a brief outline of the *status quaestionis*, regarding analytical focus on disability and its relationship to ideal corporeality.

1.2.1 The general status of discussions on "disability" in New Testament texts

Despite biblical texts being frequently citied within disability studies, biblical scholarship is not,[101] possibly because twentieth century biblical scholars 'rarely understood disability as worthy of critical enquiry.'[102] Engagement or interaction between the two disciplines effectively only began in the late 1990s or early 2000s,[103] but 'the majority of the published biblical scholarship that uses disability studies has focused on the Hebrew Bible rather than the New

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[100] Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, pp. 13-14.

[101] Moss and Schipper, p. 2.

[102] Moss and Schipper, p. 5.

[103] Joel D. Estes, 'Imperfection in Paradise: Reading Genesis 2 through the Lens of Disability and a Theology of Limits', in *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, vol. 38, (2016), pp. 1-21: p. 2.

Testament.'[104] In *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, where Moss and Jeremy Schipper discuss that very issue in their introduction, only four of the eleven scholarly articles are focussed on New Testament texts and, of them, one is centred around post-colonial perspectives[105] and another is focussed on the task of trying to identify the 'thorn' in Paul's flesh, rather than looking into the attitudes towards disability contained within narratives.[106] Similarly, when the Society of Biblical Literature published a collection of essays entitled *This Abled Body*,[107] only three out of ten were about New Testament texts. More recently, *The Bible and Disability - A Commentary* has provided a more general overview covering the entire range of canonical biblical texts, with five out of twelve chapters focussing on the New Testament. However, the nature of allocating one chapter to Paul's letters, or one to Johannine literature, leads to chapters presenting a summary discussion of the issues involved, albeit with occasional detailed reference. None really look into the issue of why or how disability is examined in the context of the notion of the corporeal "ideal" or corporeal "perfection."

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[104] Moss and Schipper, p. 5.

[105] Warren Carter, '"The Blind, Lame and Paralyzed" (John 5:3): John's Gospel, Disability Studies, and Postcolonial Perspectives', in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, eds. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) pp. 129-150.

[106] Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Paul's Disability: The Thorn in His Flesh', in *Disability Studies and Biblical Literature*, eds. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) pp. 165-183.

[107] *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, eds. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

In her 2019 monograph, *Divine Bodies*, Moss examines the nature of the resurrected body and raises many interesting questions as to 'the intersection of identity and the body,'[108] asking how nonnormative or "disfigured" bodies within early Christian texts might be resurrected and what comments those bodies make on how embodiment should be perceived eschatologically. When taking the notion of bodies which vary from a standard back to a social context, what those bodies are measured against needs to be considered by that standard and not by importing more modern values. Meghan Henning builds on Moss's work by examining the intersection of gender and disability in depictions of damned bodies as potentially 'forever distinguished from the ideal, "able" body.'[109] From her perspective, there are implications for the value placed on earthly bodies. Resurrected bodies are often discussed theologically, but the inferences made from healed or perfected textual bodies ignores the importance of Jesus' impaired resurrected body[110] and the potentially subversive logic of texts which allude to potential diversity in the afterlife.[111]

1.2.2 Identifying "ideal" in New Testament texts

Joel D. Estes, in the opening of his 2016 article on Genesis 2, states that the consideration of disability is 'a necessary corrective to interpretations that

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[108] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 17.

[109] Henning, p. 17.

[110] Henning, p. 35.

[111] Henning, p. 117.

import into the text idealistic notions of bodily perfection.'[112] Whilst it is true that biblical scholarship has only 'begun to engage seriously with disability studies' relatively recently,[113] it is a mistake to assume that the notion of an ideal corporeality is imported into biblical texts. The acknowledgement that 'most attempts to do theological anthropology have [not] attended carefully enough to the assumptions about normative or ideal bodies'[114] and that this inattention 'impoverishes our reading of biblical texts'[115] is true for considerations of both Hebrew Bible and New Testament writings. The key idea, though, is that disability as "other" is judged against a socially constructed standard or ideal, which must have formed the background to the creation of these texts. Even within discussions of textual presentations of disability, there are few, if any, analyses of whether there is a corporeal ideal present and, if so, what elements of that ideal standard might be.

Most biblical scholars look at "body" and assume "healthy body" as the norm,[116] leading to a lack of recognition regarding 'the fluidity and variety of instantiations of human ability.'[117] Solevåg, in her 2018 monograph *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, contextualises a discussion of 'nonnormative bodies' by

[112] Estes, p. 1.

[113] Estes, p. 2.

[114] Estes, p. 3.

[115] Estes, p. 4.

[116] Creamer, p. 4.

[117] Creamer, p. 4.

beginning with the acknowledgement that in ancient Mediterranean cities there were representations of what an 'ideal body' would look like: there was no "normal" body, but an idea of perfection. Following on from this, Solevåg explicitly states that 'Most individual bodies moving through the streets of an ancient city would fall short of this ideal, but some would do so more conspicuously than others,'[118] providing an important frame of reference for New Testament writings; discussions focus on "nonnormative bodies" without going back and looking at "normative" or the "perfection" against which corporeal judgements are made within the texts. Variation from an ideal, instead of a binary approach to a normative standard, raises two important issues when it comes to biblical texts and disability. One issue is that the ideal standard is important within and for the narrative context, inevitably affecting possible interpretation, so it needs to form part of the discussion on the portrayal of disability in biblical texts. Another issue is that the audience of the text would not necessarily have been on the opposite side of an ideal/non-ideal binary.

1.2.3 The relationship between "mind" and an "ideal" corporeality

Physical and mental disability are generally looked at as two distinct fields of enquiry: where disability is considered by biblical scholars, too often that "divide" leads to the prioritisation of physical corporeality. In the introduction to *Jesus the Disabled God*, Jennifer Anne Cox simply mentions that 'Mental illness is often considered to be a form of disability, but consideration of that topic will be

[118] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 1.

left for another book,'[119] exemplifying the practical effects of artificially, or at least prematurely, demarcating out the discussion.

It is the dichotomy between the corporeal "ideal" and the corporeal "other" which initially creates the notion of disability, not the difference between physical and mental. The corporeal "unit" of the person is either within social expectations of an ideal or outside of those expectations. There are obviously differences between physical and mental aspects of disability, but the distinction between "ideal" and "other" in New Testament writings first divides people. Studies on the meanings of "perfection" have focussed solely on spirituality, without considering the implications of corporeal representations. This gap in investigation helps to create exclusive and discriminatory interpretations, by the lack of open discussion.

Eiesland raised the issue of 'the paucity of theological exploration of social, emotional, and intellectual disabilities [being] scandalous'[120] at the end of the twentieth century. Research in this area has been somewhat slow to expand, but Hans S. Reinders[121], John Swinton[122] and Macaskill[123] are providing pastoral insights for modern church communities. What appears to be generally missing

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[119] Jennifer Anne Cox, *Jesus the Disabled God* (Eugene, Oregon: Resource Publications, 2017) p. xi.

[120] Eiesland, p. 28.

[121] Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008).

[122] John Swinton, *Dementia: Living in the Memories of God* (London: SCM Press, 2017).

[123] Grant Macaskill, *Autism and the Church* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2019).

from the field is the literary and textual consideration of intellectual disability (ID) from the narrative perspective of Scripture. Kellenberger has been working in the field of ID and Early Christianity since the later twentieth century, but he is one of the few academics doing so.[124]

The Bible and Mental Health was published at the end of 2020; although not meant to be centred in the field of biblical studies, it does include six "Biblical Case Studies," two of which have New Testament writings as their specific focus. In her discussion on 'Paul, the Mind and the Mind of Christ,'[125] Paula Gooder discusses how "mind" was a different construct for the societies behind New Testament writings; moving back from Pauline literature to a broader focus, the definition of "mind as corporeal process" allows for wider interpretations from a textual perspective, which modern conceptions of a separate entity restrict.[126] ID within New Testament writings becomes part of corporeality and must be considered in terms of "ideal" and the consequent culturally-based evaluations.

1.2.4 Impairment and disability being presented as "other"

Jennifer L. Koosed and Darla Schumm argue that 'the metaphorical and literal depictions of broken bodies' in New Testament writings 'promote a

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[124] Edgar Kellenberger, 'Augustin Und Die Menschen Mit Einer Geistigen Behinderung: Der Theologe Als Beobachter Und Herausgeforderter',in *Theologische Zeitschrift*, vol. 67.1, pp. 56-66; Edgar Kellenberger, *Der Schutz Der Einfältigen. Menschen Mit Einer Geistigen Behinderung in Der Bibel Und in Weiteren Quellen* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2011); Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties', pp. 117-136.

[125] Paula Gooder, 'Paul, the Mind and the Mind of Christ', in *The Bible and Mental Health*, eds. Christopher C. H. Cook and Isabelle Hamley (London: SCM Press, 2020), pp. 74-82.

[126] Gooder is, to my knowledge, one of the only other scholars describing "mind" as a process.

definition of an individual's full membership in the Christian community that almost always excludes a person with disabilities.'[127] Though primarily focused on the Gospel of John, this assertion reflects the problem of dualism in Western thought.[128] The binary pairs indicating right and wrong are not necessarily present in New Testament writings considering corporeality: instead of right and wrong, the status of "other" is created by the evaluation of what is an acceptable or not acceptable distance from the "ideal."

More recently, in his 2021 argument for the re-examination of atonement theology, David McLachlan raises the dangerous historic link between disability and sin,[129] but at the same time asserts that 'if God's action at the cross were inherently inclusive of all humanity in all its variety, that would bring people with disabilities to the centre of the gospel.'[130] Biblical scholars working in the field of the representation of disability in biblical texts recognise the necessity of being aware of normate bias, but 'Scripture presents something of a mixed message on disability.'[131] Scholars must be prepared to accept there may be a "linguistic duality": language can conceivably contain more than one set of meanings, a duality in the sense that those concurrent meanings do not have to entirely

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[127] Jennifer L Koosed and Darla Schumm, 'Out of the Darkness: Examining the Rhetoric of Blindness in the Gospel of John', in *Disability in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Darla Schumm and Michael J. Stolzfus (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 77-91: p. 77.

[128] Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 19.

[129] David McLachlan, *Accessible Atonement: Disability, Theology, and the Cross of Christ* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021), p. 1.

[130] McLachlan, p. 4.

[131] McLachlan, p. 25.

agree. For example, there is potential for a more inclusive message to be expressed using prejudicial language, even with the message being communicated from an exclusionary context. The link between disability, sin and faith is often simply assumed, whilst those 'who would liberate disability from such normate hermeneutics struggle to make sense of the healing passages found in the Gospels.'[132]

According to Kerry H. Wynn, sin cannot be separated from disability, but there is no causal relationship;[133] despite this, many exegetes consider disability for the theological implications they can draw from it, as 'the context for sin that can lead to destruction, or a means to "reveal God's works."'[134] The standard interpretation of the healing narratives seems to be that they form 'an eschatologically oriented commentary on the relative merits of disability and able-bodiedness for the salvation of the individual person.'[135] Academic conversations on disability representation in New Testament writings have yet to peel back the layer of social or cultural evaluation, in terms of understanding how "other" is actually being created. When this is not done, modern readers import their own understanding of what constitutes "disability" into ancient texts, using their own judgements as to what functions as a "corporeal ideal."

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[132] Kerry H. Wynn, 'Johannine Healings and the Otherness of Disability', in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, vol. 34.1 (2007), 61-76: p. 61.

[133] Wynn, p. 64.

[134] Wynn, p. 74.

[135] Moss and Schipper, p. 1.

Saul M. Olyan writes that impairments ‘such as blindness, lameness, deafness, and muteness are frequently denigrated in biblical and cognate literatures.’ Those who have impaired sight, limited mobility, difficulty hearing or speaking ‘are often associated with devalued qualities such as weakness, dependency, helplessness, ineffectuality, and ignorance…with divine curse, rejection, and punishment…and with social marginality.'[136] Rather than assuming the texts of the canonical New Testament both include modern standards of normative/non-normative and are one dimensional, the narratives of these texts should be considered both ableist, according to contextually-specific standards, as well as containing the potential to be forward-thinking, once the contextually oriented language is taken into account. According to Annette Weissenrieder, 'Jesus functions as a "healer" of both physical and social bodies.'[137] If the body is the metaphor, it exists between two contextual domains, both of which may contain different textual messages, but this duality is often ignored. Currently, the possibility for disability to be a ‘preventative cure for sin rather than a mark of a sinful person is revolutionary,'[138] as is the recognition that ‘disabled bodies are accepted in the kingdom of God.'[139]

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[136] Saul M. Olyan, 'The Ascription of Physical Disability as a Stigmatizing Strategy in Biblical Iconic Polemics' in Disability *Studies and Biblical Literature*, eds. Candida R. Moss and Jeremy Schipper (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) pp. 89-102: p 91. Olyan’s work centres on Old Testament writings, but the evaluation is equally valid for equivalent New Testament characters.

[137] Weissenrieder, p. 207.

[138] Moss and Schipper, p. 2.

[139] Moss and Schipper, p. 1.

1.2.5 The Ideal as a Starting Point for Analysis

The boundary which impairment crosses to become disability, or the marker against which impairment is measured, within New Testament writings is rarely considered. This is despite the work taking place on analysing biblical texts through a disability lens, as has been outlined above. Before negative metanarratives can be examined, the values or standards on which they are based must be established as present. Consequently, the following two chapters will contemplate how ideal corporeality is presented in New Testament writings. Once the presence of an ideal is demonstrated, the chapters which follow will then analyse how deviance from an assumed ideal is portrayed.

CHAPTER 2

AN IDEAL NEW TESTAMENT BODY?[140]

From the perspective of considering disability within New Testament texts, it becomes evident that the judgement of "other" is formed from a comparison with an ideal or standard. Unlike Torahic texts, such as Leviticus 21 discussing physical defects, there are no specific texts defining a corporeal ideal, yet the concept permeates New Testament considerations of corporeality; various passages point to an implicit understanding of an "ideal body." David Clines argues that masculinity is 'hardly ever noticed or mentioned' by New Testament writers, necessitating the exercise of "consciousness-raising" in relation to patriarchy within texts.[141] Similarly, whilst acknowledging that disparate texts cannot and should not be homogenised in terms of their corporeal perspectives, questions must be asked as to what normate and potentially ableist values or assumptions are contained in metaphors and language that are often taken for granted, thereby raising consciousness of the textual issue.

As has previously been discussed, "disability" as a named concept is anachronistic to antiquity. However, whilst 'different societies construct the human body differently,'[142] we all effectively subscribe to a model of disability,

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[140] An earlier version of this chapter was delivered at the EABS Conference in August 2021.

[141] David Clines, 'The Scandal of a Male Bible', unpublished paper delivered as the Ethel M. Wood Lecture (King's College London, 24 February 2015) <https://youtu.be/sfXfeaC7WTE> [accessed 21 June 2021].

[142] Dale B. Martin, p. 3.

unconsciously or otherwise,[143] by virtue of the scrutiny placed on those we judge as "the other". It must be possible that although disability as a concept did not exist by name in New Testament societies, the notion of judging someone as different from a culturally constructed corporeal standard did. There are negative judgements of corporeality in New Testament texts, meaning that a set of standards had to be invoked in order to make that evaluation.

2.1 The Irony of an "Unimportant" Body

Verses such as Matthew 6.25, paralleled in Luke 12.22, where the reader is told not to worry about their body,[144] could be interpreted literally as treating the physical as unimportant in comparison to the spiritual. In the instruction, the reader or listener is encouraged to relinquish anxiety regarding the physicalities of life, such as food and clothing, and not to be concerned about the "body". The relative triviality of the body, is also apparently underlined by Matthew 10.28, paralleled in Luke 12.4, in the sense that killing the body (σῶμα), is not as dire as killing the soul (ψυχή). In this case, the context of ψυχή indicates that "life" in its non-somatic sense, by comparison with the physical body, is to be more valued. Mark 9.43-47, paralleled in Matthew 5.29-30, illustrates something of a hierarchy, by explaining how cutting off body parts but entering heaven is better than a physically complete body. It is worth mentioning, at this point, that there is some

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[143] Roy McCloughry and Wayne Morris, *Making a World of Difference* (London: SPCK, 2002), p. 8.

[144] Henning's current work, yet to be published, examines what 'Do not worry' and its usage of μεριμνάω as 'I worry' might specifically be referring to, in terms of the mental process taking place.

debate as to whether the injunctions in these verses should be read literally or figuratively,[145] however, despite the lack of a clear dualism between body and soul, in either case the physical aspect of life, the body, is valued less.

When New Testament texts are considered from a literary standpoint, narratives, at first glance, appear to reflect the notion of an unimportant physical body, in that physical descriptions of characters are rare.[146] However, two immediate observations challenge that notion of unimportance: physical bodies are healed in New Testament writings, mainly in the gospel healing narratives, and Paul utilises the metaphor of a functioning body to describe how he views believing community interactions and relationships should work. It is evident, therefore, that New Testament texts can portray bodies in terms of "right" and "wrong". Physical bodies cannot simply be dismissed as "unimportant" on the basis of verses which subordinate them to spiritual considerations; somatic aspects of corporeal "perfection" are not explicitly defined, but can be suggested or re-constructed from the references made to the body. "Otherness" is often used to define health or completeness, but what about first investigating the presence of standards which "otherness" is measured against?

[145] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 53–54. Moss' arguments will be discussed in further detail later on, in chapter 4.

[146] Mikael C. Parsons, "'Short in Stature": Luke's Physical Description of Zacchaeus', in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 47.1 (2001) pp. 50-57: p. 50.

2.2 Assumptions of Completeness

Matthew 6.3 contains the often quoted proverb regarding not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing, which commentaries tend to interpret as describing 'a tight circle of privacy'[147] or 'absolute secrecy.'[148] This may well be a correct interpretation, but since metaphors, by explaining one "unknown" conceptual domain in terms of another which is "known," bring 'into focus the often invisible assumptions that govern the thinking of ancient authors,'[149] it would be remiss to not mention that the injunction obviously assumes the presence of both a left and a right hand. Additionally, given that the right hand (ἡ δεξιά) is active in the process of "giving alms" (cf. Matthew 6.2), with the left hand (ἡ ἀριστερά) being secondary or almost auxiliary, the text implies an element of "right-handedness" in its description of an ideal physical scenario. What might seem like a simplistic remark becomes more profound when you begin to consider what the implications might be for a reader, or listener, who does not possess both hands, or is left-handed.[150]

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[147] John. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), p. 276.

[148] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), p. 237.

[149] Julia M. O'Brien, *Challenging Prophetic Metaphor* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008) p. 175.

[150] Olyan, *Disability in the Hebrew* Bible, p. 21. Although, as Olyan indicates, left-handedness might not necessarily be negatively constructed, there is a definite preference for the right hand in this New Testament case.

Similarly, the description of putting on the armour of God in Ephesians 6.10-17 assumes that a metaphorical soldier is in possession of all the mentioned body parts. In her work on the Pauline υἱοθεία metaphors, Erin Heim outlines how 'every metaphor has a model, or models, lurking below the surface, models that are present in the thoughts of its hearers/readers.'[151] The model present in Ephesians 6.10-17 is of a soldier who is putting on every element of armour available in preparation for battle. It its literary context, the metaphor assumes that said soldier is able to complete each action and utilise each piece of equipment, yet the context of the original intended audience becomes important.[152] To be pedantic, a person not in possession of a waist, breast, or head would probably not be alive,[153] but if amputations were common, both as punishment and treatment[154] and 'a physically handicapped person earning a living would not have been a remarkable sight' in antiquity,[155] it would have been perfectly possible for a reader or listener to not have the feet required by verse

[151] Erin M. Heim, *Adoption in Galatians and Romans* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2017), p. 43.

[152] Heim, p. 57. Heim comments that the 'relationship of metaphor and literary context is of particular significance for the interpretations of biblical metaphors.'

[153] For a discussion as to the potential symbolism of the breastplate as an ethical representation of 'virtues that reflect Christ,' see David H. Wenkel, 'The "Breastplate of Righteousness" in Ephesians 6:14: Imputation or Virtue?', in *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 58.2 (2007), pp. 275-287. With respect to wholeness, whilst focused on the metaphorical armour instead of ideal corporeality, Wenkel comments that 'in order for the 'armour of God' metaphor to retain any meaning whatsoever, it must reference 'a single reality' but that the emphasised individual parts could be seen as creating 'a problem' (p. 284). In this way, tension could be created with the assumption of wholeness, by the individual function of each piece of armour.

[154] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 48-49.

[155] Martha L. Edwards, 'Constructions of Physical Disability in the Ancient Greek World - The Community Concept', in *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, eds. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp. 35-50: p. 38.

15's instruction to use 'the readiness of the Gospel of peace' (ἡ ἑτοιμασία τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τῆς εἰρήνης) as footwear, or the hands required to hold 'the shield of faith' (ὁ θυρεὸς τῆς πίστεως) in verse 16 and the sword of the Spirit (ἡ μάχαιρα τοῦ πνεύματος) in verse 17.[156]

If putting on the aforementioned armour can be interpreted as 'the functional equivalent of putting on the new humanity,'[157] the implications of the metaphor for a potential believer not deemed physically complete are eschatologically precarious. It may well be the case that the specific weapons themselves are not important,[158] that the metaphor focuses on not being passive in relation to the perceived spiritual battle; the language, though, still implies that a person not in possession of the limbs necessary to hold or wear certain equipment, does not meet the criteria of a Christian "warrior".

Colin E. Gunton suggests that theologians are often confused by metaphor and that theological language might not be about the real world, but the reality and structure of minds.[159] If metaphor[160] depends on cultural

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[156] There is a potential tension in this metaphor between the expectations embedded within its central model, as an organising image, and the ability of the intended audience to accurately psychologically simulate the linguistic utterance. The metaphor shaping perception is presenting a corporeal ideal that its audience may not be able to reach. For the theoretical background, see Heim, pp. 26-27, 50-51 and 80.

[157] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1990), p. 442.

[158] E. Best, *Ephesians* (London - New York: T & T Clark, 1998), p. 597.

[159] Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement* (London - New York: T & T Clark Ltd, 1998) p 41

[160] Within New Testament writings both process and linguistic metaphors explain one conceptual domain in terms of another. The known conceptual domain contains the value system of the text, making it important to deconstruct the metaphor rather than make assumptions based on modern value systems. Figurative language is dangerous, given the potential for prominence to be given to the known conceptual domain if a text is understood on "face value."

reference, and if it is possible to perceive "culture" as 'including the dominant ideologies of a community,'[161] then any metaphor used within a New Testament text contains ideals and values that a writer believes will communicate with their audience. If, as Solevåg describes, the situation was of individual bodies being judged in terms of their distance from an ideal,[162] then the ideal physical form for the writers of many New Testament texts is one with a biologically complete inventory of physical parts. Texts can begin to create the idea, through lack of physical description other than negative portrayals, and through the linguistic inclusion of ideal standards, that it was “normal” for a believer to meet these standards.

2.2.1 Being Without Blemish

The construct of moving from “incorrect,” in relation to an ideal, to “correct” is explicitly assumed in the healing narratives: blemishes with regards to physicality are removed. Specifically relevant to the notion of ideal corporeality is that textually the removal happens and a state of being without them is apparently restored.

Being “without blemish” becomes particularly prominent in the New Testament letters. 1 Peter 1.19’s ‘lamb without defect or blemish’[163] (ἀμνός

[161] Alice Deignan, 'Metaphorical Expressions and Culture: An Indirect Link' in *Metaphor and* Symbol, vol. 18.4 (2008) pp. 255-271: p. 256.

[162] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 1.

[163] ‘Without defect or blemish’ is the NRSV translation; ‘without blemish’ (ἀμώμου) and ‘without spot’ (ἀσπίλου) would reverse the translated order, but would be in keeping with the literal order of the NA28 Greek text.

ἀμώμου καὶ ἀσπίλου) links the physical perfection of a sacrificial lamb to the blood of Christ, simultaneously creating an existential reference to the corporeal ideal of perfection, the "correctness" of being corporeally "without blemish." With the source of the metaphor being 'the general sacrificial cult practiced by Israel,' it stands to reason that if the imperfect animal was 'unacceptable to God,'[164] then the description of without blemish or spot, whilst being specifically chosen in application to Christ, potentially also applies to believers.[165] Christ is the believer's "ideal" and he was physically purported to be "without blemish," so his body represents a standard to be aimed for; "without spot" might refer to moral cleanliness or perfection, but "without blemish" is an expressly somatic description. A blemished sacrifice was, according to the narrative imagery, 'unacceptable to God,'[166] making the figurative expiatory rite[167] depicted as only being possible where the participant(s) possesses an ideal corporeality.

Ephesians 5.27 requires the church, as the bride of Christ, to be presented without any kind of wrinkle or spot in order to be 'holy and without blemish.' The textual image is eschatological in meaning, describing the morality and spirituality of the church.[168] However, the negative description, by which the

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[164] Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 129.

[165] J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 66.

[166] Achtemeier, p. 129.

[167] John Dunnill, *Sacrifice and the Body: Biblical Anthropology and Christian Self-Understanding* (Farnham - Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 33 and p. 93. Where the sacrifice of Christ is understood as an expiation, purification from or reparation for sin, then the ideal, acceptable corporeal sacrifice does not allow for "deviance" of any kind.

[168] Best, pp. 545-546.

ideal is established, uses physical terminology.[169] Both “spot” (σπίλος) and “wrinkle” (ῥυτίς) refer to the skin, the opposite of the skin the bride of Christ should have. According to E. Best, the ideal skin described is ‘suggestive of a young woman, [which] accords with the idea of a bride.’[170] If the bride’s beauty ‘is to be all-encompassing and is not to be spoiled by anything,’ then any physical detail deviating from that corporeal “ideal” is seen as threatening a person’s acceptability to Christ.

In its reference to being ‘children of God without blemish’ (τέκνα θεοῦ ἄμωμα), Philippians 2.15 implies that to be ‘blameless and innocent’ (ἄμεμπτοι καὶ ἀκέραιοι) as children of God, a believer would have to be “without blemish”. The verse further specifies that the opposite of a “without blemish” believer is the contrasting ‘crooked and perverse’ (σκολιός καὶ διεστραμμένος) surrounding generation. When translated into English, the description σκολιός καὶ διεστραμμένος appears to be referring to a person's behaviour and attitude, but the use of “crooked” (σκολιός) adds a more physical element, given the literal possibilities of the word, in that it could be crooked/bent, instead of the more figurative

[169] If, as Jill Marshall asserts, ‘the baptismal, sacrificial, and bridal imagery of Eph 5:26-27 transfers from the Christ-church relationship to the husband-wife relationship,’ then it must also transfer to cultural attitudes and values regarding corporeality more generally. Indeed, if metaphors use the known to communicate the unknown, those corporeal values might be the origin of the Ephesians 5 bridal image in the first place. Cf. Jill E. Marshall, ‘Community is a Body: Sex, Marriage, and Metaphor in 1 Corinthians 6:12–7:7 and Ephesians 5:21–33’, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 134.4 (2015), pp. 833-847. <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1344.2015.2889>

[170] Best, p. 546.

crooked/dishonest.[171] Although in Acts 2.40 and 1 Peter 2.18 σκολιός contextually refers to dishonesty, Luke 3.5 describes an environmental image in which 'the crooked will become straight'[172] (ἔσται τὰ σκολιὰ εἰς εὐθείαν); in the Lukan context, σκολιός features within an extended illustration whereby shape is the focal point, but still uses the physical metaphor inherent within σκολιός to create the illustration. Even if the description in Philippians is figurative, the alternative usage provides literal connotations for the reader or listener, through the way the metaphorical meaning is constructed, in terms of what a blemish might be considered to be.

Similarly, διαστρέφω refers to causing someone or something to be distorted or physically deformed, or causing someone 'to depart from an accepted standard of oral or spiritual values.'[173] Matthew 17.17, Luke 9.41, and Luke 23.2 all understand διαστρέφω in relation to "perversity;" in Acts the meaning changes somewhat, to reflect "shape" more explicitly. According to Acts 13.8, διαστρέφω indicates "turning away," which is moving towards the "changing the shape of" description in Acts 13.10: 'will you not stop making crooked the straight paths of the Lord?' (οὐ παύσῃ διαστρέφων τὰς ὁδοὺς [τοῦ] κυρίου τὰς εὐθείας;) If the

[171] Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (BDAG), rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago - London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 930.

[172] The NRSV provides a passive translation: 'the crooked shall be made straight.' This adds in an assumption of an outside action on 'the crooked,' where the NA28 Greek is not in the passive voice, though it could be said the translation makes an implicit value more obvious.

[173] *BDAG*, p. 237.

Lord's paths are "straight" and the enemy's are "crooked", even a metaphorical meaning is based on a tangible or structural ideal.

The aim of this research is not to present a homogenized depiction of the whole New Testament corpus. However, it is possible to propose that the standard of an ideal believer lacking blemish, lying behind many spiritual descriptions and explanations, also contains by the very nature of the language the physical ideal of an unblemished body. An obvious caveat to this would be that what constituted a blemish was contextually specific. If Christ is the ideal, who offered himself as 'without blemish' (Hebrews 9.14) and a believer is meant to strive to 'be found by him…without spot of blemish' (2 Peter 3.14), then the ideal aim for that believer is to 'stand without blemish in the presence of his glory' (Jude 1.24).

2.2.2 Expected Functionality

The eschatological image of standing in the presence of God's glory, not only from Jude 1.24,[174] but variously referenced in texts such as Colossians 4.12[175] and Revelation 20.12,[176] contains an expected physical functionality, as the figure portrayed is able to stand. Similarly, 2 Corinthians 1.24 contains 'because you stand firm in the faith' (τῇ γὰρ πίστει ἑστήκατε), making "standing" an

[174] 'to stand without blemish in the presence of the glory [of God]' (στῆσαι κατενώπιον τῆς δόξης [θεοῦ])

[175] 'to stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills' (στῆσαι τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ)

[176] 'to stand before the throne' (ἑστακέναι ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου)

essential element of faith itself. Standing also implies an ability to take part, which is particularly evident in Luke 19. Zacchaeus is described in verse three as 'small in stature' (ἡλικίᾳ μικρὸς);[177] he could not stand tall enough to see events, suggesting that standing was not just expected to be the ability to "stand up" but also to "stand tall." There is a physiognomic element to standing in New Testament writings, in that being able to stand in the presence of God represented righteous character and in Zacchaeus' situation his lack of capability to "stand tall" was 'derogatory and demeaning.'[178] It is worth recognising that the physiognomic judgement begins with the physical standard, so the ideally functioning body could stand and stand tall.[179]

Hearing is a corporeal function that seems to be taken for granted in New Testament writings; the verb "hear" (ἀκούω) occurs approximately 400 times within the corpus. Jesus is quoted as repeatedly saying "You have heard it said," "Everyone who hears these words," or similar, assuming that whichever person is referred to can indeed hear the words. Truth or teaching is described as being "heard:" Hebrews 4.2, for example, discusses hearing the message, whilst Ephesians 1.13 refers to hearing 'the Word of Truth,' and 2 Timothy 1.13 describes hearing 'sound teaching.' James 1.19 even provides the instruction 'let everyone be quick to listen' (ἔστω δὲ πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ταχὺς εἰς τὸ ἀκοῦσαι), implying

[177] Parsons, "Short in Stature", p. 50.

[178] Parsons, "Short in Stature", p. 56.

[179] Luke 19 will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

that everyone has the capacity to hear, so they must choose to listen quickly.[180] It is true that ἀκούω can be defined as "listen"[181] with the connotation of understanding, with James 1.19 'stressing the necessity of understanding the importance' of its instructions,[182] but to listen first requires the corporeal function of hearing. On a purely practical level, the majority of communication would have been oral in first century societies, so it would be natural to hear the word, teaching or message, but at the same time it is important to recognise the exclusivity of the assumption. The healing of a man who was deaf in Mark 7 communicates restoration to a hearing ideal. The imagery in John 10.27 of 'My sheep hear my voice' (τὰ πρόβατα τὰ ἐμὰ τῆς φωνῆς μου ἀκούουσιν) indicates that those outside of relationship with Christ do not hear. Each of these examples describes the non-ideal, non-hearing as without access to the mentioned believing community, at least on the level of the narrative.

If 'the Bible was written by and for sighted people,'[183] then in many ways the ideal of sight is somewhat culturally automatic. We might consider that the narratorial use of Bartimaeus' blindness, in Mark 10, as 'a symbol or parable of conversion'[184] and, therefore, ableist since it promotes the notion of disability as deviance, from the narrative's ideal of sight. The contemporary social perspective

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[180] Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), p. 109.

[181] *BDAG*, pp. 37-38.

[182] David B. Gowler, *James Through the Centuries* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), p. 123.

[183] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 67.

[184] John Hull, *In the* Beginning, p. 44.

of the healing was, again, restoration to that ideal, with the process of healing also narratorially presented as a mirror to Bartimaeus' apparent conversion. Since a body perceived as healthy, according to first century standards, 'often evaded interrogation,'[185] it is the differences from that standard which, in New Testament writings, provide the corporeally based communication of ideology. Just as the restoration of sight proves a sighted ideal, so does the negative metaphorical judgement of blindness because it reflects the notion that "ideal" is defined by what it is not, as well as a social standard forming the basis of the metaphorical communication.

A common linguistic metaphor which is based on expected corporeal functionality, where metaphoric potential is encoded within the word itself, is that of walking. Using περιπατέω, believers either walk in light or darkness (John 8.12), 'in newness of life' (Romans 6.4), by faith (2 Corinthians 5.7) or with God (Revelation 3.4). It might sound like a simple observation, but when 1 John 1.7 envisages walking 'in the light,' there is no contemplation of not being able to take part in the textual injunction.[186] If the 'ethical life of the Christian community is measured' by being in the light,[187] then the ability to be or participate in that

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[185] Louise J. Lawrence, 'Disease and Disability Metaphors in Gospel Worlds', in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, vol. 73.4 (2019), pp 377-385: p. 378.

[186] Peter Rhea Jones, 'A Structural Analysis of 1 John 1', in *Review and Expositor*, vol. 114.4 (2017), pp. 531-541 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637317737312>. Peter Rhea Jones writes about the structure of 1 John in his 2017 article. However, at several points he also comments on 'the presiding metaphor of 1 John [being] that of "abiding in God"' (p. 538, for example). The implications of a corporeal function relating to abiding in God, with the absence of it potentially preventing abiding, are quite stark, even if it is something Jones does not directly seem to consider.

[187] Georg Strecker, *The Johannine Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p. 29.

light becomes important. Inherent in the word περιπατέω itself is a duality: it can be translated either as ‘to go here or there in walking’ or ‘to conduct one’s life.’[188] Within περιπατέω is a first century metaphor that assumes certain physical capabilities; modern readers often treat such metaphors as idioms, whereas the original texts contain multiple levels of meaning, which are still important for the modern readers who dismiss them. Many normate readers might automatically understand walking according to the Spirit, Romans 8.4, as “live” according to the Spirit, and it has even been so translated by some commentators[189] and modern versions of New Testament texts as such (for example: CEV, ERV, GNT), but this translates out the ethical consideration of the inherent corporeal “ideal” within the textual metaphor and within περιπατέω.

Worryingly, automatically understanding περιπατέω as “live” leads to the antithesis of 1 John 1.7’s ‘walk[ing] in the light’ (ἐν τῷ φωτὶ περιπατῶμεν) becoming “living in darkness”, which can be interpreted as suggesting ‘an attitude of mind.’[190] This links the idea of paralysis, or not walking, into a metanarrative of apathy or passivity. That metanarrative is used to almost cultivate a paradigm-creating loop which implies walking as being a choice, given that walking/living in the light is understood from a normate perspective as choosing to “live” in

[188] *BDAG*, p. 803.

[189] Robert H. Mounce, *Romans* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1995), p. 172.

[190] Stephen Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2007), p. 21.

fellowship with Christ.[191] Not walking is linked to not being in fellowship, since it is the opposite to the ideal of περιπατέω.[192]

2.2.3 Strength

Ephesians 6 introduces the depiction of the complete armour of God, with verse 10's instruction 'be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power' (ἐνδυναμοῦσθε ἐν κυρίῳ καὶ ἐν τῷ κράτει τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ). The NRSV translates ἐνδυναμόω as "be strong" and ἰσχύς as "the strength," but the English vocabulary does not convey the linguistic complexity of what is being described. A modern reader would perhaps primarily think of the Oxford English dictionary definition of strength, the 'quality or state of being physically strong,'[193] or later alternatives relating to capacity. However, "strength" is not a quality with inherently theological connotations. In New Testament writings, "strength," or "to strengthen," is the conceptual translation given for multiple words, each with a variety of meanings: it is difficult to separate the language of physical strength from its theological usage. Ἐνδυναμόω, for example, contains both the idea of causing someone, or becoming able, to function, both from the perspective of capacity, inner or moral strength, as well as the notion of someone physically

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[191] I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), p. 108.

[192] Christopher T. Holmes, 'Gestures to the Priesthood: Exploring Jesus' Priestly Function in 1 John 1', in *Review and Expositor*, vol. 114.4 (2017), pp. 564-573 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637317735491>. Christopher T. Holmes writes about Jesus' role as priestly intercessor, as such providing access to God's presence, but also comments on authorial concern in 1 John for those who 'have "gone out" from the community' (p. 571).

[193] 'Strength' in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online] <www.oed.com/view/Entry/191464> [accessed 24 June 2021].

weak becoming “strong,”[194] meaning that it is practically impossible to disentangle the physical strength in the imagery of Ephesians 6 from its theological context and implications.[195]

“Strength” is associated with God, in that any human strength is God-given: 1 Peter 4.11 explicitly states that ‘the strength that God supplies’ (ὁ ἰσχύος ἧς χορηγεῖ ὁ θεός) is necessary to serve the community.[196] The power and “strength” of ἰσχύος is linked to the “being able” of its cognate ἰσχύω, with both terms somewhat unclear as to what degree their implications are physical. A similar ambiguity of “strength” terminology is shown in Luke 1.51, but in this case the textual context advocates for an element of physicality: ‘he [God] has shown strength with his arm’ ([ὁ θεός] ἐποίησεν κράτος ἐν βραχίονι αὐτοῦ). Though containing physical force and authoritative dominion, God’s “strength” is exhibited through a physical action, demonstrated via the use of a “strong” arm.

The metanarrative of paralysis as weakness, passivity and exclusion is used to propagate physical strength as the corporeal ideal in Acts 3.7, where

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[194] *BDAG*, p. 333.

[195] Victor L. Budha, ‘Intercultural Criticism of Spiritual Warfare (Ephesians 6:10–20)’, in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, vol. 78.3 (2022), pp. 1-7 <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i3.6905>. Budha reframes Ephesians 6.10-17 from an African perspective on spiritual warfare, which links physical strength to that warfare. The implications of this for the corporeal expectation of wholeness, though not stated in Budha’s article, are contained with his focus on the critical values as represented by the armour itself. Likewise, a person who is not strong will not do well in the fight.

[196] David G. Horrell, ‘The Label Χριστιανός: 1 Peter 4:16 and the Formation of Christian Identity’, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol.126.2 (2007), pp. 361-381: pp. 368-370. Horrell discusses ‘the third major section of 1 Peter’ as beginning at 1 Peter 4.12, which 1 Peter 4.11 effectively introduces; he does not discuss the necessity of strength (1 Peter 4.11), but does discuss the suffering for which strength is necessary in order to endure.

healing restores a man to the "ideal" state of strength: 'And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.' According to Mikeal C. Parsons the name of Jesus is the focus of the healing narrative in Acts 3, so he queries why "feet" (αἱ βάσεις) and "ankles" (τὰ σφυδρά) are mentioned specifically as being strengthened when the man is "raised up," and highlights their consideration from a physiognomic perspective.[197] If strong ankles are an indication of bravery and noble character, distinctively seen as masculine,[198] then strengthening feet and ankles contains two ideal corporeal standards: physical strength and masculinity. In his 2015 lecture 'The Scandal of a Male Bible,' Clines comments that no woman is called strong in biblical texts[199] and submits that a concentration of strength language indicates the realm of the masculine. If female bodies in antiquity were weak and inferior, as opposed to strong and desirable,[200] then the text of Acts 3.7 also contains the ideal of a masculine body.

2.3 Christ's Corporeal Form

Literal descriptions of corporeal form in New Testament texts are rare. However, Jesus is physically described, literally in John 20 and figuratively in

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[197] Mikeal C. Parsons, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 55.

[198] Parsons, *Acts*, p. 56.

[199] Clines. 'The Scandal of a Male Bible'.

[200] Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London - New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 7-11.

Revelation 1. This is important, as if everyone is created in the image of God[201] and, by association Christ, then Jesus becomes the corporeal ideal which believers aspire to, with regards to their own corporeality.

When Jesus appears before Thomas in John 20.26-27, his body is not "perfect." It is mutilated[202] and must have reflected the brutality of the crucifixion. For the purposes of an ideal body, whether these marks are wounds or scars are immaterial: aesthetically at least, Jesus was not "perfect" by the standards of the time. Neither was he "without blemish," meaning that Jesus himself was challenging the corporeal standards held by tradition and visible in many New Testament writings. Interestingly, he was "whole" in the sense that John 19.33 and 36 highlight his legs were not broken. This appears to be in fulfilment of Old Testament Passover symbolism, such as in Exodus 12.46 and Numbers 9.12. Somewhat in contrast to the scarred physical Jesus in John 20, the standard of the "without blemish" 'sacrificial animal' is supposed to be symbolic of the unity of the believing 'covenant community.'[203] The Johannine narrative seems to struggle in its placement of Jesus in his post-resurrection corporeal form, as will be discussed later:[204] Jesus must display evidence of his crucifixion as proof of the divine sacrifice and, at the same time, he must fulfil a prophesied corporeal

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[201] Amy E. Jacober, *Redefining Perfect: The Interplay Between Theology & Disability* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2017), p. 29.

[202] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 24.

[203] Andreas J. Köstenberger, 'John' in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids - Nottingham: Baker Academic - Apollos, 2007), pp. 415-512: p. 503.

[204] See 'Resurrected Bodies' in chapter 4.

standard that negates any harm coming to the “righteous man,” highlighted by a possible allusion to Psalm 33.21 LXX.[205]

The physical depiction of Christ in Revelation 1.13-15 suggests an incomparability, which in turn portrays an aspirational ideal. In this passage, Jesus is depicted with white hair, flaming eyes, bronze feet, and hands capable of holding seven stars. Although not a literal description, due to the nature of the text, the metaphors within it point to the highest possible corporeal standard, given who is being described, a standard that is potentially impossible despite being ideal.

Revelation 1.14 portrays Jesus with hair ‘white as wool’ and eyes ‘like a flame of fire.’ Interestingly, aged white hair might not suggest ideal by modern standards, where youth is desired, but the wisdom of old-age is reflected in the presented metaphor, which may link to Daniel 7.9.[206] Traditionally, the eyes of Greek gods ‘were thought to have a special quality, which was usually described as bright and shining;’[207] bright and shining eyes would have to be eyes that could see, since eyes that could not would either be “glazed” or closed. Behind the transcendent Christ, is the corporeal ideal of clear sight. Likewise, the image of burnished bronze in verse 15 suggests a metal ‘that has been heated to burn away all impurities’[208] and the potential interpretation that the depicted feet

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[205] Köstenberger, p. 503.

[206] David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1997), p. 13.

[207] Aune, p. 95.

[208] James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), p. 77.

contained no problems or deformities. This is not the post-resurrection Jesus of John 20.

2.3.1 Christ's "Body" as Metaphor

Paul's society-as-body *topos*[209] in 1 Corinthians 12 is much debated in terms of whether the "body" is simply an analogy to the desired functionality of the believing community, or whether Paul's message rhetorically outlines how the believing community functions as Christ's body. Robert Jewett argues that 'Paul avoids the realistic identification of the Christian community with Christ and remains on the metaphorical level,'[210] whereas John Robinson states that Paul sees his believing communities as 'in literal fact the risen organism of Christ's person in all concrete reality.'[211] Whatever level at which analogy functions, or even if the imagery is flexible[212] throughout Paul's letters, the language of "body" has implications for any consideration of corporeality.

1 Corinthians 12.15-17 appears to contain two paradoxical threads of logic, one explicitly inclusionary and the other implicitly exclusionary. The repetition of 'I am not of the body' (οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος), [213] the foot claiming to not belong by virtue of not being a hand and the ear making a parallel claim

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[209] Dale B. Martin, p. 92.

[210] Robert Jewett, *Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 743.

[211] John Robinson, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1963), p. 51.

[212] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 724.

[213] The NRSV translation of οὐκ εἰμὶ ἐκ τοῦ σώματος reads 'I do not *belong* to the body' in both cases.

through not being an eye, emphasises that each limb or sensory organ is part of the body, regardless of function or perception of importance. Gordon D. Fee argues that this shows each pair, of limbs (hand/foot) or sensory organs (ear/eye), have comparable functions and, therefore, no superiority over the other;[214] Paul's point in these verses is supposed to be that a believing community needs all members.[215] Hans Conzelmann takes this argument further, describing the verses as an 'attack' against 'individuals' dissociating themselves from the "body".'[216] 1 Corinthians 12.18 and 1 Corinthians 12.21 underline the idea that 'God has arranged the members' (ὁ θεὸς ἔθετο τὰ μέλη) and, consequently, all are needed. That diverse functionality is echoed in Romans 12.4-5, which James D. G. Dunn explains as 'Paul's recognition that acceptance of the gospel is bound to have a corporate expression.'[217]

It would seem simple, therefore, to assume that if all members are placed by God and needed, then physical disabilities cannot be "evil."[218] However, 1 Corinthians 12.17 creates a negative picture of deafness and anosmia; a body without the functionality of its senses is considered to be lacking, as shown

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[214] Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), p. 610.

[215] Fee, p. 611. See also Susan Grove Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), p. 81. According to Eastman, Paul 'insists on the mutual dependence of the individual members of the "body of Christ."'

[216] Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), pp. 212-213.

[217] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 722.

[218] Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the* Church, p. 13.

through questioning ‘If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be?’ (εἰ ὅλον τὸ σῶμα ὀφθαλμός, ποῦ ἡ ἀκοή; εἰ ὅλον ἀκοή, ποῦ ἡ ὄσφρησις;) Likewise, the surface meaning of 1 Corinthians 12.19 appears to support the notion of diversity and can be read from the perspective of needing all “members:” ‘If all were a single member, where would the body be?’ Behind the text sits the assumption of an ideal body being one with all of its requisite parts and members; if body parts are missing, the body is not complete. Inherent in Paul’s body imagery is both diversity and an ideal corporeality of completeness.

Paul’s starting point is that the “body” is one, rather than it needing to become unified: the body *topos* effectively argues from, not for, unity, with there being ‘no such thing as unity without diversity.’[219] Corporeality as a representation of political and/or social solidarity would have made sense to Paul’s contemporary audience.[220] The body creates the inclusive message, but, by virtue of being a process metaphor, Paul’s body imagery brings with it the connotations and social attitudes of there being a corporeal ideal or standard. By contextualising the metaphor, the negative connotations of the body, in terms of the linguistic assumptions of an ideal corporeality, can be over-looked in favour of what is textually presented as an overarching depiction of pre-existing community.

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[219] Fee, p. 602.

[220] Jewett, *Romans*, p. 743; Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, p. 733.

Acknowledging the necessity of all body parts does not negate that comparative value judgements are made regarding various body parts. Oppositional thought frames those value judgements, as they appear in 1 Corinthians 12.23-24: τὰ ἀσχήμονα as opposed to τὰ εὐσχήμονα. The NRSV translates ἀσχήμον and εὐσχήμον in relation to measures of honour or respect, which can be interpreted as reference to internal organs, seemingly weak but with that apparent weakness having 'no relationship to their real value and necessity to the body.'[221] Dale B. Martin makes some interesting observations in terms of the alternative connotations of τὰ ἀσχήμονα and τὰ εὐσχήμονα, suggesting that the opposition is, in fact, between ugly/shameful and beautiful/presentable.[222] The shame of ἀσχήμον might relate to genitalia, but "beauty" and "presentableness" could equally be terminology of status, as in the assumption in upper-class ideology of a connection between physical beauty and nobility, with the language emphasising the value judgements being made of the mentioned body parts. When considered in light of texts such as 1 Corinthians 11.30, discussing the scandal of communicants being weak and sickly,[223] there are implications for those with a disability. The question becomes whether the focus is the message of unity that is revealed on a whole-text level, or whether the textual implications of ideal corporeality are given prominence in any way.

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[221] Fee, p. 613.

[222] Dale B. Martin, p. 95.

[223] Robinson, p. 73.

2.4 Concluding Remarks on Ideal New Testament Bodies

In terms of whether the concept of a physical standard, or "ideal body," exists behind or within New Testament writings, it is clear that it does. Although different societies construct the human body differently,[224] meaning that creating a single picture of corporeality in New Testament writings is impossible and anachronistic, ideals, references and commentary on corporeal standards are implicitly and explicitly evident at various points within language and narrative. As has been evidenced above, corporeality is important in many New Testament writings. We might not be able to make that statement for the entire corpus, on account of corporeality not being mentioned, but physical bodies are judged either positively or negatively. The representation as "other" is formed from a comparison with the often implicit ideal or standard.

Despite the historical likelihood of no one possessing an ideal physical body, New Testament writings generally assume bodies should be complete, as evidenced by texts such as Matthew 6.3 and Ephesians 6.10-17. They should be 'without blemish' or any kind of defect, as in 1 Peter 1.19 and Ephesians 5.27. Bodies, within New Testament writings, are expected to possess all elements of functionality, such as the ability to stand, walk, hear, and see. They are also expected to be strong. This is not to say that every depicted body meets those standards, or that there is no conflict between texts. Christ's corporeal form reaches an impossible standard in Revelation 1.13-15, yet in John 20.26-27 is

[224] Dale B. Martin, p. 3. Taking Martin's position as a starting point, New Testament writings show that different societies and cultures constructing corporeality differently means that the texts originating from those societies will reflect different corporeal ideals.

not ‘without blemish.’ The body of Jesus represents a corporeal ideal, yet there are different portrayals of that ideal. Even within the same text, such as in 1 Corinthians 12.15-17, there can be both inclusionary and exclusionary representations of corporeality; acknowledging diversity does not negate hierarchy or relative judgement being applied to bodies or body parts.

Corporeal values and assumptions within New Testament writings are complex and problematic, but they must not be ignored. Raising consciousness of the textual issue of ableism is essential because modern readers might 'attempt to suspend their assumptions, so that the world and voice [of the texts] can be understood as much as possible in their own linguistic, cultural, and historical terms,'[225] but the problem with creating distance, as detachment, is that eradicating all preconception from interpretation 'is neither possible nor desirable.'[226] Since there is corporeal bias within New Testament writings, prior understanding of an inclusive standpoint is needed in order to look beyond historical discriminatory social values to the conceivable message of a text. If nothing is questioned, historical attitudes are simply replicated in modern interpretations of biblical texts. There needs to be an active engagement with the multiple levels of meaning within narratives, so how should physical ideals and their corresponding language be understood from a more inclusive standpoint?

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[225] Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008), p. 4.

[226] Myers, p. 4.

Hermeneutic methods are frequently used to challenge interpretations founded on prejudice, not least the historical prejudice embedded within the language itself. For example, Christian feminists 'explore the implications and possibilities of a biblical interpretation that takes the androcentric or patriarchal character of scripture into account.'[227] If we are prepared to define Scripture as inherently androcentric or patriarchal, at least on the level of functioning within its original context, can we not also suggest that it is normate or ableist? If we are prepared to question whether it is possible to 'de-activate masculine/feminine gender contextualization in favour of an abstract degenderized reading,'[228] should we not also re-examine the more ableist aspects of language within New Testament texts?

Ableist assumptions within New Testament language and narrative cannot necessarily be “redeemed” but neither should the entire text be “rejected,”[229] since biblical texts are ‘a mediation of revelation’ but not ‘necessarily revelatory in every dimension.’[230] If ‘God is able to write straight with the crooked lines’[231] of human communication, then it is possible to look beyond explicit or implicit exclusivity, towards inclusivity. The Pauline body image is a candid example of

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[227] Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ‘Lk 13:10-17: Interpretation for Liberation and Transformation’, in *TD*, vol. 36.4 (1989), pp. 303-319: p. 303.

[228] Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 303.

[229] Avalos, ‘Redemptionism, Rejectionism and Historicism’, p. 91.

[230] Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd, ‘Introduction: The “Normativity of the Future” Approach: Its Roots, Development, Current State and Challenges’, in *Normativity of the Future - Reading Biblical and Other Authoritative Texts in an Eschatological Perspective*, eds. Reimund Bieringer and Mary Elsbernd (Leuven - Paris: Peeters, 2010), pp. 3-25: p. 17.

[231] Bieringer and Elsbernd, pp. 17-20.

how ableist language, based on normate physical expectations, could express an inclusive ideal. Similarly, once the assumed completeness is removed from the armour of God metaphor in Ephesians 6, then any believer could apply the principles of “truth” (ἀλήθεια), “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη), “faith” (πίστις) and “salvation” (σωτηρία). Whilst normate readers may not be cognisant of where a text or linguistic reference is based on the notion of an ideal body, it is worth keeping in mind Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza’s statement that 'only a consciously critical reading is able to resist the theological rhetoric of the language of discrimination and the mindset of oppression.'[232]

[232] Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 306.

CHAPTER 3[233]

CONSIDERING THE REASONING PROCESS

The concepts of the mind and of intelligence, specifically regarding how that mind is to be judged, are not historically stable;[234] they are 'socially constructed' truths.[235] Instead of a separate entity which English translations refer to as "mind," the NA28 Greek text refers to the process of understanding and reasoning. Although an ideal standard for understanding and reasoning can be suggested throughout New Testament writings, the 'standards of normalcy' are 'indeterminate and context bound.'[236] There are also multiple sets of intertwining social values regarding how understanding and reasoning should function.

"Mind" is not a particular focus of any of the New Testament writings. It is referenced in passing, if at all, as part of a wider narrative or discussion on a separate topic. Answering the question of whether there is an ideal as to what "mind" should be is, by necessity, illustrative; New Testament writings that refer to "mind" show that a standard exists behind texts, even if it cannot be definitively outlined for each one. Therefore, the following chapter will outline some elements of the "mind" process that can be seen in specific New Testament writings, as

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[233] Extracts of this chapter, specifically in relation to the Synoptic Gospels, were presented at the BNTS Conference, September 2020.

[234] C. F. Goodey, *A History of Intelligence and 'Intellectual Disability': The Shaping of Psychology in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 10.

[235] Goodey, *A History of Intelligence*, p. 9.

[236] Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus* (2013), p. 36.

well as some of the issues that they raise. It might not be possible to outline in detail what an ideal reasoning process is in each instance, however focusing on particular textual examples can show that there was an ideal standard present in the background of New Testament writings.

3.1 An Ideal Synoptic "Mind" as a Process?

The concept which English translations identify as "right mind" should instead be defined as the process of proper understanding and reasoning. Judgements made about the process of reasoning and understanding were based on presupposed social and cultural standards that can be glimpsed through textual analysis. Whilst 'the classificatory system "disabled"/"nondisabled" did not exist'[237] for societies contemporary to the Gospel writers, there does appear to be the concept of what was ideal and what was not regarding the reasoning process, particularly within the Synoptic texts.

Explicit references to reasoning and understanding within the Synoptic texts are relatively sparse, but they do indicate a process. When, in Matthew 16.23 and Mark 8.33, Jesus says "Get behind me, Satan!" to Peter, it is on account of the disciple's improper reasoning; Peter's thoughts are not mentioned as results from the reasoning process, since it is the process itself that is discussed. The verb "think" (φρονέω) denotes that Peter is giving consideration to

[237] Nicole Kelley, 'Deformity and Disability in Greece and Rome', in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, eds. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 31-45: p. 33.

the wrong focus;[238] he is displaying a “wrong mind” according to the presupposed theological standards within the texts of Matthew and Mark, because his reasoning is not centred on ‘things of God.’

Luke 24.45 contains the only use of νοῦς in the Synoptic texts. Often translated as “mind,” νοῦς refers more to the faculty, or way, of thinking;[239] though a noun, it would represent an abstract concept or process and ‘not a material entity or a discrete organ’[240] for Luke’s audience. Effectively Luke 24.45, ‘then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures’ (τότε διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς), advocates the opening of the disciples’ process of reasoning to the Scriptures, thereby giving them proper reasoning and understanding. Proper understanding and reasoning, in this context, is to have an intelligent grasp of something potentially challenging (συνίμι),[241] but understanding cannot be attained, it must be given. Additionally, that process is not an individual one for each of the disciples, as the plural ‘Then he opened their minds’ implies in many English translations; in the NA28 Lukan text, “mind” is a collective concept, as evidenced by the singular τὸν νοῦν. In literature contemporary to the Synoptic

[238] *BDAG*, pp. 1065-1066.

[239] *BDAG*, p. 680.

[240] C. F. Goodey and M. Lynn Rose, ‘Mental States, Bodily Dispositions and Table Manners: A Guide to Reading “Intellectual” Disability from Homer to Late Antiquity’, in *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies ‘A Capite Ad Calcem’*, eds. Christian Laes, C. F. Goodey, and M. Lynn Rose (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 17-44: p. 27.

[241] *BDAG*, p. 972.

Gospels, νοῦς is rarely used in a plural form - "personal identity" is what a modern reader demands,[242] not what a contemporary audience expected.

Διάνοια is a noun representing 'a succession of thought events rather than…a reified psychological object'[243] in medical texts of antiquity. It appears in the Synoptic Gospels on four occasions, three of which are translated as "mind" in the Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22.37/Mark 12.30/Luke 10.27). The "You," of 'You shall love the Lord your God,' is divided into three areas by Matthew, four by Mark and Luke; all three include: "heart" (καρδία), "soul" (ψυχή), and "mind" (διάνοια). The textual basis for the Greatest Commandment is Deuteronomy 6.5, 'the indivisibility of obedience,'[244] which in the LXX does not include both καρδία and διάνοια. The majority text of the LXX uses καρδία;[245] others, including the Göttingen edition, do prefer διάνοια as an alternative translation of the same Hebrew word[246] (לְבָבְךָ – "your heart/mind"). Although not technically an addition in the LXX,[247] it is in separating "heart/mind" that all three of the Synoptic writers distinguish the thought process as necessary, which is

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[242] Stephen D. Moore, 'Why There Are No Humans or Animals in the Gospel of Mark', in *Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, eds. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), pp. 71-93: p. 78.

[243] Goodey and Rose, p. 37.

[244] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 82.

[245] John William Wevers, *Notes on the Greek Text of Deuteronomy* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1995), p. 115.

[246] Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 574.

[247] R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), p. 480.

emphasised by ἀγαπάω, a love based on evaluation and choice, relating will and action to the abstract capacity to reason.

Defining 'with all of your mind' (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ διανοίᾳ σου) as 'a variant translation'[248] of 'with all of your heart' (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ καρδίᾳ σου) ignores the nuances between "heart" and "mind" for the Synoptic writers. Whereas διάνοια refers to a process of understanding and reasoning, in New Testament texts "heart" (καρδία) 'is the seat of rational thought and intentions.'[249] The reference to διάνοια in Luke 1.51 perhaps better illustrates the relationship between "heart" and "mind". Whilst καρδία and διάνοια might be 'practically synonymous' in terms of the LXX, Luke 1.51 shows καρδία as being the place where the process of διάνοια can happen. The phrase "thought [process] of the heart" (διάνοια καρδίας) occurs in the LXX (1 Chronicles 29.18), showing διάνοια as 'a central function of conscious existence;'[250] in Luke 1.51 the punishment described is delivered to those who are 'proud in the thoughts of their hearts,'[251] arrogant in terms of their capacity to reason which is situated in their καρδία. That arrogance is judged negatively, with the unspoken opposite, humility, being the presupposed ideal.

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[248] Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, p. 82.

[249] Andreas Schuele, 'Heart', in *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible - Volume 2*, eds. Katharine Doob Sakenfield et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), pp. 764-766: p. 765.

[250] Michael Lattke, 'διάνοια', in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament - Volume 1*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 309-310: p. 309.

[251] François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1.1-9.50* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 62.

Textual consideration of “mind” as a process rather than an entity illustrates that, for the writers of the Synoptic Gospels, the mind-body dichotomy is a fallacy.[252] Within these texts, “mind” is effectively a function of the human corporeal form and should be considered in a similar way to expected physical functionality.

3.1.1 “Right Mind” in the Synoptic Gospel Texts

Given that the single term “mind” is used to represent different Greek terms, and that linguistically the Greek used in New Testament writings does not presuppose a single, discrete entity, the reference to being of “right mind,” found in the majority of English translations of Mark 5.15 and Luke 8.35, is problematic.

The English phrase “right mind” appears in translations of Mark and Luke’s representations of the Gerasene demoniac healing.[253] “Right mind” implicitly categorises the demoniac’s prior state as “wrong,” thereby illustrating an opposition structure as his reasoning process changes. This opposition structure conveniently demonstrates the right versus wrong dichotomy inherent in the ways in which ‘societies constructed their perceptions of individual behaviours and specific expectations.’[254] A man who defied social assumptions now adheres

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[252] Chiara Thumiger, *A History of the Mind and Mental Health in Classical Greek Medical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 67.

[253] The Gospel of Matthew does not refer to correct reasoning porcess as a consequence of the healing in its equivalent account (Matthew 8.28-9.1).

[254] Jon L. Berquist, *Controlling Corporeality* (New Brunswick, New Jersey - London: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 7.

to a system of classification,[255] in that he is now deemed able to be accepted into a society that he was previously excluded from.

Mark describes the former demoniac as σωφρονοῦντα, whilst Luke gives the additional physical positioning of 'at the feet of Jesus' (παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ). In the majority of English translations, the nominal phrase "right mind" is used to represent the verb σωφρονέω.[256] Even those translations which do not use the specific phrase "right mind" still use a synonym relating to sanity,[257] which 'was, and to an arguable extent still is, a social construct, based on social ideas about acceptable and unacceptable social deviance.'[258] "Right mind" reflects what Louise Lawrence argues is a "sanist" perspective, whereby the 'normative identity is constructed as "sane."[259]

The way cognates of σωφρονέω, such as σώφρων and σωφρονίζω, are used in New Testament literature lends more weight to its potential definition as 'to be prudent, with focus on self-control.'[260] Rather than simply denoting a "right mind" as opposed a "wrong" one, σωφρονέω carries with it connotations of self-control,

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[255] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Harmondsworth - Baltimore: Penguin, 1970), p. 52.

[256] *BDAG*, p. 986. "Right mind" aligns with the definition given by the BDAG lexicon in reference to the texts: 'to be able to think in a sound or sane manner.'

[257] 'Sanity', in *Cambridge Dictionary* [online] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/sanity> [accessed 11 August 2020].

[258] Irina Metzler, *Fools and Idiots? Intellectual Disability in the Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), p. 2.

[259] Louise J. Lawrence, *Bible and Bedlam: Madness, Sanism and New Testament Interpretation* (London-New York: T & T Clark, 2018), p. 19.

[260] Cf. *BDAG*, p. 986.

reasoning and judgement in Mark and Luke, instead of sanity. The demoniac is healed from his previous state, indicating that his current status is correct since it is what he has been restored to, but that state is "correct" because his reasoning adheres to the expected standards of self-control. Σωφρονέω only appears in the Synoptic texts twice, but within the wider New Testament corpus it is used a further four times and, in each case, refers to self-control (Titus 2.6), discipline (1 Peter 4.7) or sober judgement (Romans 12.3). Where it is explicitly translated to "right mind" (2 Corinthians 5.13), the text refers to "thinking correctly," or using proper understanding and reasoning.[261]

Additionally, σωφρονέω, as a verb, does not define a static state of being, which the translation "in his right mind" suggests. Reasoning, for the purposes of understanding, is a process – it is not a completed action. Given that 'for the medical doctors of Antiquity…mental states are organic aspects of bodily disposition,'[262] viewing σωφρονέω as a process of proper understanding and reasoning seems most appropriate. The former demoniac is now capable of socially acceptable or ideal thought processes, not a man sitting at the feet of Jesus in possession of a correct mental organ. Mark's σωφρονοῦντα could simply

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[261] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 137. According to Johnson, Aristotle can be used to emphasise σωφρονέω's denotation of 'sobriety' and 'self-control'; in *Nichomachean Ethics* 3 he extols the virtue of σωφρονέω as proper reasoning, without which a person cannot function effectively within civilised society. See: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics (Book III)*, trans. W. D. Ross, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.3.iii.html> [accessed 11 August 2020].

[262] Christian Laes, C. F. Goodey, and M. Lynn Rose, 'Approaching Disabilities "A Capite Ad Calcem": Hidden Themes in Roman Antiquity', in *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies 'A Capite Ad Calcem'*, eds. Christian Laes, C. F. Goodey, and M. Lynn Rose (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 1-15: p. 2.

be a social judgement of the former demoniac's reasoning and understanding process now being acceptable to his contemporaries, the theological implication being uncertain; Luke's addition of "at the feet of Jesus" suggests that the outcome of proper reasoning and understanding is shown by physically displaying respect for Jesus' authority, according to the theological standards of the writer, not just adherence to socially constructed ideals.

3.1.2 Presupposed Standards of Understanding and Reasoning

'Normality, or for our purposes sanity, tends in all cultures to be assumed and unexpressed;'[263] it is much easier to find references to difference. In essence, the opposite of a perceived deviation suggests what ideal reasoning might be. For example, when reasoning and understanding is mentioned in the Synoptic texts, it is often in relation to what understanding and reasoning should not be, just as pride is shown to be a negative path of reasoning in Luke 1.51.

Proper understanding and reasoning in the Synoptic Gospels is a gift, from an authorial point of view. It is not of human design, since "to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven" (cf. Matthew 13.11) is 'not independently knowable.'[264] The context to proper understanding and reasoning not being given, or not being accepted, such as in Mark 4.11's description of the function of

[263] Patricia Ann Clark, 'The Balance of the Mind: The Experience and Perception of Mental Illness in Antiquity' (unpublished doctoral thesis, The University of Washington, 1993), p. 5. <http://www.historyoflearningdisability.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Balance-of-the-Mind.complete.pdf> [accessed 17 August 2020].

[264] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 533.

parables, is blatant opposition or unbelief directed towards Jesus.[265] Therefore, the distinction being made is between those who have proper understanding and reasoning and those who do not. It is not a matter of wisdom or intelligence, as evidenced in Matthew 11.25, where 'these things' are hidden from 'the wise.' The reference to "these things" might be 'imprecise'[266] but it certainly seems plausible that ταῦτα might be "these thought processes."

Thought processes, the capacity to reason and the ability to understand must be open to what is "proper". In Mark 6.52 the disciples do not possess proper reasoning and understanding because the environment needed for that process to occur is not there. Their hearts do not have the capacity, having become hardened 'because of a habitual attitude;'[267] the accusation of a hardened heart (καρδία πεπωρωμένη) has previously been used regarding those opposing Jesus' ministry and 'now the disciples are falling into the same condition.'[268] It is possible to suggest that the disciples are being criticised for a 'natural slowness' in adjusting to 'the extraordinary,'[269] however the text presents the disciples as not possessing the proper understanding and reasoning because of that apparent inability to accept the extraordinary, the ideal being the ability to

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[265] William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark : The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), p. 157.

[266] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 470.

[267] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 336.

[268] France, *Mark*, p. 274.

[269] France, *Mark*, p. 274.

show an awareness of Jesus' actions pointing beyond the situation itself, towards his divine identity.[270]

Questioning *per se* is not necessarily in opposition to proper understanding and reasoning, since the process of reasoning involves asking and attaining the answers to questions. However, Jesus' 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts?' in Luke 5.22 illustrates that raising objections to the legitimacy of Jesus' ministry[271] is the opposite of the proper reasoning and understanding process, hence it is challenged by the Lukan text. Improper thought processes are judged evil, precisely because they do not recognise Jesus' authority: the scribes' reactions, in Matthew 9.4, to Jesus forgiving sins, take place in the heart but are the opposite of "right". 'Matthew links the thoughts of the scribes with the critical reflection of the Pharisees'[272] by showing "their thoughts"(τὰς ἐνθυμήσεις αὐτῶν) as the product of the process indicated by 'you think evil' (ἐνθυμεῖσθε πονηρὰ), which is not one based on proper reasoning, and does not attempt to achieve true understanding.[273]

Believers are specifically warned against certain reasoning processes, the opposite of which can be deemed elements of an ideal standard and as such

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[270] Lane, *Mark*, pp. 237-238.

[271] Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 242.

[272] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 381.

[273] Whilst the text may be critical of a particular group of Pharisees, it is important to not extrapolate a wider interpretation. We have an 'ethical imperative to resist anti-Judaism in New Testament interpretation.' See Julia Watts Belser and Melanie S. Morrison, 'Living It Out - What No Longer Serves Us: Resisting Ableism and Anti-Judaism in New Testament Healing Narratives', in *JFSR*, vol. 27.2 (2011), pp. 153-170: p. 154.

results of proper reasoning and understanding. The call to not be anxious in Matthew 6.25 (μὴ μεριμνᾶτε) 'represents a profound challenge to…human preoccupations'[274] with need. If proper understanding and reasoning are to be the ideal and anxiety to be regarded as in opposition to that, it is focus that becomes the desired characteristic of proper reasoning and understanding, since 'anxiety is… all-consuming,' automatically distracting reasoning and understanding away from "the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6.33).[275]

'Do not judge, so that you may not be judged' (Μὴ κρίνετε, ἵνα μὴ κριθῆτε) in Matthew 7.1, is not necessarily associated with a judicial setting.[276] In this context the verb κρίνω does involve passing judgement,[277] but it is the outcome of negatively focusing on and almost adversarially seeking to influence other people;[278] the imperative is evidenced with the logic and understanding that

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[274] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 309.

[275] Lee Johnson and Robert Tannehill discuss potential conflict with social norms in relation to Matthew 6.25-33, specifically regarding women rejecting traditional duties for something deemed more important. In this interpretation, what seeking the kingdom requires is not specified, only the tension with the domestic sphere. 'The initial negative command not to be anxious is supported by a pattern of duality, established by referring first to food and then to clothing, followed by a rationale that questions the tendency to make these the dominant concerns.' Lee A. Johnson and Robert C. Tannehill, 'Lilies Do Not Spin: A Challenge to Female Social Norms', in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 56.4 (2010), pp. 475-490: p. 477. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688510000135>

[276] It should be noted that a legal setting is possible; see, for example, Christopher N Chandler, 'Blind Injustice : Jesus' Prophetic Warning against Unjust Judging (Matt 7:1-5)' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of St Andrews, 2010). Chandler asserts that Matthew 7.1-5 is 'the Matthean Jesus' halakhic, comment upon the laws for legal judging in Lev 19' (p. 2). However, it is equally possible to interpret the exhortation not to judge in terms of unfair and potentially hypocritical criticism of others, cf. Ian K. Duffield, 'Difficult Texts: Matthew 7.1–6', in *Theology*, vol. 119.2 (2016), pp. 117-120: pp. 117-118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X15615462>

[277] Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 103.

[278] *BDAG*, p. 567.

attitudes will be reciprocated. Matthew's audience is advised against "judging" as this is the antithesis of ideal reasoning and understanding for a believer. The Lukan Jesus, in Luke 6.37, adds to the reciprocal nature of the argument with 'Forgive and you will be forgiven.' These commands are both evidenced by reasoning and understanding, as well as illustrating that proper reasoning is non-judgemental and compassionate, resulting in forgiveness.

The Synoptic axiom 'You will know them by their fruits' (Matthew 7.16) is textually linked to the recognition of false prophets. If false prophets are those who do not possess proper understanding and reasoning, then the implication is that the metaphorical fruit they produce is not evidence of an ideal process, if that fruit is to be the 'outworking in the lives of these people of what they stand for.'[279] Just as the Gerasene demoniac exhibited proper understanding and reasoning, according to the writer of Luke, by sitting at Jesus' feet, in Luke 7.6-9 the centurion displays proper understanding and reasoning since 'his discourse focuses…centrally on his understanding and recognition of authority.'[280] The centurion's faith is praised by Jesus in verse 9: his logic is outlined in verses 6-8 and shows that his faith is based on a reasoned thought process, one which displays an understanding of Jesus' divine authority.[281] Additionally, that proper

[279] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 337.

[280] Green, *Luke*, p. 288.

[281] Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 78–80. Morgan discusses military relationships in Greco-Roman societies, with few relationships 'so positively described' as that of between an army commander and his troops, indicating an understood trustworthiness of those commanders. This understanding of relationship illustrates the centurion in the Lukan text displaying reasoning that is culturally appropriate. Whilst the precise implications of this for "faith"

reasoning and understanding rejects certain aspects of social standards, in that emphasis is given to a new worldview in which distinctions such as Jew/Gentile 'are not determinative of social interaction.'[282] Proper understanding and reasoning are socially constructed, but the standards within New Testament writings are not always dependent on contemporary social ideals.

The Beatitudes in Matthew 5 also reference the concept of reasoning and understanding, albeit indirectly from a modern perspective. In Matthew 5.8 the Matthean Jesus states 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.' The background to this assertion is Psalm 24.3-4, which describes who can ascend Mount Zion and includes those with a pure heart.[283] 'Purity of heart connotes integrity and stands opposed to deviousness;' whilst the idea may not 'have the degree of introspective focus that developments in Christian tradition and, in modern times, psychological studies have tended to impose on it,'[284] it does refer to a person's motives. 'The pure in heart' (οἱ καθαροὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ) references καρδία as the place affected by and where reasoning happens, therefore the reasoning and understanding taking place in a pure heart must also be pure and "proper".

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are beyond the scope of discussions corporeality, if the centurion is displaying both a correct reasoning process and faith, there must be a link between the two.

[282] Green, *Luke*, p. 287.

[283] Harrington, p. 79.

[284] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 205.

3.2 The "Same Mind"

Having "one mind" or "the same mind" appears in many English translations of Philippians 1.27, 2.2, 2.5, 3.15, and 4.2, held up as part of what constitutes as ideal believer. However, "one mind" is a false concept as it assumes "mind" to be a countable noun instead of a process. Additionally, "mind" can be mistranslated, both from the perspective of being a noun in the English version though a verb in the Greek texts, and that the English "mind" is sometimes used as an inaccurate equivalent. In the NRSV and KJV versions of Philippians 1.27 ψυχή is translated as "mind," instead of depicting identity personhood or the "soul," as versions such as the ASV translate.

Philippians 2.2, 2.5, 3.15 and 4.2 feature the verb φρονέω where the translated ideal "same mind" appears. Φρονέω itself appears twenty-six times in New Testament writings, with ten of those occurrences being in Philippians.[285] Whilst it does mean "to think," φρονέω refers to a "thinking" more akin to a reasoning process, as mentioned in the previous discussion of σωφρονέω, and therefore involves more than just intellect. When φρονέω is used in the text of Philippians, Paul is describing attitude,[286] outlook, but from the perspective that the narrative outlines a reasoning or understanding process that is based on certain values.[287]

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[285] Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2004), p. 86.

[286] Hawthorne and Martin, p. 86.

[287] Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1991), p. 94.

The phrase τὸ αὐτὸ φρονέω, which is often translated as 'to have the same mind,' is literally 'to think the same.' It 'is common enough in Paul' (cf. Romans 12.6, 15.5; 2 Corinthians 13.11; Philippians 4.2),[288] but is purported to be difficult to understand or translate accurately,[289] perhaps because English translations attempt to reference a noun rather than a process. The expression cannot mean uniformity of thought or common opinion[290] precisely because it does not refer to an end product. Stanley K. Stowers suggests that the aim of the Pauline usage of τὸ αὐτὸ φρονέω is 'for the Philippians to become people of a certain quality or type,'[291] which would account for the ideal of an audience reasoning in the same way, based on the same attitudes or values. According to Richard R. Melick Jr., this can be summarised as Paul writing 'to produce like-mindedness.'[292]

In Philippians 2.2 φρονέω is used twice, with an almost 'verbatim repetition of the friendship cliché "to think the same thing" in the first and fourth injunctions: τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε...τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες.'[293] Paul A. Holloway looks to the end of the process as being the text's ideal, but in his students' reader on the Greek texts of Philippians, Jerry L. Sumney suggests that as early as Herodotus the phrase τὸ

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[288] Hawthorne and Martin, p. 85.

[289] Hawthorne and Martin, p. 86.

[290] Hawthorne and Martin, p. 86.

[291] Stanley K. Stowers, 'Friends and Enemies in the Politics of Heaven: Reading Theology in Philippians', in *Pauline Theology - Volume 1*, ed. Jouette M. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), pp. 105-121: p. 108.

[292] Melick Jr., p. 93.

[293] Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), p. 113.

αὐτὸ φρονέω was focused on the process itself.[294] It might be reading interpretations into the language to assert, as Getty does, that φρονέω itself 'connotes having harmony of mind or agreeing with one another.'[295] In order to achieve "agreement," believers need to follow the same reasoning process, which is indicated by the phrase as whole unit.

The NRSV translates Philippians 2.5 as 'Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). Obviously, in the process of being translating into English, φρονέω has again been rendered as a noun, when a more literal translation of the Greek text would be: 'Think this in you which also in Christ Jesus.' Paul A. Holloway describes how 'scholars have struggled to know which verb to supply'[296] in ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, but that it is likely to be a form of ἐιμί. However Gerald T. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin put forward an interesting proposal that the missing verb is probably ἐφρονεῖτο,[297] with the expanded sentence being ὃ καὶ [ἐφρονεῖτο] ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ - 'Let this way of thinking be adopted by you, which also was the way of thinking adopted by Christ Jesus.'[298] A modern interpretation can involve visualising the end product, but the text might envisage a way of thinking 'in Christ Jesus' (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ).

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[294] Jerry L. Sumney, *Philippians: A Greek Student's Intermediate Reader* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 41.

[295] Mary Ann Getty, *Philippians and Philemon* (Dublin: Ventas, 1980), p. 25.

[296] Holloway, p. 116.

[297] Hawthorne and Martin, p. 107.

[298] Hawthorne and Martin, p. 108.

Whichever verb is supplied, the point of Philippians 2.5 is for believers to follow the same reasoning process that Christ did/does.

The idea of following the same ideal reasoning process appears again in Philippians 3.15 and is more explicitly related to how a believer should understand in relation to each other: 'Let those of us who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you' (ὅσοι οὖν τέλειοι, τοῦτο φρονῶμεν· καὶ εἴ τι ἑτέρως φρονεῖτε, καὶ τοῦτο ὁ θεὸς ὑμῖν ἀποκαλύψει). Strangely, the NRSV translates the process of φρονέω as both a noun (τοῦτο φρονῶμεν) and a verb (ἑτέρως φρονεῖτε). The ideal reasoning process that Paul's audience should be functioning according to has previously been discussed in the letter to the Philippians, in terms of Christ's example, so "think in this way" refers backwards to the standard that "thinking differently" is highlighted as diverging from.

In Philippians 4.2's inclusion of the τὸ αὐτὸ φρονέω phrase, Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to 'think in the same way in the Lord' (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν κυρίῳ).[299] Melick translates φρονέω as "agree" in this circumstance, but "to agree" is technically a different process; he may be correct in that the verse exhorts them to have the same attitudes and values as Christ,[300] but this was either through or as a result of the ideal reasoning process taking place 'in the Lord' (ἐν κυρίῳ). The language does not actually imply they had to directly agree;

[299] The NRSV translation reads 'be of the same mind in the Lord.'

[300] Melick Jr., p. 147.

agreement may well have been a result of the process, but that is not the focus of the text.

Questions as to potential disagreement cannot be answered with any certainty,[301] other than Euodia and Syntyche were reasoning too far from the ideal of synchronicity, and Philippians 4.2 is concerned with stopping quarrels or contentiousness that create[s] divisions.[302] It is possible that the two women were patrons of different house churches and Paul was worried about factionalism[303] caused by different reasoning processes being followed, hence the ideal of synchronicity. Translations which attempt to restrict the process within φρονέω as a discrete noun, "mind," emphasise an end result of disagreement, instead of placing the focus of the phrase on the process itself.

3.3 Being "Out" of One's "Right Mind"

According to George Aichele, 'In the transformations worked by the Gospels of Matthew and Luke on the stories in the Gospel of Mark we can see ideological pressures to make the ambiguous Jesus of Mark into something better suited to religious belief.'[304] Mark 3.21's report that Jesus' family 'went out to restrain him for they were saying, "He has gone out of his mind"' (ἐξῆλθον κρατῆσαι αὐτόν· ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη) is definitely somewhat awkward as a

[301] Holloway, p. 182.

[302] Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Social-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 237.

[303] Witherington III, p. 237.

[304] George Aichele, 'Jesus' Uncanny "Family Scene"', in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 74 (1999), pp. 29-49: p. 29.

representation of Jesus. William L. Lane describes Mark as 'the sole evangelist' to report the 'gross misjudgement'[305] made by those depicted, who according to English translations assert Jesus to be 'mad' (GNT) or have 'gone out of his mind' (NRSV). Yet, could it not also be that Jesus was not reasoning according to the standards expected by those who went out to restrain him?

Linguistic degeneration, where 'the sense of a word takes on a less positive, more negative evaluation,'[306] conceptually raises the possibility that the perception of ἐξίστημι changed because of translations bringing in vocabulary related to modern associations of madness. The only time in New Testament writings where ἐξίστημι is translated as "madness" is in Mark 3.21, leading some commentators to suggest possession. If ἐξίστημι has been degenerated by translation, or if modern readers are anachronistically using the idea of "madness" as equivalent to being out of one's right mind, instead of seeing reasoning contrary to contemporary expectation, then ἐξίστημι artificially becomes more than being out of one's ordinary state of mind, in opposition to σωφρονέω and socially understood proper understanding and reasoning. The word itself could simply mean Jesus in Mark 3.21 was not making "logical sense" according to what his audience understood logic to be.[307]

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[305] Lane, *Mark*, p. 138.

[306] Lyle Campbell, *Historical Linguistics* (Edinburgh, 2013), p. 227.

[307] Interpretations as to Jesus' supposed madness as demonic possession would be bringing context and exegesis into the linguistic translation. This is not to discount the notion of spiritual possession from New Testament writings in its entirety, more that in this particular instance ἐξίστημι does not indicate possession in a negative context.

Possession might, 'in popular terms' at least, be understood as madness,'[308] but this does not mean that ἐξέστη in Mark 3.21 should be automatically understood as Jesus being seen as demonically possessed. Firstly, possession and madness are not the same thing, even in understandings evident in New Testament writings. Markan society would have attributed corporeal difference to the supernatural, given cultural practices and medical understanding, but problematic reasoning was the symptom and possession was a potential cause. Additionally, a separation is made between the accusation of ἐξέστη and the interwoven story of Jerusalem scribes making a direct accusation of possession to Jesus: 'by distinguishing these two stories even as it interweaves them, the Gospel of Mark requires that a distinction be made between these two claims.'[309] The narrative outlines two groups presenting different readings regarding the character of Jesus, yet both with the aim of bringing the Jesus story to an end.[310] It is true that authorial intent cannot be directly discerned,[311] however it is also possible that whilst both groups within the narrative are seeking to control Jesus and define his identity according to their own terms.[312] The narrative is presenting their judgements as obviously incorrect

[308] John Painter, 'When Is a House Not a Home? Disciples and Family in Mark 3.13-35', in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 45 (1999), pp. 498-513: p. 506.

[309] Aichele, p. 32.

[310] Aichele, p. 32.

[311] Aichele, p. 39.

[312] Aichele, p. 44.

and formed on the basis of social standards and expectations, not those presented as being of God.

Alterations to Mark 3.21 in the manuscript tradition, such as the removal of any reference to ἐξίστημι in Codex W and Miniscule 28, supposedly indicate that 'in some quarters of the Church that it was considered inconceivable that anyone should regard Jesus as insane.'[313] Codex W removes ἐξέστη in favour of ἐξήρτηνται, which removes the possibility of Jesus as 'a character who had gone out of his mind,' instead characterising him as popular and well-received.[314] However, is it a misjudgement? If the indictment against Jesus is a judgement against social standards of reasoning, if he is not adhering to the expected arguments of the Judean administration depicted in the text and is challenging the thought processes of members of the general population, then technically he is "not in his right mind" according to those standards. Ἐξίστημι is an expression of negative judgement, but is not necessarily incorrect, since the judgement is not from the perspective of the Markan narrative itself. The judgement is, instead, from the perspective of those who are implicitly presented as not reasoning or understanding correctly, precisely because the text presents following the reasoning and teaching of Jesus as σωφρονέω.

[313] Lane, *Mark*, p. 138.

[314] Justin R. Howell, 'The Characterization of Jesus in Codex W', in *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 14.1 (2006), vol. 47-75: p. 72.

3.4 Paul's Reasoning Process in 2 Corinthians 5.13

The Greek text of 2 Corinthians 5.13 reads εἴτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν, θεῷ· εἴτε σωφρονοῦμεν, ὑμῖν (NA28) and is usually translated as something similar to 'For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you' (NRSV). In much of 2 Corinthians, Paul is particularly responding to criticism,[315] therefore 2 Corinthians 5.13 can be considered as part of Paul's defence of his apostolic ministry and displaying his credentials. According to 2 Corinthians 5.12 Paul is aware that members of the Corinthian congregation 'have insinuated that Paul's credentials are not "adequate" for one who claims his apostolic status.'[316] Through εἴτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν, θεῷ· εἴτε σωφρονοῦμεν, ὑμῖν, Paul is stating that his actions are entirely directed away from his own benefit or interests,[317] but exactly what the verse refers to, how Paul defends his apostolic credentials, is the subject of much debate.[318]

2 Corinthians 5.13 is a verse that creates many varied discussions, which generally fall into three broad categories of interpretation: insanity/erratic behaviour vs right mind; private vs public religious experience; or technical

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[315] Commentators such as Roetzel consider 2 Corinthians as a collection of shorter letters, amongst which 2 Corinthians 2.14-7.1 amounts to Paul defending his legitimacy. Cf. Calvin J. Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul*, 6th edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), pp. 105-122, particularly p. 116.

[316] Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 41-42.

[317] Moyer Hubbard, 'Was Paul Out of His Mind? Re-Reading 2 Corinthians 5.13', in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 20.70 (1998), pp. 39-63: p. 39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9802007003>

[318] Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians : A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), p. 417.

rhetorical terminology. In each of these three categories, 2 Corinthians 5.13 is usually interpreted as two opposing statements, but there is nothing in the language that necessitates the antinomy attributed to it. If the assumption that the verse consists of two opposing statements is removed, then 2 Corinthians 5.13 becomes two concurrent aspects of Paul's apostolic defence, instead of two supposedly conflicting qualities or states of being.

3.4.1 Insanity/Erratic Behaviour vs "Right Mind"?

It is possible to begin an interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5.13 by contrasting σωφρονέω and ἐξίστημι as antonyms: if σωφρονέω refers to Paul being in his "right mind," then ἐξίστημι 'is the opposite of self-control and can refer to all kinds of behaviour that may seem irrational.'[319] If Paul had been accused of mental instability or socially unacceptable behaviour that was 'too eccentric'[320] for the community's tastes, then σωφρονέω referring 'to being in one's right mind or being reasonable'[321] would constitute his refutation of that criticism, a counter-claim that he was capable of socially acceptable conduct.[322] Whichever way ἐξίστημι is taken to be intransitive and denote 'being out of one's mind or losing one's

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[319] David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1999), p. 276.

[320] David E. Garland, p. 276.

[321] Margaret E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. Vol. 1, Introduction and Commentary on II Corinthians I-VII* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), p. 405.

[322] Other variations of this interpretation, such as the verse being a reference to epilepsy or excessive self-commendation are possible, but 'improbable,' see Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), p. 284.

senses,'[323] the suggestion of this particular perspective would be that Paul is stating the case that it is for God to judge him, since no one else has the authority to.[324]

In terms of Paul's use of both verbs, each intransitive and relating to an internal process, ἐξίστημι is used in the aorist tense, whilst σωφρονέω is in the present, which could indicate the difference between a past action and Paul 'deliberately contrasting what he is now in writing to them with something that happened previously that may be interpreted as being mad.'[325] However, if the aorist is, in fact, timeless, then the argument regarding 2 Corinthians 5.13 as a defence of a past action does not make sense. Murray J. Harris argues that the issue is Paul submitting to God's judgement, not when Paul supposedly behaved inappropriately.[326] Nonetheless, if the contrast is not in fact between inappropriate and appropriate behaviour, as in ἐξίστημι being "for God," then limiting the time reference of the aorist would limit Paul's "for God" apostolic actions.

One of the main issues with the interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5.13, is the interpretation of ἐξίστημι as some form of madness or insanity, insanity being behaviour which contradicts social expectations or norms, with σωφρονέω referring

[323] Thrall, p. 405.

[324] Harris, p. 418.

[325] David E. Garland, p. 276.

[326] Harris, p. 418.

to “right mind” in terms of “mental sobriety,” as David E. Garland suggests.[327] If socially criticised behaviour is “for God” and proper understanding or reasoning is “for you,” despite the explanation that God is to judge the negative behaviour, the question still remains as to why that “right mind,” as proper understanding and reasoning, is not “for God” if the opposition is between reason and immorality, with God being the authority of right judgement.

Ἐξίστημι appears nowhere else in Pauline literature: the only time in New Testament writings where it is translated as “madness” is in Mark 3.21. If Mark 3.21 uses ἐξίστημι as a serious criticism being made of Jesus, yet in 2 Corinthians 5.13 it is a virtue, then the meaning of ἐξίστημι must be looked at as a process that can be either negative or positive. As well Paul not using ἐξίστημι elsewhere in his writing, where he does refer to insanity or madness he uses alternative vocabulary. In 2 Corinthians 11.23, Paul writes ‘Being beside myself, I speak’ (παραφρονῶν λαλῶ),[328] using the notion of being beside oneself or irrational (παραφρονέω)[329] as a description of someone apparently not following socially accepted logic. It seems unlikely that 2 Corinthians 5.13 would be such a vague reference to a similar condition, if Paul is prepared elsewhere to be quite so specific.

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[327] David E. Garland, p. 277.

[328] ‘I am talking like a madman’ is how παραφρονῶν λαλῶ is rendered by the NRSV translation, maintaining an interpolated link between expected reasoning and sanity.

[329] *BDAG*, p. 772.

3.4.2 Private vs Public Religious Experience?

Another interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5.13 understands ἐξίστημι as Paul 'alluding to religious ecstasy expressed in mystical experiences and speaking in tongues,'[330] which assumes that Paul distinguishes between moments of spiritual communion with God and a rational human state of communication. It is also possible, within this understanding of ἐξίστημι, that 'Paul may be downplaying the value of ecstatic visions in contrast to his more flamboyant opponents.'[331]

For those who view 2 Corinthians 5.13 as Paul responding to a charge of failing 'to produce as evidence of his apostleship the kind of ecstatic experience his rivals evaluate so highly,'[332] the verse shows Paul's concern to separate the sphere of private ecstatic experience and the public sphere, where apostolic service was visible to the community. Since the prevailing view within contemporary society was of valuing the religious "madness" provoked by gods or goddesses, Paul is rejecting such a public performance to assert that his apostleship was fulfilled 'by his sober-minded *persuading people* of the gospel and by his service to those who receive it.'[333] From this perspective, 2 Corinthians 5.13 claims that Paul's status as an apostle is evidenced by his preaching and pastoral care. A. E. Harvey argues that Paul recognises ecstatic experience 'is essentially incommunicable to others and may appear totally

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[330] David E. Garland, p. 274.

[331] David E. Garland, p. 275.

[332] Furnish, p. 324.

[333] Furnish, p. 324.

irrational,' private out of necessity and not to be exposed in a public environment.[334] This, though, implies that for Paul spiritual communication from God is not a valid argument in persuading others and would mean that Paul's Damascus road experience cannot not be used as evidence, something contradicted by Paul's use of that evidence in Galatians 1.12, with his reliance on an ecstatic experience in receiving the Gospel.

Paul only uses σωφρονέω twice: the other occasion is in Romans 12.13, where it appears to be a reference to thinking in a measured way,[335] displaying proper understanding and reasoning. However, Victor Paul Furnish also links it to Plato's *Phaedrus* and Philo's *On the Cherubim* to suggest that σωφρονέω relates to sanity.[336] The concept of sanity, in relating to concepts of reasoning and understanding by Furnish's argument, is directed by the "for you" and not "for God," which if Paul's appropriate commendation was being "right-minded" and in 'the public arena he "persuades men" to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ through his ministry of preaching…and he does so with self-control,' it is not religious ecstasy that legitimates ministry.[337] However, the religious ecstasy interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5.13 separates the legitimacy of Paul's ministry from God, whom he purports to serve. In short, the fundamental weakness of the argument regarding

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[334] A. E. Harvey, *Renewal through Suffering : A Study of 2 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), p. 71.

[335] Furnish, p. 308.

[336] Furnish, pp. 308–9.

[337] Barnett, p. 285.

2 Corinthians 5.13 as Paul responding to accusations of his lack of ecstatic experience, is the lack of evidence of ἐξίστημι as a direct reference to actual ecstatic experiences[338] - ἐξίστημι is used 92 times in the LXX and New Testament, but not in the context of ritual ecstasy.[339]

3.4.3 Technical Rhetorical Terminology?

The aforementioned speculation, regarding the relative uses of σωφρονέω and ἐξίστημι in 2 Corinthians 5.13, appears to occur despite, or perhaps because of, difficulty assessing literary and historical context. The majority of commentators view 2 Corinthians 5.13 as referring to Paul exhibiting some form of erratic behaviour or as a reference to ecstatic experiences, however there is a third group who see 2 Corinthians 5.13 as Paul responding to accusations regarding his lack of rhetorical sophistication.[340] According to Andrew C. Ballard, the terms σωφρονέω and ἐξίστημι constitute technical terminology 'often used in contexts that describe the rhetorical ability and character traits of an effective civic leader,'[341] thereby linking ideal processes of reasoning to rhetorical skill.

[338] C. Andrew Ballard, 'Tongue-Tied and Taunted: Paul, Poor Rhetoric and Paltry Leadership in 2 Corinthians 5.13', in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 37.1 (2014), pp. 50-70: p. 52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X14546439>

[339] Ballard, p. 53.

[340] Ballard, p. 50.

[341] Ballard, p. 51.

If σωφρονέω and ἐξίστημι are used as 'terminology with specific meanings in the context of persuasive speech,'[342] then Paul is responding to his opponents' accusations that he was uneducated, ignorant, and inadequate regarding rhetorical ability. Specifically, within the rhetorical sphere, σωφρονέω was applied to the intellectual and ethical qualities of a speaker, one who followed the set precepts and avoided excess, meaning that Paul's critics regarded his style of speech as excessive and unrestrained by custom.[343] Moyer Hubbard specifically translates 2 Corinthians 5.13 as a response to that rhetorical context: 'If, as some of you complain, my speech was unpolished and excessive, credit that to God's account; if I am presently reasonable and lucid, credit that to yours.'[344] With ἐξίστημι reflecting Paul's acceptance of his own weakness, σωφρονέω would then state Paul's strength of reasoning, potentially forcing Paul's opponents to re-consider the concepts of "weak" and "strong" embodied by their terminology.[345] In arguing 'his weakness and contemptibility only serve to further the proclamation of the foolish message of the cross,' Paul is utilising 'the rhetorical sophistication of a proper civic leader…for the benefit of his congregation.'[346]

This interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5.13 attributes ἐξίστημι as a negative judgement to God ([ἐστιν] θεῷ), with the ideal reasoning (σωφρονέω) assigned

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[342] Ballard, p. 55.

[343] Ballard, p. 55.

[344] Hubbard, p. 61.

[345] Ballard, p. 65.

[346] Ballard, p. 66.

elsewhere. Hubbard argues that the dative θεῷ in 2 Corinthians 5.13 is Paul 'offering some type of theological justification for his ἐξίστημι,'[347] yet that argument implies that Paul is blaming God for his rhetorical weaknesses, which would not function as a defence of his position as an apostle chosen by God. If Christ is to be 'the force that guides Paul's behaviour, legitimizing his conduct,'[348] then θεῷ must be a reflection of that legitimisation, not a method of apportioning blame for negative conduct elsewhere.

3.4.4 The Concurrent Defence of Two Aspects of Paul's Credentials

There are two assumptions made by all of the positions outlined above: that σωφρονέω and ἐξίστημι function as opposites within 2 Corinthians 5.13, and that the verse consists of two related clauses, in modern versions of original language texts linked by a semicolon. Given that punctuation was inserted into the Greek text at a later point, might it not be that these two clauses are, in fact, two largely independent statements? Paul is re-affirming his credentials[349] and, if σωφρονέω and ἐξίστημι are not meant as antonyms, Paul could be suggesting two concurrent aspects of his apostolic credentials, in his own defence.

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[347] Hubbard, p. 61.

[348] Matthew C. Pawlak, 'Consistency Isn't Everything: Self-Commendation in 2 Corinthians', in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 40.3 (2018), pp. 360-382: p. 366. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X18755908>

[349] Anthony Bash, 'A Psychodynamic Approach to the Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 10-13', in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 24.1 (2001), pp. 51-67: p. 65. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X0102400103>

The usual antithesis to σωφρονέω is μαίνομαι,[350] but the equation made by some interpreters of ἐξίστημι with μαίνομαι, in order to make 2 Corinthians 5.13 a statement of two opposites, is questionable. Whilst the two verbs might be 'roughly synonymous' in some contexts, on the occasions where this occurs the reference is not being made to religious ecstasy[351] and within the LXX and New Testament writings, in 'the vast majority of occurrences, ἐξίστημι is used to denote amazement, confusion, or fear.'[352] The use of γάρ, "for," in 2 Corinthians 5.13 functions almost like "as mentioned earlier," meaning that verse 13 explains the previous verses, 2 Corinthians 5.11-12, but that verse 13 also depends on them.[353] If 2 Corinthians 5.10-11 is taken as direct context and a 'signpost' for consequent verses,[354] the discussion of "the judgement seat of Christ" in verse 10 and "knowing the fear of the Lord" in verse 11 would suggest that εἴτε γὰρ ἐξέστημεν, [ἐστιν] θεῷ refers to "fear of the Lord," using ἐξίστημι to describe a state of awe, respect and reverence, not madness or ecstasy in explicit opposition to reason.

To hold an ideal reasoning process (σωφρονέω) as the antithesis of "for God" would not allow it to be part of Paul's work for God, yet that reasoning process is part of his defence of his apostolic mission. If σωφρονέω is not a

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[350] Hubbard, p. 43.

[351] Hubbard, p. 42.

[352] Ballard, p. 53.

[353] Barnett, p. 283.

[354] Hubbard, p. 53.

negative judgement, in the same way that ἐξίστημι is not, then the two must be concurrent positive judgements. Taking the datives, as well as the ellipsis ἐστιν into account, 'it is for God's glory…it is for your benefit' simply indicates that the two verbs operate in different directions and do not necessarily have to result in conflicting states or actions. Paul is drawing a contrast between two kinds of behaviour, but from the perspective that one is 'directed toward God' and the other 'toward the Corinthians.'[355] If Paul is affirming that all he does is 'for God, or for them, and not for himself,'[356] then concurrent statements would allow "for you" to still be "for God", in the sense that Paul views his apostolic mission as commissioned work for God. Proper reasoning and understanding are not in opposition to what is "for God", it simply seeks to persuade people of the Gospel alongside Paul's awe and reverence "for God". Paul's apostolic defence functions by having the proper understanding and reasoning with which to persuade people, but that understanding is of the Gospel message, alongside the proper attitude to God, which is because of who God is not who Paul is.

3.5 Concluding Remarks on Ideal New Testament Reasoning Processes

The English translation "mind" is an uncomfortable one, anachronistically judging a process as a discrete, albeit abstract, entity. What is being described in the New Testament writings discussed above is a process, one which needs to take place in a "pure" heart (cf. Mark 6.52). Applying a disability studies

[355] Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), p. 131.

[356] David E. Garland, p. 274.

perspective to the consideration of “right mind” allows for the definition of a process of proper understanding and reasoning, but it also creates the space for ‘an inventory of assumptions.’[357] By looking at judgements regarding the reasoning process as being made based on presuppositions, textual assumptions become evident: that proper reasoning is a gift (cf. Matthew 13.11); that it produces humility; that an acceptance of Jesus’ divine authority should be an automatic result of the process of proper reasoning and understanding; that focussing reasoning on the kingdom of God excludes preoccupation with human need; that proper reasoning can be judged by the actions or effects it produces (cf. Matthew 7.26); that it is compassionate and results in forgiveness; that those with a correctly functioning reasoning process exhibit self-control (Mark 5.15/Luke 8.35); and that there should be a synchronicity between believers if their process of reasoning is ideal. “One mind” in Philippians, though, should not be understood as a singular process, more that the letter’s audience were expected to reason in a particular way and according to certain values. Also, questioning is not the direct opposite to proper reasoning and understanding, since the correct reasoning involves learning by asking and attaining the answers to questions – improper questions arise from the objective of challenging Jesus’ authority (cf. Luke 5.22) and provide evidence of a deviant reasoning process, one not focussed on the kingdom of God.

[357] Patricia A. Clark and M. Lynn Rose, ‘Pscychiatric Disability in the Galenic Medical Matrix’, in *Disabilities in Roman Antiquity: Disparate Bodies ‘A Capite Ad Calcem’*, eds. Christian Laes, C. F. Goodey, and M. Lynn Rose (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 45-72: p. 51.

New Testament writings which mention the reasoning process create an overarching picture that there were expectations for a person's reasoning process, even if those expectations might vary in terms of specifics. They illustrate that the ideal standards of reasoning for believers outlined in a text did not automatically correspond with the values of the text's contextual society. Even Jesus was judged as not adhering to cultural standards, 'out of his mind' in Mark 3.21 and not making sense according to the understanding of his audience at that point. Additionally, as we have seen, Paul, in 2 Corinthians 5.13, reaffirms his credentials to lead by maintaining that he can reason according to expected standards, but that he can also reason according to God's standards and then be seen as not meeting society's expectations.

The often-hidden nature of references to "mind" as a process, at least in English translations, means that more work needs to be done on how reference is made to the process of reasoning and understanding within New Testament writings. The process of proper understanding and reasoning occurs in, and is dependent on, the καρδία, yet not every reference to καρδία pertains to the process of reasoning and understanding, so how can the distinction in usage accurately be made? Texts such as Luke 15.17 ('when he came to himself'/εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν) seem to refer to the recovery of the process of reasoning and understanding, but do so with a figurative use of language: is there a way to accurately identify subtle references to the process of "mind" where the language is not explicit to a modern reader?

Despite these remaining questions and something of a 'dearth of source material' when it comes to examining the "mind" in New Testament texts, it is imperative that we place the little of what we have in relation to corporeality under scrutiny,[358] because it is against cultural standards contained in these texts that individuals are measured. Measurements are 'based on context-bound, shifting descriptors.'[359] If the "mind" is not an entity but a process, then, in terms of the societies contemporary to New Testament texts, those who thought differently could be viewed as 'ultimate others.'[360] This is important because who meets the standard of "right mind," functioning in a close enough way to the ideal process, and who is judged according to their "otherness," functioning "too far" away from the ideal process, depends on who is in control of the standard.

As is also true for the more physical aspects of corporeality, those narrating New Testament writings are shaping the standard for the thought processes of believing communities, which means that "right mind" is being illustrated from specific perspectives. The portrayed standards, or attitudes to standards, of corporeality illustrated here and in the previous chapter, form the background for the following discussion on the judgements made against those who do not adhere to corporeal expectations. The remaining chapters will examine how this occurs in New Testament writings, particularly through the use of negative metanarratives.

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[358] Laes, Goodey, and Rose, p. 13.

[359] Clark and Rose, p. 51.

[360] Laes, Goodey, and Rose, p. 8.

CHAPTER 4

"DEVIANT" BODIES

The topic of bodies fascinates scholars of antiquity, yet little attention is often paid to disabled bodies.[361] This chapter contributes to biblical scholarship by providing an overview of disabled bodies in New Testament writings, alongside consideration of the metanarratives used to portray them. As has been established in chapters 2 and 3, New Testament writings contain assumptions or expectations of ideal corporeality. Even where New Testament writings depict societies consisting primarily of "non-ideal" members, some are still judged "other" and, therefore, are textually viewed as somehow "deviant." This judgement is made on the basis of not coming close enough to the ideal standards embedded within a text.

What constitutes an atypical body is not a simple question with regards to antiquity. It 'cannot be answered by a simple definition that applies to all places at all times.'[362] The distance from the ideal considered "too far" and therefore "other" [363] will be different in the context of each individual New Testament text.[364]

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[361] Kristi Upson-Saia, 'Resurrecting Deformity: Augustine on Wounded and Scarred Bodies in the Heavenly Realm', in *Disability in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Darla Schumm and Michael Stolzfus (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 93-122: p. 93.

[362] Husquin, p. 15.

[363] Husquin, p. 28. One of Husquin's central considerations is how far deviation could extend and still be judged acceptable. Whilst this chapter examines those bodies judged "deviant" in New Testament writings, this question needs to always be kept in mind, from the perspective that the answer may well vary in each context.

[364] Husquin, p. 18. According to Husquin, atypical bodies would have been 'of many kinds,' making 'a globalizing categorization' impossible. "Other" will, therefore, be different in each individual context.

Out of necessity, the futility of a single definition[365] leads to questions being very much a point of reference, according to an implicit and abstruse ideal standard against which a deviant body is being judged. As such, the texts discussed in the following chapter raise more questions than can in fact be answered and are explored in a case-by-case basis, acknowledging that an overarching interpretation is inappropriate.

Corporeal deviance, or the judgement of such, relates to physiognomic frames of reference prevalent in antiquity;[366] a person negatively judged too far from a society's ideal would have religious and symbolic assumptions, inner qualities, associated to their external corporeal state. That thought world then produces and effects metaphors based on the body, as well as relative judgements according to types of body.[367]

Against a backdrop where 'deformity and disability were overwhelmingly common occurrences,'[368] physiognomy was considered 'a reliable and impartial

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[365] Husquin, p. 28.

[366] Dale B. Martin, p. 18. 'In the ancient world, physiognomy, the art of interpreting a person's character and inner state on the basis of visible, physiological characteristics, was a respected science.' For further discussion on the development of physiognomic thought, see also Antón Alvar Nuño's brief outline in 'Ocular Pathologies and the Evil Eye in the Early Roman Principate', in *Numen*, vol. 59.4 (2012), pp. 295-321: pp. 304-305. Amongst other comments, Alvar Nuño highlights how the prologue to treatise A of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Physiognomonika* explains three separate types of proto-physiognomic approaches.

[367] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 25. In many societies, the body of a Roman male citizen was considered normative, as in that was the marker beyond which "other" could be defined; Parsons observes that 'races or ethnic groups exhibiting real or presumed deviations from that body type would be subject to denigration.' In theory, this also would mean that a non-Roman would be considered "other," but it would be their corporeality that would be the focus of comparison, leading to a negative physiognomic bias at any point past the marker of Roman male citizen.

[368] Kelley, p. 31.

tool to assess and categorize others,'[369] meaning that the judgement of corporeal deviance was useful in rhetorical invective.[370] Early New Testament writers were aware of and used physiognomic ideas, [371] but their usage is not entirely uncritical: there is capacity for tension where linguistically embedded values conflict with alternative elements of a particular narrative.

Corporeal deviance could be 'mobilized for different purposes'[372] and a variety of impairments are utilised in New Testament writings. Moss summarises the situation in the Gospel of Mark, for example, as akin to Jewish and Early Christian literature in general, where impairment is linked with sinfulness.[373] This association does occur, but solely taking this perspective ignores, as Moss acknowledges, any potential layers of meaning, or possible challenge to social assumptions regarding impairment and negative corporeal judgement.[374]

4.1 A Notional Category of "Other"

There is, in New Testament writings, a boundary between bodies judged positively and those judged negatively. Solevåg might be overstating the situation

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[369] Callie Callon, *Reading Bodies: Physiognomy as a Strategy of Persuasion in Early Christian Discourse* (London - New York: T & T Clark, 2020), p. 5.

[370] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 27 and Callon, p. 1.

[371] Callon, p. 2.

[372] Upson-Saia, p. 93.

[373] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 275.

[374] Henning, p. 16. Henning correctly states that, because texts discussing the body 'were written by persons with a relatively high degree of social power,' it is difficult to access a disability perspective. Particular information pertaining to a disability perspective has not been included and gaps have been left, on account of a nondisabled focus.

in suggesting that that the 'notion of an overarching category of infirmity or disability' is present because similar groupings of disability categories point to 'the existence of a higher-level concept of infirmity or disability,'[375] but there are groups of those judged to be too far from whichever particular corporeal ideal pertains to the text in which they are referred, even if "otherness" is never explicitly defined.

Negatively judged bodies can be found loosely assembled together[376] according to an assumption of lack. The judgement of "other" allows for the construction of a boundary of inclusion for community membership,[377] situating deviant bodies on the outside of that aspect of cultural identity. The outside group, such as "the blind and the lame" in Matthew 21.14,[378] is a literary device, 'not real characters,' which functions to underscore the significance of Jesus.[379]

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[375] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 14.

[376] Kylie Crabbe, '"The Blind and the Lame": An Adapted Category in Early Christian Communal Self-Understanding', in *The Reception of Jewish Tradition in the Social Imagination of the Early Christians*, eds. John M. G. Barclay and Kylie Crabbe (London - New York: T & T Clark, 2022), pp. 107-128: p. 109. Crabbe states that 'terms for particular conditions that frequently appear in close association with one another suggest a kind of categorization of thinking.' However, despite frequently appearing together, there is not an actual relation between the conditions. This could suggest a movement towards a concept similar to "disability," but the lack of vocabulary indicates nothing quite as distinct is present in New Testament writings.

[377] Crabbe, p. 107.

[378] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 42. 2 Samuel 5.8 reads 'The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.' Some Greek translations add 'of the Lord,' with interpreters assuming that 'the blind and the lame' were excluded from temple precincts. There is debate as to what 'the house' actually refers to, when it is added with or without 'of the Lord,' but the important point here is the grouping of impairments considered as negative corporeal states.

[379] Crabbe, pp. 123–24.

In many cases, the impairments listed relate to the corporeal functionality important to taking part in society as it is constructed in the narrative,[380] with ascribed meanings 'distinct and alien from a modern perspective.'[381] Passages such as Matthew 11.4-6 and Luke 7.21-23 show impairments listed as an almost generic category, not as disability *per se* but as 'objects of Jesus's healing ministry.' People with 'no place in communal identity' operate, according to Kylie Crabbe, as part of narratives creating the illustration of 'an ideal, restored community without impairments.'[382] Deviant bodies exist, as the opposite of the acceptable, in order to be transformed.

John 6.2 contains a crowd 'following' Jesus, curious as to 'the signs that he was doing for the sick.'[383] A modern reader tends to interpret the crowd as the normate group expecting to view healings, however if the majority were in search of the elusive quality of health themselves, the crowd would be composed of those with impairments; the weakness[384] described as the focus of signs, being outside of the community identity, pertains to lacking strength for

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[380] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 15. Solevåg uses κωφός, as mute, deaf or both, to exemplify how an oral culture would understand incapacity to participate.

[381] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 14.

[382] Crabbe, p. 125.

[383] J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), p. 341. Ramsey Michaels makes the point that the action of following in itself demonstrates interest and curiosity, meaning that the crowd was focused on the healing of impairment as a sign of Jesus' status and power, though not necessarily as healing and change of corporeal state in itself.

[384] Τῶν ἀσθενούντων in John 6.2 uses ἀσθενέω to refer to a group of people too weak to participate, possibly on account of sickness. I have commented on "the weakness" being the focus of the signs in the Gospel of John, as it is that which places them as "other."

participation. The 'great crowds' in Matthew 15.30-31 are expecting teaching or healing as 'the fulfilment of the Isaianic promises.' [385] The function of 'the lame, the blind, the maimed, the mute, and many others' is symbolic as narrative prosthesis on a superficial level, collective evidence of Jesus' messianic identity.[386]

Although the category of "other" is broad and cannot be precisely determined, it is important to remember that even though the notional "other" can include both impairment and possession, impairment and possession are not automatically linked together. For example, Matthew 4.23 describes Jesus 'curing every disease and every sickness' and does not mention exorcism in conjunction with that aspect of Jesus' ministry. Additionally, in the following verse, 'people with demons' are listed as separate to 'having epilepsy or afflicted with paralysis.' [387] Matthew 4.23-24's lists emphasise the broad generalisation of "other," but it is interesting that in the purportedly normal activity of 'healing every disease and sickness' does not describe medical treatment.[388] Θεραπεύω is rendered as "to heal" or "to cure" in English translations, but it could equally translate as treat or serve. Whilst the narrative probably intends to abridge

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[385] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 639.

[386] France, *Matthew*, p. 424. Isaiah 35.5-6 'provides the scriptural basis for the cure of the blind, deaf (and dumb), and lame' with Isaiah 61.1 concerning good news to those who are poor and oppressed 'with no reference to physical healing in most translations of the Hebrew text, though the LXX version also includes "recovery of sight for the blind."'

[387] France, *Matthew*, p. 151. France notes the separate category made for demon possession, but also mentions that Matthew is not as careful in the distinction as other gospel writers, in that the idea of healing is used to cover the entire list.

[388] W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 1-7* (London - New York: T & T Clark, 2004), p. 418.

accounts of corporeal signs and emphasise the number of impairments brought to Jesus , with 'no single case of illness [being] left untreated,'[389] the question should still be asked as to what exactly the attention given by Jesus consisted of and the degree to which "restoration" had to be corporeal, since not every person with an impairment is necessarily "cured."

4.1.1 Feast Imagery

Whereas cursory references to the notional grouping of impairments creates exclusion in texts seeking a brief illustration of Jesus' "healing" ministry, in the feast imagery of Luke 14[390] the category becomes representative of inclusion.[391] In Luke 14.15-24, the previously outcast metaphorical guests could be interpreted as representing believers, but the sequence of asking them once the original invitees had refused to come becomes problematic, on both a figurative and a literal level. John Nolland argues that the historical Jesus did not turn to "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" because he was rejected by the rich and important,[392] yet those outside of community identity are only invited once the original invitations have been refused. Are they "second choice" or is the text a commentary on community identity and values? If Luke's gospel is

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[389] France, *Matthew*, p. 151.

[390] Gosbell, p. 169. Luke 14.15-24 is part of Luke 14's 'larger section on banqueting etiquette.' Gosbell comments on this beginning with a man present experiencing dropsy, who Jesus heals and sends on his way. Symbolically, the condition labelled as dropsy (ὑδωπικός) can be used as a metaphor for greed and gluttony, and is structurally separated from "the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame" of Luke 14.13 and Luke 14.21.

[391] Crabbe, p. 127. 'The references across Luke 14 project the community as one in which people like those with visual and mobility impairments are included.'

[392] John Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1993), p. 754.

highlighting issues regarding social values, negative corporeal judgement is still being used in order to do that. If 'it is the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind who are finding their way into the banquet' and not 'the people with the most publicly obvious claim' on eschatological participation,[393] then the narrative's subversion of Greco-Roman banqueting and symposia practices[394] employs standards of marginalisation even as it attempts to include the "others" – they are still identified as "marginalised" even when present at the banquet.

Luke's banquet parable is preceded, in Luke 14.7-14, by a discussion on ranking and relative honour, which lays the foundation for the parable itself. The pericope states that the host 'has the final say' about the hierarchy and seating position of the guests.[395] "The poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" may have been marked for exclusion in Leviticus 21.17-23,[396] but the provided advice in Luke uses the shame of being reprimanded for self-importance to illustrate the assumed humility of "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" to exemplify the ideal attitude. Negatively judged bodies are marked ritually, socially, and economically, since these individuals cannot contribute according to cultural expectations of reciprocity.[397] By directing hospitality to be organised according

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[393] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, p. 754.

[394] Gosbell, p. 165.

[395] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, p. 749.

[396] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, p. 751.

[397] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), p. 34. Giving or providing hospitality to "the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame" would be 'a gift-without-return' since economically they would not be able to respond in kind, making 'even their gratitude…worth nothing.'

to generosity rather than self-interest, the text is subverting banqueting etiquette[398] in preparation for the following parabolic discussion of the eschaton, but it does so by utilising embedded corporeal values.

The uninterested responses of Luke 14.15-24's original invitees show a preoccupation with 'material affairs of life,'[399] implying that "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" who accept their invitation have a more correctly oriented attitude. This sets up an interesting comparison between the original invitees, who reject the invitation on material grounds, and the eventual attendees who apparently do not have the same concerns. However, Luke 14.21 gives 'no thought' to "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" refusing the secondary invitation[400] and in Luke 14.23 the "master" instructs the "slave" to "compel" them to attend the banquet.[401]

If Jesus is disrupting cultural customs in relation to established corporeal boundaries, then the enlargement of those boundaries in Luke 14.23, when the servant is sent outside of town,[402] illustrates not only how there were those

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[398] John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 751.

[399] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, p. 758.

[400] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, p. 757. Nolland refers to "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" as 'needy' and although this reflects the assumptions of Luke 14, it is somewhat problematic vocabulary, hence it has been substituted as far as possible in this discussion for "the poor, the lame, and the blind" as the notion grouping which appears in the Lukan texts.

[401] English translations render ἀναγκάζω as "compel," "urge" or "make" in terms of almost forcing behaviour. It is possible that it could simply refer to "urge" but the "bring in" (εἰσάγω) of Luke 14.21 suggests that "the poor, the lame, and the blind" are not given much of a choice, or their response is assumed.

[402] François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9.51-19.27* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), p. 372.

further excluded from community identity, but also that there are multiple boundaries, or degrees of "otherness." "The poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" are judged negatively as being too far from the corporeal ideal, but they exist within the boundaries of the parable's "town": the servant or slave is instructed to go further outside of the town or community boundaries. In this way, the parable displays evidence of a socially constructed corporeal hierarchy, even as it brings the marginalised towards the centre.

Interestingly, François Bovon comments that the final message of the parable is not joy 'because of the welcoming of the next to last,' but instead the resultant position is sadness because of the 'exclusion of the first.'[403] "Sadness" would indicate loss based on relative value, with God 'rescind[ing] his original invitation to the messianic banquet, and by extension the entire eschaton' from Israel and making it now 'reserved for a new community,' one made from a faithful remnant, outcasts and Gentile believers. Proponents of this argument see Luke confirming the places of both Jews and Gentiles in salvation.[404] However, even if an allegorical reading is 'still favoured by many exegetes and commentators,'[405] with its negative metaphorical usage of "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," it must be acknowledged that such an interpretation

[403] Bovon, *Luke 2*, p. 373.

[404] Gosbell, p. 173.

[405] Gosbell, p. 172.

provides an unflattering portrait of God, with God apparently only inviting the marginalised and Gentiles after 'he has been shunned by his original invitees.'[406]

Given that Luke 14.7-14 disputes social etiquette, it seems much more likely that the parable functions as a challenge to a community who overlooked "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind".[407] It may well be that it is this challenge that contains the theological import, rather than any imposed metaphorical consideration, of highlighting and raising the status of those marginalised within the believing community.[408] In arguing for Luke 14.15-24 as a challenge to the community audience's values, Gosbell contends that Luke aims 'to provide contrast with traditional images of Greco-Roman banquets' where excluded "others" are either servants or entertainers.[409] She suggests that Luke uses Jesus' table fellowship to cross social boundaries.[410] At the same time, though, if meal practices enact and reinforce social values and hierarchies, then they also provide evidence of the negative corporeal judgements placed upon "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," as the culture of the text creates its boundaries. Gosbell is not wrong to assert that the Lukan meal scenes illustrate contrast between Jesus' perspective and his opponents,[411] in reference

[406] Gosbell, p. 220.

[407] Gosbell, pp. 175–76.

[408] Gosbell, p. 224.

[409] Gosbell, p. 166.

[410] Gosbell, pp. 201–2.

[411] Gosbell, p. 202.

to the treatment of those marginalised, but marginalisation is still measured according to corporeal standards.

4.2 Stories of Healing

Healing stories 'have no singular purpose,'[412] but are problematic lenses through which to view corporeality, as they appear to solve the presented problem of deviance.[413] Christological in focus, they provide knowledge about Jesus, but 'very little about the character with the disability.'[414] Viewing narratives of healing as metaphors does not solve the issue, as 'The metaphor still demands that we isolate and focus on persons with physical limitations such as blindness, deafness, or paralysis as symbols of brokenness'[415] whose corporeality needs to be "fixed." Healings promote the transformation from a "wrong" body towards an "ideal" one, where this transformation might be viewed as "fixing" disability if the person concerned has enough faith.[416] This is not to say that texts featuring healings do not provide elements of challenge to cultural

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[412] Colleen Grant, 'Reinterpreting the Healing Narratives', in *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*, eds. Nancy L. Eiesland and Don E. Saliers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 72-87: p. 73.

[413] Although the importance of resisting anti-Jewish interpretation has been alluded to earlier, it is particularly important to reemphasise here that 'efforts to resist the oppression of people with disabilities by deemphasizing liberal acts of healing tend to highlight Jesus' structural critique and social transformation ' but can 'easily lead to anti-Jewish readings.' See Watts Belser and Morrison, pp. 153–54.

[414] Grant, p. 74.

[415] Grant, p. 78.

[416] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 299.

marginalisation, or comment on the negative treatment of those excluded from society on account of their impairment.[417]

4.2.1 Unnamed Bodies in Healing Narratives: Deafness[418] in Mark 7.31-37

There is a 'paucity of references to deaf individuals in the ancient world,' which Ellen Adams suggests could be 'a reflection of the extent to which they were shut out of political life, and by extension elite literature.'[419] As a result of that practical exclusion, with elite literature providing much of the record, there is little to no evidence from deaf people in antiquity. In a political world centred around rhetoric as a particular form of communication, both oral and aural, it is 'likely that deaf people were considered as different, and so were hindered from playing a part in sociopolitical life.'[420] In Mark 7.31-37, a deaf man has his ears "opened" but he is a member of the masses so his voice is simply reported as 'he spoke plainly.' [421] To a certain extent, in the ancient world the degree of hearing

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[417]One example of where a healing narrative also functions as potential social commentary is John 5.1-15, which is discussed in the following chapter.

[418] Ellen Adams, 'Deafness: Sensory Impairment as Communication Disability, Past and Present', in *A Cultural History of Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (London - New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 85-100: p. 86. The adjective "deaf" will be used in reference to hearing loss, since the texts concerned do not refer to a "Deaf" community or culture.

[419] Adams, 'Deafness', p. 87.

[420] Adams, 'Deafness', pp. 87-89. Hypothetically deafness was not a hindrance in agricultural life, such as for manual labourers in agriculture; deaf people would have been invisible in the labour force, 'but then all of the masses were deprived of a voice.'

[421] An interesting comparison, from this perspective, would be with Zechariah, in Luke 1, who loses and regains his voice. Zechariah, as a member of the priestly elite, is both named and is attributed with direct speech; his situation will be discussed later in this chapter.

loss was not important; it was the ability to speak that mattered[422] and there is plenty of recorded speech-related imagery and reference,[423] as well as linguistically embedded expectations regarding speech.[424] Mark 7.35 reflects this idea of a "cultural speech impediment" in relation to rhetoric, where even the 'smallest difficulties in speech' were damaging,[425] as the deaf man's ears are opened but more attention is paid to his ability to speak: 'his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.'

Recorded only in Mark's Gospel,[426] the 'deaf man who had a speech impediment' (φέρουσιν αὐτῷ κωφὸν καὶ μογιλάλον) is brought to Jesus and requests are made on his behalf; the man is passive in the story until healing has taken place. Little information is given about the man, other than this, but some commentators read further details into the text. Lane, for example, assumes the 'impediment in his speech' was 'so severe he could not articulate his words,'

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[422] Martha L. Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus : Transforming Disability in Ancient Greece* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 73.

[423] Peter Kruschwitz and Abi Cousins, 'Speech - Lack of Language, Lack of Power: Social Aspects of the Discourse about Communication Disorders in the Greco-Roman World', in *A Cultural History of Disability in Antiquity*, ed. Christian Laes (London - New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 101-115: p. 102.

[424] Kruschwitz and Cousins, p. 102. In Greek, for example, the 'earliest stage of childhood' is referred to using νήπιος (negatively related to ἔπος, a word or speech act); similarly, the corresponding Latin would be *infans* (negatively related to or derived from *fari*, "to speak"). In both cases the language alludes to the 'lack of a certain physical and mental power' and 'these terms would appear to define a point of departure for fully formed human life.' Where an individual is dependent on speech for participation and success within society, either term could function as an insult or an accusation of lack in ability.

[425] Kruschwitz and Cousins, p. 108.

[426] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 369. Yarbro Collins attributes the omission of the story in Matthew and Luke to 'its magical elements,' but these could be elements of folk medicine or sensory communication.

retrospectively diagnosing ‘a spasmodic condition of the tongue’ which could ‘extend to the facial muscles as well.’ Whilst this is not within the text, the interpretation is plausible. Where Lane’s reading becomes problematic is his assertion that the man could not have been ‘born deaf and mute’ because he would then ‘possess no concept of language.’ On this basis, Lane decides that the man ‘had become deaf later in life apparently as a result of disease or injury and could only speak with great effort.’[427] There are simply not the details within Mark 7.31-37 to support Lane’s conclusions: to make those assumptions is to read into the text a metanarrative of deafness, one that asserts complete lack of auditory acuity and presupposes that deafness prohibits learning to communicate. Elements of the text do illustrate a struggle to communicate, but this is from a nondeaf narrative perspective.[428]

The adjective κωφός can refer to “deaf” or “mute” or both, but the meaning “mute” is unlikely in this case since the accompanying adjective μογιλάλος refers to “impeded in speech” or “mute”. Where Mark 7.35 describes the man post-cure as speaking “correctly”, [429] the indication is that the man ‘could speak beforehand, but not correctly.’[430] The evaluation of correct or incorrect is based upon the man’s ability to speak, not specifically on his deafness. “Mute” is often

[427] Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, p. 266.

[428] Lane goes beyond the metanarrative of deafness within the text, the struggle to hear and communicate, adding to it a more extreme, modern negative corporeal judgement.

[429] The NRSV translates ὀρθῶς as “plainly,” the sense of the word being easily understood within their verbal and aural context. According to the standards of that context, against which the man’s speech was judged “impaired,” the man’s speech was now deemed “correct.”

[430] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 370.

'narrowly conceived' as "without speech" but it could also, in first and second century texts, 'denote ignorance'[431] according to a metanarrative associating negative perceptions of intellectual impairment with the inability to hear or speak.[432] Mark 7.31-37 appears to contain the assumption, by virtue of those accompanying the deaf man acting on his behalf, that non-verbalisation was out of inability, but this comes from the nondisabled perspective of the text. The narrative does not say the man could not speak or did not speak, merely that his speech did not meet the standards desired by those imploring Jesus to heal the man.

Ominously, Robert A. Guelich, though recognising the specific usage of "deaf" in Mark 7.32, points out that κωφός can have 'the general meaning of "blunt" or "dull,"'[433] against a cultural background where, similar to blindness, 'the faculty of hearing and the organ of the ear' figuratively represent 'cognition and insight.'[434] Where deafness is associated with "muteness," it is possible to read in Mark 7.31-37 'a malign association between the inability to articulate clearly and an inability to think clearly,' which could then explain the passivity of "a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech" within a culture where rhetoric and oral

[431] Louise J. Lawrence, p. 58.

[432] Adams, 'Deafness', pp. 85-86. Until recently deafness and/or speech impairment was, obviously incorrectly, considered as a cognitive or intellectual disability.

[433] Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1989), p. 394.

[434] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 57.

delivery in response was central.[435] Alongside this, Lawrence asserts that deafness would not necessarily have impeded travel, contrasting with the deaf man not approaching autonomously in the Markan narrative.[436]

The question of whether the deaf man partakes in his healing or whether healing was forced upon him is a difficult one. Within the narrative the deaf man is passive, the metanarrative associated with “deafness” and “muteness” denying him any agency: he is “brought” to Jesus; Jesus is “begged” to provide healing, not by the man himself; the man is taken aside by Jesus and is not active until he speaks “correctly”. Mark presents a deaf man who cannot make decisions for himself. His narrative function, in providing the opportunity for Jesus to demonstrate power, means no information is provided as to how the man was brought, whether willingly or not, how he cooperated or what he says in Mark 7.35, when he is apparently heard for the first time. It is worth noting that he has probably been communicating verbally prior to that point.

In her analysis of Mark 7.31-37, Lawrence hints at an incongruity between the situation described in the narrative and the linguistically embedded values or expectations. According to Lawrence, when Jesus takes the man aside in Mark 7.33, he is removing the man from ‘hearing culture’ to a space where other sensory dimensions become important: the method of healing is visual and

[435] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 60. From the perspective of an ancient literary elite, the man would be read as ‘submissive and totally reliant on the directions of others.’

[436] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 60.

based on physical contact.[437] Taking the man aside is more than Lane's assertion that Jesus is establishing a personal relationship with 'a person who had learned to be passive in life;'[438] the narrative assumes the deaf man to be passive, but Jesus' actions seem to be aimed at using an appropriate method of communication. The society of the narrative, through its limited means of communication, excludes the deaf man from full participation in communication and forces a type of "passivity" on him. There is no indication that he learns or chooses passivity, since that is a quality inherited from the metanarrative of deafness embedded in the language. Alternatively, it is possible to argue that there is agency in cooperation, a decision of some kind even if there is a power dynamic to pay attention to, despite the lack of information. Passivity, imposition, or cooperation are different options which can be read into the narrative omissions.

Emphasis on the therapeutic process to the miracle[439] indicates the deaf man has to be involved or at least complicit in said process. In order for the man to be involved, he would need to be communicated with. Lane and Guelich[440] focus on touch and spittle as part of the man's healing communicating healing intent, but perhaps the function of touch should be examined further. Touch can be considerate and a means of communication, even, as perhaps is the case

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[437] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, pp. 67–68. Lawrence outlines how Jesus' actions do not follow cultural expectations, instead utilising alternative methods of communication.

[438] Lane, *Mark*, p. 266.

[439] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 370.

[440] Lane, *Mark,* pp. 266-267; Guelich, p. 394.

here, a request for participation. Additionally, Jesus' only direct utterance, in Mark 7.34, is a word foreign to the narrative, 'Ephphatha' (rendered εφφαθα in the NA28 text), which is translated as 'Be opened' (διανοίχθητι). The translated meaning of the word is important, but the guttural vibrations of the delivered word might still have conveyed meaning in a sonant way.[441] Verbally, the man is not spoken to: 'Be opened' is directed to his ears. This does not mean, though, that he was not communicated with, even if that communication is not made explicit by the narrative. 'Ephphatha' is immediately followed by 'his ears were opened, his tongue released,' with the evidence of the deaf man's healing being 'he spoke plainly.' Although the text assumes a lack of agency on the man's behalf, he had to choose to speak and thereby evidence Jesus' healing action in response to being communicated with.

Following evidence of the healing, Jesus 'ordered them to tell no one,' but 'they proclaimed it' and did not follow the instruction (Mark 7.36). This cannot be a negative judgement of the previously deaf man, not just because the identity of those commanded to be silent is unclear. Mark 7.36-37 is not about concealing Jesus' identity, more a literary device communicating to the text's audience that Jesus' deeds are so extraordinary they can't be hidden.[442] However, there may be more to these to verses, in the sense that they could suggest a comparison between the deaf man and those who brought him to Jesus. Jesus must be addressing a group of people who witnessed the healing. This group may have

[441] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, pp. 69-70.

[442] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 374.

included the deaf man, in which case he was proclaiming and testifying. If the deaf man was not part of this group, the text raises another possibility. References to the deaf man and what he did are consistently singular, whilst references to those who brought him are consistently plural. Within the narrative there is a tension between those who begged Jesus to heal the man (Mark 7.32) and those who were 'astounded beyond measure' once it had taken place (Mark 7.37). It could be assumed that those requesting healing would be praising Jesus given the evident sign of his power and authority, but 'They were astounded beyond measure' (ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο) suggests an element of bewilderment and perhaps a lack of expectation in their previous appeals as to the likelihood of success. The deaf man is not included in this astonishment at Jesus' ability and power, so he is not shocked that Jesus is capable of curing deafness or muteness. He still disappears from the narrative once healed, since the focus of the narrative is Christological and the deaf man has no narrative function once he is no longer deaf.

4.2.2 Acts 14.8-18: Misunderstanding Healing

Healing narratives are rarely focused on the healing or the recipient of healing. That does not mean the individual is completely invisible, but their identity is subsumed by other concerns. Acts 14.8-18 is one such case, where the focus is on the witnesses to the healing who mistakenly attribute healing to Paul and Barnabas, instead of to Jesus. Corporeal judgement, in the change from an "incorrect body" towards the ideal standard of walking, is evident in the scene, but the pericope is problematic and raises questions on a range of levels.

It is not just ‘a healing miracle performed on a man who heard the gospel and had faith’ compared to ‘the superstitious response of the people.’[443]

In Acts 14.8 the man is described as sitting, unable to use his feet, someone who had never walked and ‘lame from birth,’ the repetition emphasising the ‘severity of the man’s condition’[444] and, therefore, the “difficulty” involved in the healing. He is taken to be, in some modern interpretations, a beggar,[445] although this is not stated in the Acts narrative. The paralysed man’s function is to be healed and for that healing to introduce the controversy that occurs in Acts 14.11.

There are small details about the sitting man which are interesting and often overlooked. In Acts 14.9 the “man sitting” is said to be listening to Paul as Paul is speaking and Paul notices the man has the faith to be healed, which is assumed to be great given the emphasised difficulty of healing his impairment, but there is a practical question as to how the man could understand Paul if the crowds present could not.[446] The paralysed man was in Lystra, implicitly having

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[443] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts* (Downers Grove - Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008), p. 249. Marshall’s evaluation of Acts 14.8-18 perhaps oversimplifies in attempting to draw a distinction between the paralysed man having faith to be healed and the local community who do not show faith.

[444] David F. Watson, ‘Luke-Acts’, in *The Bible and Disability - A Commentary*, eds. Sarah J. Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017), pp. 303-332: p. 325.

[445] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 250. Marshall writes that the man is ‘presumably a beggar,’ though there is no information given in the text other than his paralysis and that he was sitting. Marshall deduces the man is a beggar from his impairment, reading in a cultural expectation of low socioeconomic status.

[446] Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), p. 110. Conzelmann discusses the narratorial assumption that people understood Greek and Hellenistic

been there long enough to speak the Lycaonian language of those around him, but understood Paul, who could not speak or understand Lycaonian, making him at least bilingual and implicitly intelligent. Additionally, where the crowd is confused and mistakes Paul and Barnabas' divine authority for the physical presence of Hermes and Zeus, the previously paralysed man does not. Physiognomically, the man should not be amenable to or able to understand the divine healing he receives; instead, he displays a correctly functioning reasoning process which contradicts expectations derived from his physicality. The required level of faith indicated as a condition for healing is 'made plain by [the man's] ready obedience to Paul's command to stand up.'[447] As will be discussed further in the following chapter, the choice to evidence healing, in this instance by choosing to stand in response to Paul's exhortation, displays an important role for the participant in a healing, even if they are not given a voice.

4.2.3 A Rare Named Healing: Zechariah

It is rare for a named person to be healed in New Testament Writings. Bartimaeus, in Mark 10, and Paul, in Acts 9, are two of the only New Testament examples.[448] Although Paul has his sight "returned," other of his physical impairments are not taken away, as will be discussed later on in this chapter. The other example of a named person who is healed is Zechariah in Luke 1. Of

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Jewish thought. The crowd are negatively judged because they apparently lacked the required understanding, whereas the paralysed man did not.

[447] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 274.

[448] Both Bartimaeus and Paul will be discussed, with respect to blindness, in chapter 7.

these three named men, whilst the cause of impairment is not known for Bartimaeus, both Paul and Zechariah have their impairments divinely caused and removed.[449]

Michael Rydryck calls Luke 1.5-25 'the first miracle of judgement' in Luke-Acts[450] and Nolland compares Zechariah's unbelief with Mary's belief,[451] that unbelief being shown as the reason for Zechariah's "punishment". An 'angel of the Lord' appears to Zechariah and announces the upcoming birth of his son, John, to which Zechariah responds in Luke 1.18 by questioning how it could be true, 'How can I know this will happen?' (κατὰ τί γνώσομαι τοῦτο), and providing evidence as to the apparent impossibility of the angel's pronouncement. By way of response, the angel declares that Zechariah will be unable to speak until his son's birth. Consequently, Zechariah is unable to talk until, in Luke 1.63-64, he writes on a tablet 'His name is John' and 'his mouth was opened and his tongue freed.' Zechariah's ability to speak, an important corporeal ability in a rhetorically organised society, is divinely taken away, thereby making his disability, albeit temporary, a "lesson" or a "punishment."

In his slightly more generous portrayal of Zechariah, Rydryck maintains that Zechariah asks for a sign or confirmation because 'he is unaware of the

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[449] Strictly speaking, whilst Zechariah has his divinely caused muteness removed, Paul's sight is both removed and returned, but the 'thorn' he has 'in the flesh' he is given by God is not taken away, as indicated in 2 Corinthians 12.7.

[450] Michael Rydryck, 'Miracles of Judgement in Luke-Acts', in *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and Their Concepts of Reality'*, eds. Stefan Alkier and Annette Weissenrieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 23-32: p. 28.

[451] Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, p. 33.

eschatological nature of the [angel's] appearance.'[452] Yet Zechariah, as a priest, might be expected to recognise a messenger of the Lord, at least within the context of the Lukan narrative. Rydryck does go on to suggest that Zechariah might also underestimate 'the ambiguous power of the holy presence,' therefore the announcing angel gives the requested sign as a punishment for Zechariah's lack of belief. As will be discussed in later chapters, lack of understanding is often attributed to a choice of some kind in New Testament writings, so a legitimate interpretation, from the narrative's perspective, would be that Zechariah is aware of the divine nature of the message, given the evidence in front of him, and decides to not immediately believe. In English translations the "because" of Luke 1.20 expresses retribution for Zechariah's lack of belief;[453] although not a grammatical connective in the same way, the imperative ἰδοὺ of the Greek text still creates the same sense of cause and consequence, evidencing the punitive nature of Zechariah's given impairment.

Not mentioned in the narrative is Zechariah's potential social "suffering" on account of the impairment bestowed upon him. Unable to speak, a modern reader would assume that Zechariah could not perform his priestly role within the temple, but although Luke 1.21 mentions that the blessing Zechariah was meant to perform was delayed[454] it does not mention that he did not eventually confer it. Worth noticing is that, in Luke 1.22, Zechariah 'kept motioning to them,' indicating

[452] Rydryck, p. 28.

[453] Bovon, *Luke 1*, p. 39.

[454] Bovon, *Luke 1*, p. 39.

some form of continuing, non-verbal communication. Even if Zechariah's written communication in Luke 1.63, 'His name is John,' displays the required belief to end his punishment, often missed is the beginning of the same verse: 'He asked for a writing tablet.' Inability to speak is a divine punishment or judgement, but Zechariah is still able to communicate non-verbally within his society.[455]

Impairment, in Luke 1 functions as a "place-holder" in that Zechariah has his speech removed until he exhibits evidence of the appropriate belief. Zechariah's impairment is problematic on a range of levels: his inability to speak is given in divine judgement of unbelief and his ability to verbally communicate is only restored once what he has doubted will happen comes to pass; the impairment is temporary, inherently displaying the potential for it to be "removed"; Zechariah is a named character who is not excluded from a rhetorical society despite losing his ability to speak, his priestly status potentially making his situation even more "non-typical" within the contextual society of the narrative.

4.2.4 Ambiguity as to the Cause of Impairment: Luke 13.11-17

Although the cause of Zechariah's impairment is explicit, the cause of impairment for other narrative figures is more ambiguous. Only found in Luke 13.11-17, the "Bent-Over Woman" has, until relatively recently, 'received very

[455] Nowhere in the Lukan narrative is it mentioned that Zechariah could not perform his priestly duties. Muteness is not mentioned in Leviticus 21 as being prohibitive of priesthood and in Luke 1.22 "the people" automatically associated Zechariah's muteness with "a vision" and not necessarily punishment.

little scholarly attention.'[456] She is said, in Luke 13.11, to have a 'spirit of weakness' (πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας) causing her to be unable to stand upright. "Spirit of weakness" is translated variously as, for example, 'a spirit of infirmity' (KJV, ASV), 'a disabling spirit' (ESV), 'a spirit that had crippled her' (NRSV), but the "Bent-Over Woman" is not an exorcism narrative.[457]

With Jesus teaching in the synagogue, the "Bent-Over Woman" suddenly appears in the narrative at Luke 13.11, having not being previously mentioned. She is identified by her impairment and given no name. Despite the lack of detail, Mary Ann McColl and Richard S. Ascough attempt 'a sketchy portrait': since the woman has had her impairment for eighteen years, she must be at least that age and beyond the normal age to get married and begin a family, approximately halfway through the average lifespan.[458] McColl and Ascough assume that the woman's impairment was from birth or early childhood, without information in the narrative providing evidence for that portrait. It is just as plausible that the woman is older, possibly with a family, and that her impairment developed later on in life. If the woman's impairment had been from birth, the implications regarding potential sin would likely be discussed or at least mentioned in the narrative, yet

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[456] Natalie K. Houghtby-Haddon, *Changed Imagination, Changed Obedience: Social Imagination and the Bent-Over Woman in the Gospel of Luke* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), p. 52. See also Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 83.

[457] New Testament writings concerning exorcisms are not being discussed within this research question. The "Bent-Over Woman" narrative is being included from the perspective, as will be argued here, that hers is not an exorcism narrative, but a healing narrative using contextual language describing impairment.

[458] Mary Ann McColl and Richard S. Ascough, 'Jesus and People with Disabilities: Old Stories, New Approaches', in *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, vol. 63.3-4 (2009), pp. 1-11: p. 6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/154230500906300312>

Jesus does not mention the forgiveness of the woman's sins when removing her impairment.

The "Bent-Over Woman" is not viewed as important in her own right. Green, in his commentary on Luke 13.11-17, discusses how the woman's impairment 'places this miracle squarely within Jesus' mission,' providing understanding of Jesus' healing ministry.[459] Interestingly, Natalie Houghtby-Haddon proposes that the story of the "Bent-Over Woman" does not fit into 'the typical pattern' of miracle, exorcism or Sabbath controversy: 'Luke, an adept writer of Greek among the gospel authors, is trying to communicate something different by telling the story in this particular way.'[460] Physiognomically, the "Bent-Over Woman's" impairment would be understood as moral. A bent back was understood to be 'the result of a feeble character, even as an evil disposition,' a "spirit of weakness" a 'characteristically feminine problem' according to the physiognomic handbooks.[461] The Gospel of Luke would have been written from and for a social perspective negatively evaluating the woman's physical position according to those standards. However, according to Parsons, it is with the "Bent-Over Woman's" story that 'Luke begins his case for the inclusiveness of the Abrahamic covenant community'[462] and challenges the inevitability of

[459] Joel B. Green, 'Jesus and the Daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10-17): Test Case for a Lucan Perspective on Jesus' Miracles', in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 51 (1989), pp. 643-654: p. 652.

[460] Houghtby-Haddon, *Changed Imagination* (2011), p. 32.

[461] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 86.

[462] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 83.

negative assessment. Green's evaluation of the "Bent-Over Woman's" social position as relatively inconsequential to the narrative,[463] is accurate from the perspective of Luke's Christological primary focus, but from the perspective of examining corporeal judgement within the text, the factors which apparently relegate her to the periphery of society *are* important. The "Bent-Over Woman" has been doubly marginalised by the impairment in her body and inaccurate perceptions of demonic spiritual interference.[464] By making the issues which exclude the woman marginal, she is pushed further into the background of any discussion on the text, when it is those issues which are actually questioned in the narrative. Disability, as the negative judgement of impairment, is portrayed within Luke 13.11-17 and should, therefore be discussed and not be considered superfluous to any exegesis.

If the "Bent-Over Woman" simply appears in Luke 13.11, then she must have been present in the synagogue, perhaps not centrally located, but "around."[465] As an example of narrative prosthesis, she appears and disappears as needed, but at the same time there are gaps in the narrative on account of that narrative prosthesis function, which allow for different interpretations of her

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[463] Green, 'Jesus and the Daughter of Abraham', p. 649. 'Whether the woman was in a state of ritual impurity, or under what conditions a woman might have been present in the synagogue – these are issues marginal to the narrative.'

[464] Heidi Torgerson, 'The Healing of the Bent Woman: A Narrative Interpretation of Luke 13:10-17', in *Currents in Theology and Mission*, vol. 32.3 (2005), pp. 176-186: p. 180.

[465] Robert J Shirock, 'The Growth of the Kingdom in Light of Israel's Rejection of Jesus: Structure and Theology in Luke 13:1-35', in *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 35.1 (1993), pp. 15-29: p. 23 <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853693X00022>. According to Shirock, 'the sick woman in the synagogue represents the lower class of Jewish society.'

situation. Visibly, the woman was bent over and, according to Bovon, the vocabulary indicates a 'deformed' lower spinal column, for which there was no medical assistance available, the difficulty of the healing making her the perfect subject through which to demonstrate Jesus' power and authority.[466] Jewish thought in antiquity distinguished human beings from animals through their vertical position, meaning that on first glance 'that mark of humanity had disappeared in this case,'[467] but Jesus calls the "Bent-Over Woman" to him. Luke 13.12 uses προσφωνέω for "call," the same verb used to call the disciples prior to Jesus choosing the twelve apostles (Lk 6.12-16). From this language, the audience could understand the woman also as a disciple.[468]

Heidi Torgerson comments that there is no evidence that the "Bent-Over Woman" seeks to be healed, that inaction implying that she knows healing on the Sabbath to be illegal.[469] The woman has resolved to not contradict Sabbath religious edicts.[470] The "Bent-Over" woman is as much oppressed by the physiognomic interpretations of her condition as her impairment itself. She does

[466] Bovon, *Luke 2*, pp. 284-285.

[467] Bovon, *Luke 2*, p. 285.

[468] Houghtby-Haddon (2011), pp. 98-99.

[469] Torgerson, p. 180.

[470] Jamie Clark-Soles interprets the woman as helpless, so much so that she is not looking for help anymore. This is interesting, as ordinarily Clark-Soles advocates for acknowledging alternative readings. That being said, with regards to impairment in John 5.1-15, she also finds for a more negative reading of the character being healed, at least in terms of their agency, as will be discussed in chapter 5. Cf. Jaime Clark-Soles, *Women in the Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2020), p. 199.

not approach Jesus, instead waiting to be called and showing humility within her situation.[471]

Jesus summons the “Bent-Over Woman” and she responds by approaching him. If she is aware of and respects the Sabbath laws, then in voluntarily approaching she presumably becomes involved in the action of healing. When Jesus lays hands on the woman, she could have refused to participate. Of course, there is the potential of an interpretation that considers power dynamics, which would lead to a Jesus who does not respect personal boundaries; this is, perhaps, taking the question too far, given the lack of narrative discussion, and the vocabulary used in “calling” the woman as a potential disciple. Taking the initial idea of discipleship further, that discipleship is affirmed in the synagogue, a public space, and the woman, once healed, praises God in public and with men present.[472]

‘Luke does not have a modern concept of disability, nor should we expect him to,’[473] but that does not mean the Lukan narrative does not challenge negative corporeal assessments, even if physiognomic consciousness is linguistically embedded and key information about the woman is missing from the narrative. The question effectively becomes how far Luke both challenges and adheres to social assumptions, not whether any challenge is present. For

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[471] Συγκύπτω is used three times in the LXX (Job 9.27; Sirach 12.11 and 19.26) as referring to the wicked bowed down by evil, or a gesture of humility if/when someone is accused of wickedness. As a word for “bent over,” it only appears once in New Testament writings, in Luke 13.11.

[472] Houghtby-Haddon (2011), pp. 99-100.

[473] Watson, p. 304.

example, despite Houghtby-Haddon's identification of the "Bent-Over Woman" as a slave on account of her impairment,[474] David F. Watson acknowledges that the woman would have faced social consequences from not being able to meet face to face, but also that she could have been independent.[475]

As mentioned previously, the expression "spirit of weakness" (πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας) is problematic. It does not have to be the case that the Lukan Jesus would have understood the woman's impairment as 'a physical manifestation of a satanic possession, the bonds of which Jesus has decided to break.'[476] The expression πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας is a distinctly Lukan phrase within the New Testament corpus and although the narrative 'understands her illness as bondage that was caused by Satan,'[477] the reference to Satan in Luke 13.16 'does not indicate that she has done something wrong to endure this condition,' or that she was possessed in any way, since all ill people were subject to evil power[478] according to contemporary understanding. First and second century communities seemed to believe that illness or impairment was caused by hostile

[474] Houghtby-Haddon, p. 64 (see also pp. 85-86).

[475] Watson, p. 315.

[476] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 86. Parsons uses pseudo-Aristotle's suggestion of an "evil disposition" to anchor the woman's portrayal within physiognomic consciousness. At the same time, he acknowledges "weakness" can also refer to social and economic situations.

[477] Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 312.

[478] Watson, p. 315.

external forces; healing was implicitly a cleansing,[479] though not necessarily an exorcism, as illness was associated with some form of corporeal pollution.[480]

A potential causal link between sickness or disease and a demon or spirit is not always explicit in texts,[481] particularly in the context of folk medicine. The mention of "a spirit of infirmity" 'shows that the distinction between "evil spirits" and "infirmities"…was not hard and fast.'[482] Nolland, in his commentary on Luke, 'remains uncertain whether we should consider a "spirit of weakness" as descriptive of a demon…or whether it is simply an idiom for having a debilitation ailment.'[483] In Luke-Acts, ἀσθενεία is used a reference to physical infirmity and is often found in used in the context of a healing story. In other New Testament writings, the cognate verb ἀσθενέω is used in reference to being weak or sick and, whilst it might not be the 'overarching term for various disabilities' Solevåg claims it to be,[484] Luke uses the noun ἀσθενεία for "general sickness."[485] In reference to the "Bent-Over Woman", πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας is more likely to be a physiognomically

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[479] Dale B. Martin, p. 164.

[480] Cf. Joan Taylor and Helen Bond, *Women Remembered* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2022), p. 80. The 'woman with a spirit of infirmity' (γυνὴ πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας) in Luke 13.11 could simply relate to a diagnosis from folk medicine. See also Megan S. Nutzman, *Contested Cures: Identity and Ritual Healing in Roman and Late Antique Palestine* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p. 154.

[481] Dale B. Martin, p. 166.

[482] Taylor and Bond, p. 81.

[483] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, pp. 723–24.

[484] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 14. It should be noted that Solevåg, makes this claim, at least in the first instance, specifically in relation to the Gospel of John.

[485] Houghtby-Haddon (2011), pp. 66-67. Ἀσθενεία is used as a general term for sickness in the Hippocratic corpus, as well as having a specific usage for a type of wasting disease.

charged idiomatic expression for impairment, rather that the indication of demonic possession.

Though recognising the mention of the word “spirit” in Luke 13.11 and the imagery of Satan binding a person in Luke 13.16 might lead a reader to infer demon possession, Bovon argues the narrative itself ‘is unacquainted with any expulsion and includes a laying on of hands,’ thereby suggesting a healing and presupposing an illness. Bovon also outlines the idea that illnesses and impairment ‘belong to the negative sphere over which Satan reigns,’[486] without routinely denoting possession and the need for exorcism, which supports πνεῦμα ἀσθενείας as an idiomatic expression. As Houghtby-Haddon observes, ‘Luke seems to be very careful *not* to use’ the language of possession and exorcism in Luke 13.11-17.[487] Importantly, where the Lukan narrative includes other “exorcisms,” the language is very specific in terms of ‘stating the spirit possessing the person is either evil or unclean,’ which is not done in this pericope. The woman is bent-over because of the impact of the “spirit of weakness” – she literally lacks the strength to straighten up fully.[488] In Lukan exorcisms, Jesus typically rebukes the spirit or casts it out, but here the “Bent-Over Woman” is only “set free”, which is used in both exorcism and healing contexts.[489] Without the additional exorcistic language elements, it seems

[486] Bovon, *Luke 2*, p. 284.

[487] Houghtby-Haddon (2011), p. 66(n. 6).

[488] Houghtby-Haddon (2011), p. 67.

[489] Houghtby-Haddon (2011), pp. 32–33. Where the Lukan Jesus speaks to a possessing spirit, he communicates directly to it and rebukes (ἐπιτιμάω) or casts out (ἐκβάλλω). This vocabulary is

unlikely that the narrative is an exorcism text. Against a contextual background of a blurred distinction between medical belief and religion, impairment, regardless of cause, is placed in a negative sphere for which Satan is given the culpability. Every illness would likely have been seen as having a spiritual element without it being a case of possession.

As mentioned previously, once called by Jesus the woman moves closer to Jesus and her actions can be interpreted as a choice of some kind. If the "Bent-Over Woman" is not brought to Jesus, the narrative does not ascribe her with passivity, even if it does obscure her agency as she moves from the periphery of the scene towards the centre and discipleship. Luke 13.13 states that upon Jesus declaring her "free," the woman 'immediately…stood up and began praising God.' She stood up and was not made or told to stand. Whilst some interpretations focus on the standing being 'a narrative device indicating that it came from God,'[490] the "Bent-Over Woman" has to choose to stand and choose to then praise God, neither of which she was told or made to do. The "Bent-Over Woman" has to choose to display evidence of the healing that has taken place.[491] That the woman praises God and not Jesus is significant: Torgerson explains this as the woman's recognition that 'Jesus is the instrument'

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not used about or toward the "Bent-Over" woman's impairment. It is also worth considering that when Mary Magdalene demons "come out" of her, in Luke 8.2, linguistically she is not described as being "set free."

[490] Bovon, *Luke 2*, p. 286.

[491] For further consideration of the connection between agency and evidence of healing, see in particular discussions of John 5.1-15 and Matthew 12.9-13/Mark 3.1-6/Luke 6.6-11 in the following chapter.

which facilitates healing, but that 'God's work *within* Jesus restores her.' [492] This is a sophisticated theological understanding for someone not previously recognised as having agency or faith. The "Bent-Over Woman" moves away from marginalisation and silence with the removal of her impairment,[493] yet is depicted as only now able to praise God, even though there is evidence in the narrative of prior understanding.

Although the "Bent-Over Woman's" healing itself, Luke 13.11-13, can be read independently of the discussion that follows, the expansion of the miracle into 'a so-called controversy dialogue' leads to the woman being both compared to a household animal and referred to as a "daughter of Abraham."[494] The contrast Jesus makes in Luke 13.15-16 is between an animal and a daughter of God's people, a hyperbolic representation of the negative corporeal judgement placed upon the woman. What the Lukan Jesus presents as her true identity is effectively hidden behind the physiognomic consciousness of the society portrayed in the narrative. The purpose of the argument is to highlight the hypocrisy of the synagogue leader's objections to healing on the Sabbath,[495] with even the vocabulary of the analogy echoing the preceding healing.[496]

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[492] Torgerson, p. 180.

[493] Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 304.

[494] Schüssler Fiorenza, p. 306.

[495] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, p. 723.

[496] Bovon, *Luke 2*, p. 288. The use of λύω for "untying" the animals in Luke 13.15 functions as an echo of the earlier ἀπολύω for "set free."

Oxen and donkeys, as domestic animals are a poignant comparison to make with the “Bent-Over Woman”. The Lukan Jesus appears to want to show his opponents as caring more for livestock than a fellow human,[497] calling attention to the absurdity of authorising the untying of an animal in order for it to drink but not healing the woman, valuing the life of an animal over that of a human person.[498] This absurdity depends on the relative hierarchy between animals and humanity, although it would be a mistake to assume any kind of gender equality. Looking beyond this positive interpretation of Jesus’ analogy and argument, the question has to be asked as to why this particular imagery may have been used. In a social context where the woman’s status would have been affected by both her gender and her impairment, her impairment potentially placing her lower in the human-animal hierarchy, the relative social importance of the impaired woman is brought candidly forward.

Luke 13.11-17 acknowledges the preconceptions of its audience and uses zoological physiognomy expectations to scandalize those who had judged the woman according to those expectations. Impairment is still negatively portrayed, but it is also used to challenge some of the physiognomic presumptions made when the “Bent-Over Woman” is acknowledged as a “daughter of Abraham”. If impairment masks status and leads to the incorrect negative judgement of the woman, and Jesus’ removal of her impairment reveals her true identity, then the society in which the “Bent-Over Woman” lives is suggested to be making

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[497] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 88.

[498] Bovon, *Luke 2*, pp. 288-289.

incorrect judgements as to character based on superficial observations. Corporeal impairment hides the woman's "daughter of Abraham" status and physical wholeness potentially hides cowardice and stupidity. Although this may not be the main point within the Christologically focused Luke 13.11-17, it is another layer among many within the narrative.

In the same narrative where 'a dehumanising act of "narrative prosthesis"' occurs,[499] the "Bent-Over" woman has part of her identity positively acknowledged, albeit not through the use of her personal name. The 'unusual' term "daughter of Abraham" provides the means for the woman 'to assume her rightful cultural place,'[500] as the use of "daughter" embeds the woman in the kinship structure of the community.[501] It is true that "daughter of Abraham" appears to be unique to Luke, in known New Testament manuscripts, and that there is a narrative strategy of introducing physiognomic concerns 'in order to subvert them.'[502] Yet it feels slightly unrealistic to go as far an Parsons in stating that Luke challenges misogynistic characterisations of women in general in this pericope, no matter how desirable it might be that Luke does so. This being said, through calling the unnamed woman a "daughter of Abraham" her faith is

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[499] Hannah Wilson, 'A Feminist Disability Studies Analysis of the Representation of Disabled Women in the Gospel of Luke' (unpublished master's thesis, Liverpool Hope University, 2019), p. 40. Wilson describes where Jesus and the synagogue leader discuss the woman, without her involvement and as she fades from the narrative, as 'a dehumanising act of "narrative prosthesis."'

[500] Watson, p. 304.

[501] Houghtby-Haddon (2011), pp. 70-71.

[502] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 87.

validated,[503] indicating the woman is a model of faith itself.[504] The "Bent-Over Woman" does not become a "daughter of Abraham," she already is one. One of Luke 13.11-17's secondary functions, aside from providing evidence of Jesus' power and authority, and facilitating a Sabbath controversy discussion, is to provide an element of social commentary. In other healing narratives this level of commentary might relate to the crowd being a physical obstacle to accessing Jesus,[505] here the obstacle is the negative social judgement based on interpretations of impairment. Impairment itself is a negative corporeal state, but the Gospel of Luke challenges 'social and personal perceptions of *socially* disvalued states'[506] and certain aspects of the metanarrative associated with them.

4.2.5 Immediate Healing to Prevent Disability?

Most of the healings which take place in the so-called healing narratives involve a person with a long-held impairment, except in the case of Zechariah, where impairment is somewhat punitive. A healing often overlooked occurs at Jesus' Gethsemane arrest, where one of Jesus' companions cuts off the ear of a

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[503] Taylor and Bond, pp. 80-81. According to Taylor and Bond, Abraham was 'the prime model of trust in God,' making the "Bent-Over Woman" linked into that paradigm through the stated kinship.

[504] Only the "Bent-Over Woman" and Zacchaeus, in Luke 19, are labelled as a daughter or son of Abraham. Zacchaeus, discussed later in this chapter, is both referred to by his personal name and is not "healed," despite being corporeally judged. Although each character maintains a differing social status, for differing reasons, kinship to faith is recognised in each case

[505] One example of the crowd preventing access to healing features is the paralysed man lowered through the roof of a house, in Mark 2 and Luke 5.

[506] Torgerson, p. 180.

slave: the incidence of violence appears in Matthew 26.51, Mark 14.47, and John 18.10, [507] but only Luke 22.50-51 also includes Jesus touching and healing the slave's ear.

The slave affected by '"No more of this!" And he touched his ear and healed him,' in Luke 22.51, is almost incidental, as the healing is actually only one verse in Luke's wider description of Jesus' arrest. It is not even a "healing story." [508] However, losing an ear could have serious consequences within the rhetorical societies of the first and second centuries, with the writers of each text being aware of this. The slave was simply not important enough within the narratives to be properly considered, "his" impairment not important enough to function as a teaching moment, except for being the linguistic conduit towards Jesus talking about an unrelated topic. In Matthew, Mark and John the slave's injury is left to become an impairment, disabling that slave's ability to fulfil the social role he is placed in by the text, but in Luke Jesus prevents the injury becoming an impairment, effectively preventing "disability". This is all that can really be said about the slave, since "he" appears in and disappears from the narratives so quickly, impairment being caused in all four Gospel narratives by a companion of Jesus, injury only healed in one.

[507] The Gospel of John names the companion who cuts off the slaves' ear as Simon Peter, who is reprimanded. The slave is also named as Malchus, but no healing is described.

[508] Although the narrative gives the cause of the impairment, there no lead-up to or consequent discussion of it, no mentioning of implied or explicit eschatological aspects and no communication with or about the slave by Jesus.

4.3 Named Bodies Not Healed

Impairments left unhealed is not an idea often considered by modern interpreters. Within a first and second century context, where everyone likely had some form of impairment, even those judged too far from the corporeal ideal and, therefore, "other" were not all healed. Many were left waiting under the porticoes in John 5.1-15, for example. Disabled characters are rarely named in New Testament writings, so when their personal identity is recognised that character must be important to the writer of whichever text they appear in. An explicitly named disabled figure who is not healed prompts the reader to ask why, since these individuals are highlighted by the presence of their personal identities.[509] Zacchaeus, the tax collector, and Paul are two such figures.

4.3.1 Zacchaeus (Luke 19.1-10)

Zacchaeus is a somewhat perplexing character to examine from the perspective of disability. He had a role and status within his society, a job as a tax collector and had accumulated wealth. How far Zacchaeus can be considered corporeally as "other" relates to physiognomic expectations as to his being described, in Luke 19.3, as 'short in stature'[510] (τῇ ἡλικίᾳ μικρὸς), not meeting the corporeal standard of ideal height.

When Nolland summarises Luke 19.1-19, he outlines Jesus working 'a saving transformation on a man whose situation seemed to be one of double

[509] Bartimaeus, as a named disabled character, will be discussed in chapter 7.

[510] The NRSV uses 'short in stature.' The NRSVUE simply uses 'short.'

jeopardy,' from the perspective that Zacchaeus is both a tax collector and a rich man. Nolland recognises that Luke's readers come to the story of Zacchaeus with the awareness of Jesus being a 'friend' to tax collectors and sinners but also that 'it is humanly impossible for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.'[511] After Zacchaeus' introduction in Luke 19.2, readers would have expected a villain of some sort and Luke does not initially do anything to contradict those expectations, instead layering on the physiognomic expectations of 'short in stature' in the following verse. The Lukan portrayal of Zacchaeus is ambiguous and the ambiguity leads to some potentially problematic interpretations from a disability perspective.

Even the meaning of Zacchaeus' name within the narrative is unclear. Judged negatively for not reaching the expected standard of height, as someone corporeally regarded as "other", the use of Zacchaeus' name is unexpected. In theory, its presence denotes its relevance, though commentators disagree on what the relevance of Zacchaeus' name is. Bovon deems the etymological meaning of "pure one" or "innocent one" to be unimportant;[512] to the contrary, Parsons, considering Zacchaeus as a diminutive form of Zechariah, contends that the etymology adds to 'the irony of the story,' conflicting with Zacchaeus' low expectations of self and occupation that was 'far from pure and innocent.'[513] The

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[511] John Nolland, *Luke 18.35-24.53* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), p. 904. Luke 18.25 closely precedes Zacchaeus' appearance in the Lukan narrative. As an exaggerated metaphor, it should be noted that whilst the image shows the difficulty of a rich person entering the kingdom of God, it does not state it is completely impossible.

[512] Bovon, *Luke 2*, p. 596.

[513] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 99. Parsons argues, as previously mentioned, that Luke challenges physiognomic expectations through the "Bent-Over Woman" being identified as a

question of how far Zacchaeus' name could be considered ironic is an uncomfortable one, especially as his identity as a "son of Abraham" is recognised in Luke 19.9. If the "Bent-Over Woman's" corporeal impairment masked her identity as a "daughter of Abraham, it is logical to assume that Zacchaeus' apparent negative corporeal status masks his identity as a "son of Abraham" and, as such, his given personal name might be linked to that identity.

Zacchaeus 'was trying to see who Jesus was' (Luke 19.3) because he recognises the importance of doing so. The narrative uses the verb ζητέω as "to seek" or "to search for" (ἐζήτει ἰδεῖν τὸν Ἰησοῦν τίς ἐστιν as literally 'he was seeking to see'), which is pertinent because it 'can refer to the quest for truth, for health, for a meaning, or for salvation.'[514] This suggests that Zacchaeus is already looking for Jesus and true understanding in a metaphorical sense. If Zacchaeus is trying to gain access to Jesus but cannot do so, Luke 19 also contains a background social critique of the crowd preventing access to faith. Despite the scarcity of physical description in New Testament writings, Zacchaeus is described as 'short in stature' (ἡλικίᾳ μικρὸς) in Luke 19.3. When commentators 'ignore or minimise "small in stature,"'[515] they also ignore 'on account of the crowd' (ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου). Zacchaeus' height is usually given as the reason why he

'daughter of Abraham' in Luke 13.16. Apparently, physiognomic expectations are not challenged in exactly the same way in the case of Zacchaeus, given the information provided on his profession.

[514] Bovon, *Luke 2*, p. 596.

[515] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 98.

cannot see Jesus, yet the narrative clearly states the crowd are providing the obstruction, around which Zacchaeus must circumnavigate.

Size, within the society depicted in Luke's Gospel, is 'a crucial marker of difference often overlooked' and which informs cultural identity.[516] Although Parsons states that in first and second century societies corporeal "otherness" deemed 'physical deformity' was part of everyday life, 'as was its public ridicule,'[517] portrayals can be somewhat more complex.[518] Nonetheless, unsettling as the consideration may be, the question has to be asked as to whether Luke's inclusion of "short in stature" and accompanying descriptions of Zacchaeus could be an element of "humour" in the narrative. In other Greco-Roman contexts Zacchaeus' small physique would have been a target of invective, 'laughable, even despicable;' "small in stature" could conceivably be

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[516] Lynne Vallone, *Big & Small: A Cultural History of Extraordinary Bodies* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 1. Size difference, as 'a fact of nature,' is used to categorise people, with those categories 'significantly impact[ing]…ways of thinking, feeling, and constructing the world.' Even though Vallone's study is focused on the seventeenth century onwards, evidence of categorising people according to corporeal standards can been seen throughout recorded history, with these more general comments being introductory to her contextually specific discussion.

[517] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 108.

[518] Plutarch, in *Quaestiones Convivales* 633c, outlines how it is acceptable to ridicule certain types of corporeal "otherness" but not all: cf. Plutarch, *Quaestiones Convivales*, ed. Gregorius N. Bernardakis, <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0007.tlg112.perseus-grc1:633c> [accessed 3 December 2022].) Writing slightly earlier, though still relevant, Cicero discusses how 'deformity and bodily defects' are suitable topics for humour, but only up to a point. Frederik Van den Abeele comments, though, that this upper class 'etiquette' cannot reflect the everyday. See Frederik Van den Abeele, 'Blindness: Visual Impairments in Antiquity', in *A Cultural History of Disability in Antiquity*, Christian Laes (London - New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 67-83: p. 82. The same type of "otherness" can be seen from different perspectives: Kruschwitz and Cousins compare how the character Alcibiades' lisp is mocked in Aristophanes' *Vespae* 42-6, yet seen as a more positive feature of his language in Plutarch *Alcibiades* 1.4. See Kruschwitz and Cousins, pp. 105-109. Also, cf. Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, ed. Bernadotte Perrin <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0007.tlg015.perseus-eng1:1.4> [accessed 3 December 2022] - Archippus still ridicules the son of Alcibiades for 'overwork[ing] the lisp' and the way he walks.

'another tasteless joke deriding the deformed,'[519] whether or not Luke's audience is later intended to feel guilt at their amusement when Zacchaeus is identified as a "son of Abraham".

Within the New Testament corpus, 'short in stature' (ἡλικίᾳ μικρὸς) only occurs in the Gospel of Luke;[520] elsewhere μικρός is not directly used to describe height. Generally avoiding positive references, μικρός figuratively expresses low social standing in Acts 8.10 and Acts 26.22,[521] describes children or 'little ones' in Matthew 18.10 and a short amount of time in John 7.33. Connotations of "least" of "less than" associated with "small" imply that "short in stature" would have been heard by Luke's audience 'as something derogatory and demeaning.'[522] In addition to the negatively stereotyped "chief tax collector" and "rich" labels, Zacchaeus may have also been religiously and socially alienated, with social discrimination moving his "short[ness] in stature" from impairment to disability.[523]

Physiognomically, small physical stature was seen in terms of "smallness of spirit" and "small in stature" would naturally lead to the inferred characteristic of being "small-minded".[524] Watson queries if Zacchaeus' corporeal situation is,

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[519] Parsons, *Body and Character*, pp. 100-101.

[520] Anna Rebecca Solevåg, 'Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke: Comic Figure, Sinner, and Included "Other"', in *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, vol. 14.2 (2020), pp. 225-240: p. 226. <https://doi.org/10.3828/jlcds.2020.12>

[521] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 103.

[522] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 105.

[523] Watson, p. 322.

[524] Parsons, "Short in Stature", p. 53.

in fact, more serious: if his “shortness” was ‘so extreme as to be pathological,’ he would not only be identified as suspect in character but also potentially be categorised as “monstrous”.[525] Μικρός was not the most common adjective used to denote dwarfism, but it was used in that context and Luke does draw on cultural stereotypes.[526] Solevåg argues Luke uses the cultural stereotype of a dwarf in his portrayal of Zacchaeus, not just the physiognomic presumptions of a flawed character.[527] By running ahead (Luke 19.4) and hurrying (Luke 19.6), Zacchaeus was not displaying the accepted behaviour for a free man in antiquity; his behaviour was ‘considered unmanly’ and performative, echoing portrayals of a dwarf as a comic figure on Greek vases. On this basis, Solevåg proposes that Luke creates a symposium setting, where dwarfs would perform, but redefines Zacchaeus’ place at the banquet: when Zacchaeus invites Jesus to his home, he becomes the host and benefactor, taking a position of honour.

There are different interpretations of Zacchaeus’ behaviour, a physiognomic view or a sense of urgency and determination. Similarly, Zacchaeus’ position as chief tax-collector could be variously interpreted. If degrading roles, such as providing self-humiliating entertainment was one of the only forms of employment for someone “short in stature”, Zacchaeus must have exhibited extreme determination and aptitude to reach the position in society that

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[525] Watson, pp. 321-322. Within Greco-Roman social categorisation, “monstrous” included those who became objects of entertainment, both humourous and otherwise.

[526] Solevåg, ‘Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke’, p. 232. Πυγμή and νάνος were more commonly used for dwarfism.

[527] Solevåg, ‘Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke’,: pp. 103-104.

he did, in spite of his “otherness”. Congenital difference could be socially interpreted as deformity exhibiting divine judgement, [528] with the crowd recognising Zacchaeus as a sinner in Luke 19.7, yet Jesus does not pronounce forgiveness for Zacchaeus’ sins. There is narrative tension between the use of physiognomic expectation or humour and the purported “reversal” of those expectations once Jesus enters Zacchaeus’ house. This approach to the narrative allows for a “son of Abraham” to be both a member of the kingdom and humiliated. Resolving the tension created by allusion to physiognomic humour or judgement is only possible if the audience is intended to contrast their response and previous view of Zacchaeus with how his identity as “son of Abraham” should be treated. Alternatively, perhaps the tension is not meant to be resolved and Luke’s contemporary audience would accept a “son of Abraham” being seen as “less than” because of his non-ideal body, despite the kinship inherent in the phrase.

Zacchaeus’ identity as a “son of Abraham” indicates that “small in stature” ‘does not mean he must be small in spirit’ and that he should be excluded from ‘the family of God.’[529] If the Lukan Jesus redefines “son of Abraham” as referring to ‘faithful practices’ instead of bloodline,[530] then this challenges the stereotypical, negative interpretation of Zacchaeus the tax collector. Typically Zacchaeus’ story is examined as a conversion narrative, where interpreters, such

[528] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 101.

[529] Parsons, “Short in Stature”, p. 56.

[530] Solevåg, ‘Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke’, p. 235.

as Parsons, cite “son of Abraham” as the indication that Zacchaeus’ conversion is no less valid than others, moving past walls of prejudice or bias.[531] What is puzzling in the Gospel of Luke, though, is why the earlier reference to the “Bent-Over Woman” as a “daughter of Abraham” was acknowledgement of her pre-existing identity, but for Zacchaeus being a “son of Abraham” must apparently be a new or converted identity. Jesus, in Luke 19.9, says ‘Today salvation has come to this house because he is also a son of Abraham’ (σήμερον σωτηρία τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ ἐγένετο, καθότι καὶ αὐτὸς υἱὸς Ἀβραάμ ἐστιν),[532] which could be read in one of two ways: either salvation comes to the house at this particular time because Zacchaeus is now a “son of Abraham” and he is head of the household, previously one of “the lost” referred to in Luke 19.10, or salvation occurs because of Zacchaeus’ pre-existing identity as a “son of Abraham”, this being the reason why Jesus, salvation personified, enters the house. If Zacchaeus is judged according to negative corporeal expectations, as well as the tax collector stereotype, then this pericope is his conversion narrative. If Zacchaeus is already a “son of Abraham”, then the Gospel of Luke is communicating something else.

Acknowledging the questions and possibilities of the narrative is essential, if automatically ableist presumptions based on the linguistically embedded physiognomic consciousness are to be avoided. Zacchaeus’ actions in Luke 19.8, of giving half his possessions to “the poor” and paying back four times any

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[531] Parsons, *Body and Character*, pp. 106-107.

[532] The NRSV translation reads ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.’

defrauded amount,[533] can be interpreted as repentance by a guilty tax collector, but they do not have to be. Zacchaeus' supposed guilt is based on the assumption that the tax collector stereotype is accurate, and he had purposefully defrauded people. New Testament writings, of course, do use stereotypes as a short form of communication, as a lot of ancient literature does, but there is also the option that the Gospel of Luke is challenging that tax collector stereotype, as it relates to challenging the physiognomic character assumptions associated with "short in stature".

"If" (εἰ) is a key word in Luke 19.8: it does not denote the certainty traditional interpretations have regarding Zacchaeus' guilt – why must it be assumed that Zacchaeus has purposefully stolen money? If Zacchaeus had inadvertently defrauded anyone, he could be rectifying a mistake, or even describing his common practice in the event of an error. Traditional interpretations of Luke 19 contemplate the salvation of a tax collector, a story of repentance and pardon, are, in relatively recent interpretations, opposed by those who find within the narrative that Zacchaeus' morality has been misunderstood, that he deserves to both hear Jesus' message and be called a "son of Abraham". "Traditionalists," like Nolland, maintain that 'the whole tone of the story' counts against the idea of Zacchaeus describing his regular practice.[534]

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[533] Nolland, *Luke 18.35-24.53*, p. 906. Nolland observes that the 'fourfold restitution is probably not the fulfilment of any legal requirement,' as Jewish law normally required the repayment of the stolen amount theft plus a fifth; Roman law required four times the amount only 'in certain circumstances.'

[534] Nolland, *Luke 18.35-24.53*, p. 906.

Conversely, Isaac T. Soon argues that when crowd calls him a sinner, Zacchaeus literally stops and 'provides evidence to the contrary regarding his possessions and his policy towards extortion.'[535]

Soon contends that Luke's portrayal of Zacchaeus' wealth is 'ambiguous'[536] and that even though 'Zacchaeus's claim to give up his possessions and pay back those whom he might have defrauded is often viewed as a moment of redemption,'[537] it could equally be an established habit. This reading of Zacchaeus' business procedure would ring true with him already having the identity of "son of Abraham", but the question would still remain as to why such a practice was necessary. Perhaps it was about mistakes made, or a consequence of the actions of tax collectors acting on Zacchaeus' behalf, for whom he is taking responsibility.

Fellowship between Zacchaeus and Jesus is traditionally interpreted as Jesus rejecting the social "rules" preventing a holy man associating with a presumed sinner,[538] but the narrative spotlights hospitality. Luke 19.5 could be read as Jesus, the guest, extending hospitality to Zacchaeus in his own home;[539]

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[535] Isaac T. Soon, 'The Little Messiah: Jesus as Τῇ Ἡλικίᾳ Μικρός in Luke 19:3', in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 142.1 (March 2023) pp. 151-170: p.163.

[536] Soon, p. 163. In his article (pp. 156-158) Soon also argues that, linguistically, ἡλικίᾳ μικρὸς could equally refer to Jesus, since there is no conclusive grammatical link to Zacchaeus. This is improbable given the physiognomic associations of the phrase, which Luke is unlikely to have attributed to Jesus, especially considering the lack of physical description of Jesus in general, but it is an interesting idea, nonetheless.

[537] Soon, p. 162.

[538] Watson, p. 322.

[539] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 107.

it could also be Jesus encouraging Zacchaeus in extending hospitality, and so taking up the honourable position of host as he, a “son of Abraham”, has the status to do. In telling Zacchaeus he would dine with him, the Lukan Jesus is not just challenging prejudice predetermining Zacchaeus’ place in the body politic. Something more than this is taking place. Where the “Bent Over Woman”, another child of Abraham, has her impairment removed, Zacchaeus does not. If Zacchaeus’ impairment was deemed necessary to remove, one would presume Jesus would have done so in order to make his status as a saved “son of Abraham” clear. Jesus recognises Zacchaeus as a “son of Abraham” regardless of his “shortness” meaning that the fault, within the narrative, is those who do not recognise that status, not with Zacchaeus being “short in stature”.

The socially indicted impairment is not removed, Zacchaeus making no petition for such an action.[540] Therefore the moral failings are seen to rest with the society judging Zacchaeus with its physiognomic consciousness, even when the language of the narrative uses those values. Luke draws on cultural notions of “deviant” bodies, physicality not meeting expected standards, and employs negative tropes.[541] Whilst Zacchaeus certainly challenges those tropes, how far Luke subverts them[542] is uncertain. Zacchaeus is a single character who does not appear to completely fit a negative metanarrative linked to his disability, yet he is just a single character – the whole cultural metanarrative is not overturned.

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[540] Soon, pp. 160-161.

[541] Solevåg, ‘Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke’, p. 225.

[542] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 170; Solevåg, ‘Zacchaeus in the Gospel of Luke’, p. 225.

At best, Luke challenges the assumptions of one aspect of physiognomic consciousness; Zacchaeus could also be the exception, since Luke uses the language of the metanarrative to make key points. Challenging the metanarrative, or providing an exception to it, does not show 'the stranglehold of physiognomic determinacy [to be] broken,'[543] as Parsons suggests, and Zacchaeus is, at least at first, an object of ridicule, ridicule based on corporeal prejudice.

4.3.2 Paul's Disabled Body

Retrospective diagnosis of Paul's mentioned, though not explicitly detailed impairments, is 'a hazardous hermeneutical enterprise.'[544] As such, an attempt will not be made here.[545] In many ways, the exact details of Paul's impairments are irrelevant: negative corporeal judgements were made about him and his writings do discuss reactions to where his corporeality was deemed to be too far from the relevant ideal.[546] This is not to say Paul's physical appearance and health are not important, more that whether he was or was not "other" in the eyes

[543] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 107. Theologically salvation may break the so-called 'stranglehold of physiognomic determinacy,' as Parsons states, but it does not rid the Lukan narrative of its influence.

[544] Louise J. Lawrence, 'Appearance and Health', in *T & T Clark Handbook to the Historical Paul*, eds. Ryan S. Schellenberg and Heidi Wendt (London - New York: T & T Clark, 2022), pp. 141-154: p. 146.

[545] *A Disabled Apostle: Impairment and Disability in the Letters of Paul* is a monograph by Isaac T. Soon, forthcoming from Oxford University Press. Although the content has not yet been publicly outlined, it is based on Soon's PhD thesis of the same name (see http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/13925/) on which there is an author embargo until 2024: in his PhD thesis abstract, Soon challenges the notion that specifics about Paul's disabilities cannot be discovered.

[546] Paul and sight, or his lack of, in relation to Acts 9, 22 and 26, will be considered further in chapter 7.

of his audience should be focused on and, if he was considered to be an “other”, how he was then treated and how he viewed himself.[547]

It has not been until relatively recently that New Testament scholarship has paid any real attention to Paul and his disabilities.[548] The evidence available within New Testament writings is ‘purposefully curated,’ often by Paul himself, for particular audiences against a backdrop where the ancient body had a plurality of meanings.[549] Without ‘direct access,’ narrative constructions of Paul provide somewhat ‘creative’ images of Paul’s body,[550] such as with Luke providing support for Paul’s identity as an “ideal” man in order to maintain status.[551] From this standpoint, how Paul wanted to be depicted and why is the issue needing consideration. Lawrence finds a narrative Paul who takes a different approach to the Lukan version of himself, a writer portraying his own body as ‘provocatively anomalous, atypical, and deviant.’[552] If Paul, as Lawrence suggests, is aware of his own impairments and how they appear to others,[553] then it is important to examine how those impairments might be used within his communications with

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[547] Jennifer Larson, ‘Paul’s Masculinity’, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 123.1 (2004), pp. 85-97: p. 85. Paul’s Corinthian correspondence evidences that specific criticisms were being made against his physical appearance and character.

[548] Lawrence, ‘Appearance and Health’, p. 141.

[549] Lawrence, ‘Appearance and Health’, p. 142.

[550] Lawrence, ‘Appearance and Health’, p. 154.

[551] Lawrence, ‘Appearance and Health’, p. 149.

[552] Lawrence, ‘Appearance and Health’, p. 154.

[553] Lawrence, ‘Appearance and Health’, p. 143.

his audience, without assuming that he is putting physiognomic theory into practice.[554]

Paul's alignment with anxious or lowly performers conflicts with the 'imposing masculine presence' of ideal rhetors.[555] Whatever it may have been, Paul's apparent physical impairment was, at least socially, 'a potential source of shame rendering him vulnerable to opponents' attacks.'[556] Paul's responses to those attacks display his "reputation management" when his appearance and voice did not meet the expectations of others.[557] He does not hide his "weakness," [558] instead addressing it directly.

2 Corinthians 10.10 is often mentioned in relation to discussion of Paul's relative weakness. In the verse he apparently provides a direct quotation of criticism he has received: 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible' (αἱ ἐπιστολαὶ...βαρεῖαι καὶ ἰσχυραί, ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενὴς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος). There is some debate as to whether, in the accusation, Paul's letters are 'tyrannical and aggressive,' with each section of the report being critical, instead of the criticism being in the

[554] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 50.

[555] Lawrence, 'Appearance and Health', p. 145.

[556] Parsons, *Body and Character*, pp. 48-49.

[557] Lawrence, 'Appearance and Health', p. 144.

[558] In texts such as 1 Corinthians 2.3-5 and Galatians 4.13, Paul uses ἀσθενεία to describe his own corporeal state. As a term which is frequently used to refer to infirmity or sickness (see Lawrence, 'Appearance and Health,' p. 144), Paul recognises himself as "other," deviating from physical and social corporeal ideals.

contrast.[559] For present purposes, the tone of the referred to letters are not as relevant as the negative corporeal judgement, which renders him 'the opposite of what they expect him to be:' physically unimpressive and, therefore, according to both rhetorical and physiognomic standards, a failure.[560]

In the ancient rhetorical handbooks, an orator's delivery depended both on their verbal skill and elocution, but also the physical impression they made on their audience.[561] This means that Paul's critics objected to 'something directly related to his body,'[562] whatever impairment it was that made him "weak" (ἀσθενὴς), on the basis of their physiognomic consciousness.[563] Attacks on Paul's apparent impairment in 2 Corinthians 10.10 invoke the 'prejudicial assumptions' of a metanarrative associated with "weakness," questioning both his masculinity and status as a free citizen,[564] as well as his character, authority and suitability to lead. Stephan J. Joubert, in acknowledging that gait was a 'prominent visual indicator of moral character and status in ancient Graeco-Roman societies,' demonstrates that, in 2 Corinthians 10.10, Paul is recounting how his opponents attempt to shame his 'inability to do the "leadership walk".'[565] His opponents, in

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[559] Harris, pp. 698-699.

[560] Barnett, p. 476.

[561] Harris, p. 700.

[562] Dale B. Martin, p. 53.

[563] Stephan J. Joubert, 'Walking the Talk: Paul's Authority in Motion in 2 Corinthians 10–13', in *In Die Skriflig : Tydskrif van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging*, vol. 49.2 (2015), pp. 1-7: p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1899>

[564] Lawrence, 'Appearance and Health', p. 145.

[565] Joubert, p. 1.

making the self-comparison based on Paul's "walk", provide 'proof of their lack of any real understanding.'[566]

It is, perhaps, Paul's reference to his 'thorn in the flesh' (σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί) in 2 Corinthians 12.7 where Paul creates uncertainty. He seems 'to conceal as much as he reveals,' though importantly stating his 'thorn in the flesh' was given to him.[567] The 'messenger of Satan' is given to Paul, yet he does not precisely say who by; in 2 Corinthians 12.8, Paul's three requests 'to the Lord' are refused, with the Lord, in the following verse, providing the reason 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness' (ἀρκεῖ σοι ἡ χάρις μου, ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται). "Weakness" (ἀσθένεια) is perceived, by Paul, as problematic, yet God chooses to not remove it, raising the possibility that it may not have been deemed problematic by God. If Paul was given his "weakness" by someone else, God either allows Paul to keep said negative corporeal state or does not judge that state as negative. It is unlikely that God, within Paul's narrative, would provide a messenger of Satan. Equally, reading the text as God not removing satanic influence does not provide a particularly positive portrayal of God, when Paul tends not provide such depictions, preferring instead to depict God's overall authority. In which case, an alternative reading could be that the messenger of Satan is Paul's own expression or a cultural idiom, given the interrelation between religious and medical contexts. In the same way that the "Bent Over

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[566] Christopher Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric', in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 32 (1986), pp. 1-30: p. 16.

[567] Adela Yarbro Collins, 'Paul's Disability', p. 165.

Woman" was not possessed, but was influenced by the domain of illness, for which Satan was believed responsible, Paul is expressing that he has an impairment belonging in that sphere.

If 'messenger of Satan' is read to be an impairment which God chooses not to remove, it is either not problematic, similar to Zacchaeus, or is a judgement or teaching tool. Given that the text does not suggest the impairment was of specifically divine origin, then a non-problematic impairment is a potential interpretation, despite being culturally referred to and treated as a messenger of Satan. If Paul's messenger of Satan is an almost idiomatic expression for a corporeal disability, it would be an issue for an audience subscribing to Greek or Roman values concerning body, beauty and strength; physiognomic consciousness would lead to Paul's message being potentially undermined by an impairment in the eyes of those who he is trying to communicate with. Any 'discrepancy between the content of the speech and the embodiment of the speaker' would disrupt rhetorical expectations of a speaker matching the corporeal ideal, in so far as not being "other" or "deviant" in any way.[568]

Adela Yarbro Collins notes that Paul's "thorn" is ambiguous, lacking clarity as to whether it 'is actually an interpretation of what Paul experienced or a rhetorical usage of the phrase without any claims being made about the nature of that experience.'[569] She goes on to outline that whilst modern interpreters understand "thorn in the flesh" in different ways, with some arguing it refers to

[568] Dale B. Martin, p. 54.

[569] Yarbro Collins, 'Paul's Disability', p. 165.

'temptations of the flesh,' the 'most widespread' view is of some type of physical impairment or disability.[570] For Moss, the "thorn" is either a metaphor for suffering caused by opponents or a physical impairment.[571] Moreover, contextually impairment would have been seen as the justification for rhetorical invective, but being judged negatively by his opponents in many ways sets Paul apart as "other" from their corporeal perspective. More recent readings do take this somewhat more 'nuanced' approach, venturing that Paul was 'vulnerable to attack' if anything about his demeanour 'physiognomically suggested he was either servile or feminine.'[572]

If Paul's thorn in the flesh is metaphorical, identifying its target domain is methodologically problematic, given that a modern reader cannot see beyond the source domain of the thorn to 'the [specific] manner in which this [particular] condition was evaluated and characterized in the ancient world.'[573] The specifics of the thorn have caused much speculation, but in reality it is the negative corporeal implications of the metaphor's source domain which contributes to Paul's communication, not his actual impairment: in his writing, Paul curates his condition through his use of the metaphor. A thorn (σκόλοψ)[574] is a 'malady,' in

[570] Yarbro Collins, 'Paul's Disability', p. 172.

[571] Candida R. Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies: Reconsideration of the Function of Paul's Thorn in the Flesh', in *Journal of Religion, Disability and Health*, vol. 16.4 (2012), pp. 319-333: p. 320.

[572] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 321.

[573] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 322.

[574] *BDAG*, pp. 930-931; *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon: Volume II*, (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 1273. Σκόλοψ is normally translated as "thorn," though the AMPC translation acknowledges "thorn (splinter)." "Thorn" tends to indicate, at least to a modern

that puncture wounds were discussed by ancient medics as potentially severe;[575] the exact character of Paul's thorn is unknown[576] but it provides a metaphorical hole in Paul's own character and 'prevents Paul from becoming too arrogant about his experiences.' Arrogance was a 'widely recognized' danger for philosophers and leaders in antiquity. In highlighting his thorn, Paul implies that his opponents, using his impairment as the basis for their invective and insult, in being without such a thorn are intrinsically arrogant.[577] By doing so, Paul has reframed his impairment, negatively judged according to social and cultural corporeal standards, as a positive attribute; it is still negative, in that the impairment does not meet corporeal expectations, but it is of benefit.[578] One interpretation of the benefit of Paul's thorn is that it becomes an ongoing treatment for 'Paul's chronically swollen ego.'[579] Weakened bodies, those punctured by "thorns", were seen as weak and so Paul is depicting himself as "weak" through this metaphor. [580] Yet there is another side to the strong and weak dichotomy: Paul reverses what is positive and negative when he claims his

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reader, a botanical element on which one would accidentally injure oneself; the definition of σκόλοψ as 'anything pointed that causes annoyance' (*BDAG*) does not inherently indicate outside intent, but a 'pointed wooden stick or pole' (*Cambridge II*) would have to be wielded in some way.

[575] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 321.

[576] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 319.

[577] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 322.

[578] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 323. The "thorn in the flesh" is portrayed as having the positive function of 'bring[ing] Paul down to earth' by puncturing his ego.

[579] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 323.

[580] Moss, 'Christly Possession and Weakened Bodies', p. 324-325.

thorn as treatment. Paul has an impairment, but this is positive because he is no longer at as much risk from arrogance or egotism. Without an impairment, his opponents keep their relatively "ideal" corporeal status, yet they move into the rhetorically negative space and, in effect, become "non-ideal".

From a similar corporeal perspective, in Galatians 4.13-16, Paul praises a previously positive response he received, despite his impairment, and reprimands his audience's change in attitude. Paul does not explain the way in which his impairment provided cause[581] when he writes, in Galatians 4.13, 'it was because of a physical infirmity that I first preached the gospel to you' (δι' ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς εὐηγγελισάμην ὑμῖν τὸ πρότερον). According to Richard N. Longenecker it seems probable that Paul's impairment somehow caused him to go to Galatia or to stay there longer,[582] with Bruce suggesting that Paul's first visit 'coincided with an attack of this ailment.'[583] Both, though, imagine a "healthy" Paul whose ministry is interrupted or diverted by an inconvenience, not a Paul who lives with a different corporeality to the ideal being imagined. Ronald Y. K. Fung describes the situation as Paul's original plan being to go elsewhere, that his missionary

[581] Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Nashville – Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1990), p. 190. Longenecker stresses that the preposition plus accusative shows Paul's impairment was the occasion of preaching not his reason for doing so, that reason being the importance of his content.

[582] Longenecker, p. 191. It should be noted that, not writing from a disability studies perspective, Longenecker refers to Paul's 'illness.'

[583] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 208.

visit to the Galatians was solely due to his need to recuperate,[584] but the importance of Paul's impairment is that although the Galatian community could have rejected him on account of his impairment, they did not (Galatians 4.14). The language used in Galatians 4.14 provides insight as to the response that Paul could have anticipated from the Galatians, if they had acted according to social or cultural convention. Paul writes to the Galatians 'you did not scorn or despise [me]' (οὐκ ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε). Ἐκπτύω could refer to "despise",[585] but Paul might also be alluding to the word's more illustrative meaning of "to spit out".[586] The more 'instructive' meaning of ἐκπτύω reflects the 'ancient stigmatization of disability,' with the act of spitting culturally relating to warding off evil spirits or expelling their influence.[587] Paul could literally be relating how the Galatian audience previously did not exclude him or try to exorcise his impairment.[588]

Cultural physiognomic association between impairment and evil spirits would have led to the approach of "spitting out" those with impairments, but in praising the Galatians' response in not treating him in this way, Paul is effectively

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[584] Ronald Y. K. Fung, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 196.

[585] *BDAG*, p. 309. "Despise" in terms of "disdain" and rejection.

[586] *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon: Volume I* (Cambridge - New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), p. 456. *The Cambridge Greek Lexicon* does not mention figurative usage, instead providing the literal definition "spit out."

[587] Martin Albl, '"For Whenever I Am Weak, Then I Am Strong" - Disability in Paul's Epistles', in *This Abled Body: Rethinking Disabilities in Biblical Studies*, eds. Hector Avalos, Sarah J. Melcher, and Jeremy Schipper (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), pp. 145-158: pp. 153-154.

[588] Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 209.

disconnecting his impairment from traditional contextual interpretations. When he says the Galatians 'welcomed me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus' (ὡς ἄγγελον θεοῦ ἐδέξασθέ με, ὡς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν) in Galatians 4.14, Paul is recognising that his impairment does not disqualify him in any way from that honourable and authoritative role. His impairment does carry 'social stigma'[589] and, according to Bruce, something about Paul's appearance was 'repulsive'[590] to the Galatians cultural sensibilities, so that in inhabiting a corporeality that challenged ideal standards Paul created something of a difficulty, or "trial" for his audience. [591]

Galatians 4.15-16 expresses that the positive attitude towards Paul has apparently changed. Previously commended 'for not accepting…widespread attitudes toward disabilities,'[592] the rejection of Paul does not appear to now be because of his impairment, but equally, it is not possible to know whether Paul's impairment was used by his opponents as evidence to aide in their attempts at persuading the Galatians to approach Paul differently.[593] Paul reverts to using his corporeality as evidence of his authority in Galatians 6.17, with the exhortation 'From now on, let no one make trouble for me, for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body' (Τοῦ λοιποῦ κόπους μοι μηδεὶς παρεχέτω· ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ στίγματα

[589] Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', p. 153.

[590] Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 209.

[591] Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', p. 153.

[592] Albl, 'Whenever I Am Weak', p. 154.

[593] Robert Jewett, 'Paul, Shame and Honor', in *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. J. Paul Sampley (Harrisburg - London - New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), pp. 551-574: p. 551.

τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου βαστάζω). Regardless of who the agitators are, or whether Paul's appeal is to them or to the Galatians, the reason given that trouble should stop is that Paul has 'the marks of Jesus' and others do not.[594] "Trouble" is separate from "marks", so the marks themselves are positive representations of identity. This does not mean that marks in and of themselves are positive, more that what they represent is authoritative, being the consequence of Paul's service of Jesus and the Gospel.[595] Marks or scars, such as those that would inevitably result from the 'countless floggings' mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11.23-25, could have been 'scars of dishonour'[596] and used as evidence for invective against Paul, echoing a slave or criminal body. Paul does not rebut physical criticisms, he 'embraces and builds upon the image of himself as flogged and suffering,' corporeal imperfections becoming a means by which to identify with Christ.[597]

Paul does not appeal for pity regarding his impairment[598] - the aesthetic element to his corporeal "otherness" is, according to the curated viewpoint in his letters, a badge of his faithfulness to Christ. Impairment gained in the service of

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[594] Fung, p. 313.

[595] Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 276.

[596] Joubert, p. 3.

[597] Lawrence, 'Appearance and Health', p. 145-146.

[598] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians - A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), p. 324.

Christ gives Paul, within his narrative, the authority in Galatians 6.17 to renounce opponents and agitators working against him and his mission.[599]

4.4 Resurrected Bodies

Resurrected bodies are often discussed from a theological perspective, which is obviously not the focus of this research, but the textual portrayal of resurrected bodies is critical. Constructions of the afterlife and its bodies had consequences for how early Christians viewed corporeality. As Henning asserts, 'eschatological healing not only has implications for resurrected bodies, but also determines how earthly bodies are valued.'[600] The risen body is not the same as the immortality of the soul; its literary representation illustrates 'a refusal to be separated from the material body.'[601] Therefore, 'the importance of Jesus's wounds in the resurrection appearances'[602] cannot be underestimated.

4.4.1 Jesus' Resurrected Body

Surprisingly, as the 'founding narrative in the Christian story,' the actual body of the resurrected Jesus 'receives a rather superficial scholarly

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[599] Larson, especially p. 85. Larson discusses how Paul's opponents used the physiognomic prejudice of the time against him, in that 'physical unattractiveness or disability detracted from one's ability to lead.' In focusing on Paul's ability to perform rhetorically, Larson inadvertently raises the question of whether Paul was challenging perceptions of impairment by refusing to adhere to the expectations placed upon a body not meeting cultural standards.

[600] Henning, p. 17.

[601] John D. Caputo, 'Bodies Still Unrisen, Events Still Unsaid: A Hermeneutic of Bodies without Flesh', in *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*, eds. Chris Boesel and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), pp. 94-116: pp. 94-95.

[602] Henning, p. 35.

examination.'[603] Individuals tend to 'reconstruct a Jesus who so happens to cohere with personal beliefs,'[604] often one with an ideal, perfect body, even when, as discussed in chapter 2, that carefully curated body was technically "whole" but, at least aesthetically, imperfect and mutilated. The actual nature of Jesus' resurrected body, as it appears in Luke 24 and John 20, is 'not at all clear.'[605] John 20 provides the most corporeal description of Jesus when he appears to his disciples post-resurrection. Other than mentioning Jesus' hands and feet in Luke 24.39, the Lukan narrative provides no substantive information as to the nature of Jesus' resurrected corporeality.[606]

Mary, in John 20.14, does not recognise Jesus from his physical appearance. J. Ramsey Michaels cites this as being 'consistent with certain other resurrection appearances in which the risen Jesus' identity is similarly concealed, at least temporarily, from his disciples.'[607] Mary sees Jesus and 'did not know' that it was him, but the text does not say that Jesus' identity was concealed from her. It is plausible that Mary does not recognise Jesus because his appearance is somehow different: when Jesus speaks to Mary, in John 20.15, he speaks as if he is a stranger, giving no clue as to his identity and having a corporeality without

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[603] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 24.

[604] James G. Crossley, *Jesus in the Age of Neoliberalism: Quests, Scholarship and Ideology* (London - New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 8.

[605] Dale B. Martin, p. 124.

[606] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 26-27. In Luke, the narrative provides no description of wounds, so that even where the audience might suspect 'something is distinctive about Jesus's extremities,' there is no detail given as to what that distinctiveness is.

[607] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 998.

features Mary would have known to associate with him. When Jesus speaks her name in John 20.16, Mary perceives something in his voice and she responds in the knowledge that it is the resurrected Jesus in front of her.[608]

Assuming that Mary reaches for Jesus in some way,[609] Jesus' 'Do not touch me' (μή μου ἅπτου) in response (John 20.17) could suggest an instability to his corporeal status at that point, indicated by 'I have not yet ascended to my Father.'[610] 'Do not touch me' could represent something different. Grammatically μή μου ἅπτου could be rendered as 'Stop touching me,' if Mary was embracing Jesus and he asks her to stop because he wants a particular sequence of events to happen: she needs to tell the disciples of meeting Jesus, so that certain events can take place before he "ascends". Mary's embrace, then, would indicate the corporeality made evident to Thomas in John 20.27, without Jesus overtly displaying the marks of his crucifixion. In either interpretation of Jesus' words, his corporeal state is "other", even if exactly how that might be is unclear.

'Marks of impairment [appear] on Jesus' resurrected body'[611] meaning that body is "other" and does not meet cultural expectations of ideal corporeality. Moss tackles this question in detail, since, for the Johannine narrative, the marks of the execution in Jesus' side and hands 'identify Jesus and confirm the reality

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[608] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 375.

[609] Beasley-Murray, p. 376. First or second century Eastern customs could suggest that Mary 'prostrated herself before Jesus and sought to clasp his feet.'

[610] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 1000.

[611] Amos Yong, 'Disability Theology of the Resurrection: Persisting Questions and Additional Considerations - A Response to Ryan Mullins', in *Ars Disputandi*, vol. 12.1 (2012), pp. 4-10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15665399.2012.10820066>

of the resurrection.'[612] The narrative carefully curates the distinctiveness of Jesus' resurrection body; the evidence of Jesus' salvific action is presented, but no marks on his back, for example, that would be marks of a criminal's punishment. [613] Importantly, the issue of how or why 'Jesus continues after death to be marked by the nails of the crucifixion' makes a difference in how John's audience reads the text, because, as previously mentioned, if Jesus is recognised with an impairment, that recognition challenges the culturally created corporeal ideal.

Continuing to consider Moss' argument, the assumption that Thomas is invited to touch a wounded and porous Jesus in John 20.27, 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side' (φέρε τὸν δάκτυλόν σου ὧδε καὶ ἴδε τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ φέρε τὴν χεῖρά σου καὶ βάλε εἰς τὴν πλευράν μου) ignores the more probable reading that Jesus exhibited scars that had begun to heal.[614] Scars would indicate a resurrected body and 'proof of life,' open wounds a walking corpse that had merely been animated.[615] In contrast to the dominant interpretation that 'Thomas is invited to thrust his hand into the wounds of Jesus,'[616] Moss convincingly argues that Thomas expects any potential touch to be 'probative,' him placing his fingers '*on* Jesus's body' and feeling the 'uneven

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[612] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 24.

[613] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 32.

[614] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 25-26.

[615] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 36.

[616] Beasley-Murray, p. 376. Beasley-Murray is but one example of this interpretation.

impressions' of a scarred and healed wound.[617] Scars were 'the ultimate form of identification in the ancient world.' They could indicate either a 'servile or criminal body' or 'markers of virtue.' The narrative not revealing the marks of Jesus' pre-crucifixion punishment to the audience appears to indicate, at least for John, Jesus' scars are symbols of the latter.[618]

Thomas is offered the opportunity, in John 20.27, 'to convince himself via visual inspection and touching that Jesus has really been resurrected.'[619] His answer in John 20.28, 'My Lord and My God!' (ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου) denotes recognition on sight of Jesus' scars and that 'it is unlikely that Thomas did any such thing,' given the narrative does not explicitly state the momentous action of Thomas touching Jesus took place.[620] Ramsey Michaels notes that Thomas' John 20.28 response is the first time anyone, except the Gospel writer, has called Jesus "God".[621] This event takes place after Thomas has seen Jesus' impaired body and recognised Jesus from those scars or impairments. Notwithstanding Thomas' "doubting" reputation, the disciples also needed the visual proof of Jesus' scars: it is only after Jesus 'showed them his hands and his

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[617] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 28-29. The idea of placing touch "into" Jesus' scars would then refer to the indentations of an uneven surface caused by the evident scars.

[618] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 31-32.

[619] Ernst Haenchen, *John 2* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 211.

[620] Beasley-Murray, p. 385. Beasley-Murray does not adhere to Moss' argument regarding Jesus' scars, however he does recognise that Thomas touching Jesus is probably not intended by the narrative.

[621] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 1018.

side' (ἔδειξεν τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῖς) that they 'rejoiced' on seeing physical evidence of resurrection in Jesus' impaired body (John 20.20).

Other than John 20, there is no record in New Testament writings 'of what Jesus looked like physically.'[622] That absence seems strange when, within the genre of biography, it would have been expected[623] and when the influence of physiognomic consciousness is considered.[624] On one hand, Jesus' resurrected body is corporeal, but it 'rises above bodily limitations.' It passes through walls to disappear, not 'limited by temporal conditions' and 'contradicts the central features of embodiment.'[625] However Jesus still stands in front of the disciples. According to John D. Caputo, Jesus' resurrected body 'at the end of the gospels is the opposite of the blind, lame, leprous, and paralyzed bodies with which the gospel narratives open,'[626] but that body is still an impaired one, marked by scars and narratorially curated to a different standard.

4.4.2 Which Kind of Resurrected Body?

The theological discussion around the exact nature of resurrected bodies is beyond the scope of examining corporeal judgements. Yet at the same time, the consideration of whether there will, or will not, be some kind of corporeal

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[622] Joan E. Taylor, *What Did Jesus Look Like?* (London: T & T Clark, 2018), p. 1. There, though, is a brief reference to Jesus' appearance in Revelation, see chapter 2.3 above.

[623] Taylor, p. 5.

[624] Taylor, p. 10.

[625] Caputo, p. 95.

[626] Caputo, p. 99.

aspect to that body has implications for what is valued by standards constructed by a society imagining the eschaton, as is exhibited in John 20. 1 Corinthians 15, for example, is an important chapter 'from a disability perspective,' as it outlines a contrast between earthly bodies and 'the spiritual bodies inhabited by the resurrected.'[627] What becomes an essential question in the consideration of 1 Corinthians 15.35-57 from a disability perspective, is not what the spiritual body will be like, but its implications for the corporeal body. Paul writes about transformation and continuity, but what will be erased and what will be preserved?

Caputo describes Paul's account of the risen body as 'refer[ring] to rising again from the dead in such a way as to put all mortality and corruptibility behind it once and for all.' It is a "spiritual body" that is without limitation, 'the same body restored and extended to perfection.[628] Perfection, though, is a socially and culturally dependent concept, so there is no real way of knowing what perfection in the text specifically is. As a cultural value, if it refers to the corporeal ideal which no one reached, resurrection, according to Caputo's stance, might indicate the eradication of impairments and, therefore, a negative view of impairment itself. If the risen body is a somehow perfected body, and Jesus' risen body was, therefore, so perfected, then Jesus' scarred, risen body would have been perfect and incorruptible. This line of thinking does link two technically unrelated texts, so

[627] Arthur J. Dewey and Anna C. Miller, 'Paul', in *The Bible and Disability - A Commentary*, eds. Sarah Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (London: SCM Press, 2018), pp. 379-425: p. 396.

[628] Caputo, pp. 95-96.

the audience of 1 Corinthians may, or may not, have used the connection with Jesus' resurrected body to see a challenge to physiognomic consciousness within Paul's writing. They may, alternatively, have viewed Jesus' body as an exception, with other resurrected bodies reaching towards ideal corporeality.

Two questions are contained within 1 Corinthians 15.35: 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?' (πῶς ἐγείρονται οἱ νεκροί; ποίῳ δὲ σώματι ἔρχονται;) For discussing how 1 Corinthians 15 presents corporeal standards, it is the kind of body resurrected that is constituent to this present discussion of corporeality.[629] When focused on the "body", Paul's meaning can be enigmatic 'because of the varying ways in which he uses the language of the "body" and "flesh."'[630] One clearly stated element of 1 Corinthians 15.39 is that 'not all flesh is alike' (οὐ πᾶσα σὰρξ ἡ αὐτὴ σὰρξ), which begins an exposition showing, according to Conzelmann, that Paul cannot conceive of 'existence without a body.'[631] Even if fleshly corporeality does not continue into the eschaton, it is at least the source domain of an extensive metaphorical exposition of resurrection "bodies". A resurrection "body", in the sense of its form, may not consist of flesh (σάρξ), but where "body" (σῶμα) indicates 'a specific mode of

[629] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), p. 1261. The discussion on 1 Corinthians 15.35 surrounds whether the questions are completely separate or whether the second is an explication of the first. Effectively, for consideration of corporeality, the answer is irrelevant, since the focus is on the kind of body, regardless of if there are two questions or one.

[630] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 12.

[631] Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 280.

being' or substantiality,[632] then resurrected bodies are understood in terms of there being a corporeal ideal, albeit with an unspoken shift in the construction a body is measured against.

The body 'that rots in the grave' is confirmed, in 1 Corinthians 15.37, to not be 'the body that will be' (τὸ σῶμα τὸ γενησόμενον),[633] the illustration being of a seed that dies to facilitate the growth of a new plant from within itself. Potentially, then, from a Pauline perspective the physicality of impairment would not matter if it was going to be left behind. Literally and metaphorically, this would have theological implications for judgements of a person's pre-resurrection corporeality. Anthony C. Thiselton highlights the shift from "flesh" (σάρξ) in verse 39 to "body" (σῶμα) in verse 40, with flesh apparently emphasising matter or substance and "body" calling attention to form and character.[634] In a society where cultural values are influenced by physiognomic consciousness, what elements of form and character continue? If, as Thiselton emphasises, the "two bodies" are not the same, then impairments in the pre-resurrection body are irrelevant to any post-resurrection identity. Such an emphasis puts the Pauline interpretation of resurrected bodies in contrast with the resurrected body of Jesus in John 20. Paul's marks of Jesus would, according to the two bodies model, be erased.

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[632] Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, p. 282.

[633] Thiselton, p. 1267.

[634] Thiselton, p. 1267.

'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable' (σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ κληρονομῆσαι οὐ δύναται οὐδὲ ἡ φθορὰ τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν κληρονομεῖ) in 1 Corinthians 15.50 clearly separates the physical aspects of corporeality and underlines transformation as a necessity.[635] Corporeality post-resurrection is 'analogous to the heavenly "bodies", which are not composed of "flesh."'[636] If impairment relates to the more physical, or "fleshly" aspects of corporeality, within the Corinthian narrative they would be erased upon resurrection, making the text problematic from a disability perspective. As mentioned above, there is a tension between 1 Corinthians 15 and representations of Jesus' body in John 20. Not only that, as Moss states, the idea that flesh and blood, in the sense of corporeality, cannot inherit the kingdom of God 'is flatly rejected by other canonical texts.'[637]

4.5 Removing Body Parts to Prevent Sin

Not all New Testament writings suggest a corporeal discontinuity between pre- and post- resurrection bodies. Matthew 5.29-30, 18.8-9 and Mark 9.43-48 suggest an understanding of physicality in resurrected bodies, if the corporeal

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[635] Thiselton, p. 1292. See also Cynthia Long Westfall, *Paul and Gender* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), p. 149. Westfall comments, about the 1 Corinthians 15 body, that because the body 'is "spiritual" [it] does not mean that it is not corporeal, but rather that it is immortal rather than perishable.'

[636] Dale B. Martin, p. 125.

[637] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 13. Obviously, as has already been acknowledged, the New Testament is comprised of separate texts that may or may not have been considered together in first and second century communities. However, these separate texts are also presented together to a modern audience and, so, where there are clear disagreements it is important to recognise the disparities of stance on a topic.

aspects of their arguments, the voluntary removal of body parts, have any kind of effect. Even if the suggestion of chopping off limbs or gouging out eyes is not literal, the language still implies the potentiality of impairment in resurrection bodies, through the usage of self-amputation as a metaphorical source domain, as well as the negativity of missing parts. The "ideal" is still completeness or being "whole", but the corporeal "ideal" must be sacrificed if the alternative is worse. Where "members" of the body are considered to be the cause of sin,[638] it is preferable to endure the negative state of corporeal "deviance" as opposed to retaining corporeal wholeness but risking the loss of salvation.

4.5.1 Matthew 5.29-30[639]

Matthew 5.27-30 is a short section concerning adultery, more specifically lust.[640] Within the context of 'everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart' (πᾶς ὁ βλέπων γυναῖκα πρὸς τὸ ἐπιθυμῆσαι αὐτὴν ἤδη ἐμοίχευσεν αὐτὴν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ αὐτοῦ), the thought process constituting adultery has already taken place and is effectively shown in the action of looking. The other husband's marriage 'is already violated by the lustful

[638] István Czachesz, *The Grotesque Body in Early Christian Discourse* (Sheffield – Bristol, US: Equinox, 2012), p. 48.

[639] France, *Matthew*, p. 204. France purports that Matthew 5.29-30 is 'an originally independent saying of Jesus' which is added into chapter 5 to 'reinforce the seriousness of the warning' against adultery, as well as what constitutes adultery. A fuller version of the saying appears in Matthew 18.8-9, though is not explicitly related to adultery.

[640] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 526.

look'[641] and the 'sexual imagination'[642] that the person looking at the forbidden woman has indulged in. Sin is linked to body parts, with Matthew 5.29-30 'vividly demand[ing] radical sacrifice for the purpose of avoiding occasions of sin.'[643] If a body part causes sin, then 'it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell' (συμφέρει γάρ σοι ἵνα ἀπόληται ἓν τῶν μελῶν σου καὶ μὴ ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου βληθῇ εἰς γέενναν) – the sentiment of sacrificing bodily wholeness to prevent sin and consequent damnation is repeated twice in these two verses.

There is a disjuncture between the adultery that has already happened in Matthew 5.28 and the preventative actions seemingly advised in Matthew 5.29-30. The sequence of an eye being removed, then a hand, could represent the sequence of steps towards physical adultery; the inclusion of body parts apparently causing sin, and the possibility of self-amputation then preventing that sin, runs counter to the notion that the lust of the eyes is unavoidable, making it therefore possible to stop short of physical adultery, even where the process of imagination has transpired.[644] Assuming that, in the text as it is presented in the NA28 Greek version, there is a logical coherence to Matthew 5.27-30, then reasoned adultery is a sin and has taken place, but acting on that reasoning is

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[641] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), p. 245.

[642] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 237.

[643] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 523.

[644] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 238.

worse. It is, however, possible to make a choice and avoid the more serious scenario of acting on that "imagined" sin.

Responsibility for 'the deeds of one's bodily members' cannot be "disclaimed" since actions are 'psycho-somatic.'[645] The removal of the body parts "causing" sin prevents an individual being able to action that sin, if, for example, the hand is understood as 'an instrument of adultery and of unchastity.'[646] Hierarchies within the body, right being assumed to be of greater usefulness,[647] mean that the additions of 'right eye' (ὁ ὀφθαλμός ὁ δεξιὸς) and 'right hand' (ἡ δεξιά χεὶρ) are important because they add greater significance to the loss of the eye or the hand: even if it is the right hand that needs to be removed, drastic action is still the preferable choice.[648] As a consequence of choosing to self-amputate, impairments resulting from such a choice should be read, according to Moss, as 'piety in practice.'[649] This, though, is not a standard perspective. Nolland focuses on the goal of piety, the seriousness of commitment, with the means of exhibiting that commitment not being important.[650] R. T. France refuses to relate 'pictorial imagery' to 'the nature of human existence after death' and categorically states

[645] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 526.

[646] Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 246.

[647] France, *Matthew*, p. 205.

[648] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 238.

[649] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 279. Moss' discussion on the potential literality of the phrase is discussed in further detail relating to Mark 9.43-48.

[650] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 239.

that Matthew 5.29-30 is not evidence for imperfect resurrected bodies,[651] yet the language of Matthew 5.29-30 'implies that the body is raised exactly as it was buried.'[652] At the very least, on the level of the source domain, if the text is metaphorical, a comparison is made between whole and damned verses impaired and saved.[653]

4.5.2 Matthew 18.8-9

Matthew 18.8-9 provides a version of the exhortation to self-amputate that is not limited in scope to adultery: the principle of avoiding dangerous behaviours is applied to other areas of sinfulness,[654] though still from the perspective of danger to self and risk to salvation. Similar to its occurrence in Matthew 5, the exhortation to self-amputate indicates a move to the singular second person,[655] that 'it is for individual disciples to work out for themselves' where they need to take action.[656] The imperative to rid oneself of whichever body part "causes" sin

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[651] France, *Matthew*, p. 206.

[652] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 525. Despite stating that the language implies impairments are expected to continue post-resurrection, Davies and Allison also state that 'it is improbable that either Jesus of Matthew took such language literally.'

[653] France, *Matthew*, p. 205. 'To "cause to stumble"…is a recurrent metaphor in Matthew.' In this case, the cause of stumbling needs to be removed, but the scenario created is a "whole" person stumbling and an "impaired" person not. If stumbling represents salvation, then wholeness does not equate to what physiognomy expects it to.

[654] France, *Matthew*, p. 683. The self-amputation phrase here is also more similar to the Mark 9.43-48 version.

[655] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 738.

[656] France, *Matthew*, p. 683.

asks for a swift, decisive and severe response.[657] Can the verses asking for self-amputation as the prevention of sin give such a severe message and still be considered metaphorical? The demands in Matthew 18 have a 'wider sense' since 'any sin to which hand, foot, or eye might lead is pertinent,' making the warning more comprehensive.[658] Yet ears are not included as a cause of sin, nor is the tongue, which is surprising if self-amputation is meant to comprehensively prevent sin, with 'any sacrifice…worth making to eliminate it.'[659] If the phrase were completely metaphorical, then any body part, no matter how valuable, would be "at risk" of being removed, but ears and the tongue are two corporeal elements necessary for communication within a rhetorical society. The omission of ears and the tongue is somewhat puzzling, but could suggest that self-amputation to prevent sin was not meant to completely exclude a person from their society. Certain impairments seem to be more serious, from a social interaction or communication perspective than others, and therefore, not suggested in the text, yet at the same time the text asks for extreme commitment, since salvation is more important. Why would the text not contrast complete exclusion from rhetorical society as being preferable to damnation, instead of making being "othered" according to corporeal judgement the point of comparison? Those who are proactive in removing body parts have been

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[657] W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 8-18* (London - New York: T & T Clark, 2004), pp. 764-765.

[658] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 739. Hands, feet and eyes are, according to Nolland, the three main ways in which people encounter the world and 'could be labelled causes of stumbling in relation to almost any form of wrongdoing.'

[659] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 739.

proactive in preventing sin and are possibly placing themselves in a more passive social position, but they are still left with the ability to communicate.

One of the key differences between Matthew 5.29-30 and Matthew 18.8-9 is the alternatives provided to hell. In Matthew 5 the whole body going 'into hell' is the alternative to the loss of a body part, whereas in Matthew 18 the alternative to hell is 'more positively described as "entering into life" without the affected part.' France warns against interpreting this text too literally, as evidence for resurrected or heavenly bodies featuring impairments being disadvantaged in heaven,[660] but even if the rhetoric is 'unmistakably hyperbolic'[661] and not suggesting literal self-amputation, it still insinuates, not so subtly through its metaphorical source domain, that impaired bodies in heaven is an option.

4.5.3 Mark 9.43-48

Moss takes on the discussion of potential self-amputation with regards to Mark 9.43-48, the 'most concrete statement on the afterlife' in the Gospel of Mark.[662] She does not deny that the contrast between hell and life 'presupposes' the final judgement decision of God, though focuses instead on 'bodily wholeness and faith in Jesus [being] intimately connected.'[663] Previous scholarship on the self-amputation in Mark 9, some of which has already been mentioned in relation to Matthew 5 and 18, views it as metaphorical and

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[660] France, *Matthew*, pp. 683-684.

[661] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18* (2004), p. 766.

[662] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 291.

[663] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 284.

rhetorical,[664] with ‘almost no modern scholar’ reading the passage literally: those that recognise any literality understand the amputation as punitive.[665] In direct opposition to those, such as Lane, who “just” interpret Mark 9 as an illustration of sacrifice,[666] Moss advocates for ‘the possibility that Mark both envisages the resurrection of deformity and intends his audience to take his injunction literally.’ Even if the audience is not expected to act and self-amputate, the seriousness of Mark 9.43-48 ‘rests upon the assumption that we do understand this passage literally’ and depends on the contrast between ‘deformed eternal life’ as opposed to ‘normal-bodied damnation.’[667] If a person knew they would be healed in the afterlife, then, whilst obviously painful, self-amputation would not have as grievous implications, as it would technically be temporary rather than eternal and the cost of displaying commitment not as sacrificial, making the commitment itself not as valuable.

Commentaries on this Markan text are more inclined to view the language as ‘thoroughly hyperbolic’ because Mark’s audience would apparently automatically understand ‘there would be no lame and blind persons limping and groping about in heaven.’[668] Hyperbolic or not, the negative of impairment in the phrase’s potential source domain is still preferable to hell. However, as stated by

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[664] Moss, ‘Mark and Matthew’, pp. 291-292.

[665] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 46.

[666] Lane, *Mark*, p. 348.

[667] Moss, ‘Mark and Matthew’, p. 292-293.

[668] Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8.27-16.20* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2001), p. 71.

Moss, there are ‘strains of ancient thought’ regarding disability being preserved as identity in the afterlife,[669] so the intended audience of Mark may not have presumed eschatological healing to the state of an ideal body. Moreover, the passage portrays sin as so corrupting that disability is preferable if it enables entering heaven, to being “able-bodied” and thrown to hell: ‘It is the undesirability of being disabled and the radical suggestion that one should make oneself disabled that makes the saying so powerful.’[670]

Amputation, within the narrative, does not have to be punitive; in a first and second century context it can also be medical and therapeutic.[671] According to Moss, it was more likely that Mark’s audience would have understood military experience and medicine as ‘the cultural contexts that shaped the amputated body.’ Wartime amputation or eye loss provided evidence of valour, the amputee being further admired ‘when the patient was also the surgeon.’ [672] Medical authors cited amputation as a precautionary step, a cost but one which yielded benefit when the alternative was worse.[673] Where the Markan passage considers the prevention of sin or stumbling, it also ‘presents an opportunity for the reinterpretation of Mark’s position on disability.’[674] Removing the body parts

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[669] Moss, ‘Mark and Matthew’, p. 293.

[670] Moss, ‘Mark and Matthew’, p. 293.

[671] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 47.

[672] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 49-50.

[673] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, pp. 52-53.

[674] Moss, ‘Mark and Matthew’, p. 294.

which cause the individual to stumble show physical impairment not to be the consequence of sin, but its prevention.[675] Impairment, at least within these few verses of the Markan narrative, becomes representative of piety and the choice of obedience, an outward representation of a desirable spirit, not a physiognomic embodiment of sin.

It is not, though, that Mark has a positive perspective on disability and impairment. Mark 9.43-48 'muddies the waters' of Mark's position on impairment and sin, with the assertion that that 'able-bodiedness can be the *cause* of sin.' [676] Moss provides the example of gangrenous feet, part of a technically whole body, causing people to stumble and resulting in the need for amputation: 'corrupted wholeness can cause bodily destruction,'[677] as would likely have been acknowledged by a Mark's intended audience. She also argues that whilst Mark 9 employs the negative force of impairment and disability, at the same time it revises the 'standard model' connecting sin and disability, admitting 'that disabled bodies are accepted in the kingdom of God.'[678] Effectively the passage creates room for the possibility of impairment in the discussion of "ordinary" resurrected bodies.

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[675] Matthew Thiessen, *Jesus and the Forces of Death* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), p. 60. Though outlining Jesus' attitude in the context of leprosy, Thiessen does discuss the reality of ritual impurity for the Markan Jesus.

[676] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 294.

[677] Moss, *Divine Bodies*, p. 57.

[678] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 294.

Mark 9.43-48, and by association the corresponding passages in the Gospel of Matthew, challenges the primacy of corporeal "wholeness" using a 'subversive logic' that impairs "earthly" bodies 'in order to contain sin in anticipation of the afterlife.'[679] Impairment becomes evidence of those who have chosen to 'contain sin' and rid themselves of its influence, making the revolutionary presentation that corporeal "wholeness" can be the mark of a sinful person,[680] despite Mark reproducing 'a traditional negative evaluation of disability.'[681]

4.6 Concluding Remarks on Bodies Deviating from an Ideal

The status of bodies which do not meet corporeal ideals contains more ambiguity than a simple negative judgement. Impairment, where mentioned, is rarely positive in and of itself, but its portrayal depends on what the corporeal anomaly is considered to be and how far the individual's situation leaves them marginalized. There are groups of those judged to be too far from the ideal, collectively referred to by a list of their impairments, even if their "otherness" is not explicitly stated as such. Passages such as Matthew 11.4-6 and Luke 7.21-23 show groups of people operating outside of the communal identity. Luke 14 uses this loose grouping to represent inclusion, with those identified as marginalised brought closer to the centre of the community, yet the hierarchical

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[679] Henning, p. 117. In other texts, such as the tours of hell discussed by Henning, 'sinful bodies are disabled in hell in order to contain sin in the afterlife.'

[680] Moss and Schipper, p. 2.

[681] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 56.

judgement of corporeality according to its distance from an ideal or standard is present in the apparent layers of marginalisation.

Presented bodies are carefully curated within their respective narratives; there are impaired bodies which an author wants to be viewed positively, such as Jesus' resurrected body being framed as sacrifice for the good of others, or Paul's "marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6.17) being evidence of steadfast adherence to a believing identity. The positively portrayed impaired bodies of Jesus and Paul are of named individuals, whereas unnamed impaired bodies generally fulfil a narrative purpose, often curating the character of others through the erasure of their impairment, as well as the only indicator of their identity.

The portrayals of impairments can be both problematic and have space for liberative potential; disabled people can often be 'presented as a morality lesson and remain objects not agents in the plot,'[682] but gaps left in the narrative, whilst the focus of the plot is elsewhere, is where elements of agency can be found. Mark 7.31-37 portrays a deaf man who apparently, from a nondeaf perspective, struggles to communicate. Measured according to normate standards, the man's status regarding his participation in his healing is left ambiguous, with no information provided, for example, as to whether he was brought willingly or otherwise. The "Bent-Over Woman" in Luke 13.11-17 is not viewed as important in her own right, identified by her impairment, but narrative gaps allow for the interpretation that she displayed agency in responding when Jesus calls her. Impairment is still negatively depicted, but where individuals such as the "Bent-

[682] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 360.

Over Woman" and Zacchaeus are referred to as children of Abraham, the physiognomic associations are challenged, allowing for the possibility of alternative interpretations to the assumed negative metanarrative.

Re-evaluation of corporeal standards is shown to be possible through the existence of named bodies that are not healed, such as that of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus' behaviour can be interpreted as recognising the importance of Jesus (cf. Luke 19.3) and the Lukan Jesus does not change Zacchaeus' corporeal status, presumably not deeming it necessary to do. From a similar perspective, despite being culturally negative, Paul's physical marks of Jesus remain and he praises his Galatian audience (Galatians 4.13-16) for initially responding to him positively, despite his impairment and reprimands them for a change in attitude.

Paul's praise of the Galatians' first positive reception to his impairment shows incongruity with his depiction of what a resurrected body will be (cf. 1 Corinthians 15.37), one apparently leaving behind physical impairments. According to 1 Corinthians 15.50, Paul's marks of Jesus would be erased if they are fleshly impairments, yet Jesus' carefully curated resurrected body in John 20 retains its scars and injuries. It raises the question of whether Paul's version of the eschaton excludes corporeal diversity. Paul appears to exclude impairment from resurrection, when Jesus' body retains its difference, even if it is only hinted at in its Luke-Acts depiction (cf. Luke 24.40). Paul's version of post-death corporeality also differs from the retention of impairment in Matthew and Mark, where wholeness is at times symbolic of a preference for sin (cf. Matthew 5.29-30, 18.8-9; Mark 9.43-48).

Gospel healing narratives have enabled the propagation of the idea, especially within modern Western cultures, that the 'remediation of disability' is the 'utopian horizon of health,'[683] despite challenges elsewhere in those same texts. These miracle stories contribute to the metanarrative of disability in making deviation from corporeal expectation a deficiency, 'used by Christians to throw supposedly good wishes for an extreme makeover at disabled bodies,'[684] and fuelling 'destructive attitudes toward disability among Christians even to the present day.'[685]

Without questioning the corporeal values and judgements within New Testament writings, there is the risk that ableist assumptions as to the kinds of bodies desirable to God will automatically be promoted. Narrative portrayals of impairment, as well as the gaps in those narratives, need to be re-evaluated. New Testament writings do reflect the physiognomic consciousnesses evident in first and second century societies, but there are points of tension and challenge that need to also be acknowledged. Chapter 5 will look specifically at the metanarrative of paralysis to further examine how narratives can be re-evaluated in the light of a disability perspective.

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[683] Sharon V. Betcher, 'Disability and the Terror of the Miracle Tradition', in *Miracles Revisited: New Testament Miracle Stories and Their Concepts of Reality* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), pp. 161-181: p. 163.

[684] Betcher, p. 165.

[685] McColl and Ascough, p. 1.

CHAPTER 5

THE METANARRATIVE OF PARALYSIS

Within New Testament texts, impairment carries associated meanings, to the point that 'impairment cancels out other qualities, thereby reducing the complex person to a single attribute.'[686] A person with an impairment has their identity and agency overridden,[687] being replaced by a narrative focus on that impairment which invokes 'extraneous details.'[688] New Testament writings are full of examples of metanarratives of impairment, where personal narratives are displaced by dominant social or cultural values. From a methodological point of view, David Bolt has stated that 'it can be useful to focus on a particular condition when illustrating or exploring the metanarrative.'[689] In *Metanarratives of Disability*, impairments within category of paralysis were not covered,[690] but from the perspective of New Testament texts, it is this category that can illustrate the presence of metanarratives within some biblical pericopes.

It is important, at this point, to acknowledge that there are those affected by mobility impairments who 'object to the use of the terms *paralytic* and

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[686] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 10.

[687] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 10.

[688] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 10.

[689] David Bolt, 'Prologue', p. xvii.

[690] Within private email correspondence, David Bolt did communicate that a chapter entitled 'The Metanarrative of Paralysis' had been planned, however this did not materialise from the author (15th June 2021).

paralysis, for they are short and brutally descriptive.'[691] However, Robert F. Murphy uses "paralysis" as a means to discuss the overarching category of impaired mobility. Since any consideration of impaired mobility within New Testament narratives must be, by nature, a broad overview of attitudes, the overarching category is the most applicable reference; nuanced discussion of lived experience within the texts is impossible given the lack of focus on precisely that topic.[692]

Critical readings of "paralysis", or at least ones which 'are appreciative of disability'[693] are not common within theology and biblical studies academia, meaning that in many cases there is what Bolt would describe as 'a covert perpetuation of recurrent tropes.'[694] In New Testament writings, passivity is ascribed to paralysis, which is then linked to an apparent lack of faith on the part of the individual with impaired mobility. Consideration of any potential metanarrative of disability is important, as its presence, especially when embedded within language, indicates a dominant cultural understanding that is then 'granted legitimacy as truth'[695] through its use. Whilst this process does

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[691] Robert F. Murphy, *The Body Silent* (New York - London: W. W. Norton, 1990), p. 3.

[692] Παραλυτικός and χωλός are the most common terms used to reference impaired mobility in New Testament writings. They are general descriptions alluding to "paralysis" or "lameness" in some form, but lack specific detail and only provide the information as to mobility being impaired.

[693] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 11.

[694] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 11.

[695] Danielle Kohfeldt and Gregory Mather, 'The Metanarrative of Chronic Pain: Culpable, Duplicitous and Miserable', in *Metanarratives of Disability: Culture, Assumed Authority, and the Normative Social Order*, ed. David Bolt (London - New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 141-55: p. 141.

occur within New Testament writings, other textual features can, at the same time, suggest details that at least invite an audience to query the embedded metanarrative.

5.1 Passivity - Dependence

Paralysis, particularly as depicted in gospel texts, brings with it the connotation of passivity, particularly in relation to a character who is described as "paralysed". The character referred to by "paralysis" is seen as dependent on others and, therefore, passive in their society. Despite the narrative assumptions of dependence, there are potential ambiguities. Contextual "gaps" allow for questions to be asked regarding the portrayal of the person referred to only by their impaired mobility, either in terms of their faith, veiled by their textual invisibility, or their potential agency in their own situation, which is left out of descriptions.

Matthew 8.5-13 and Luke 7.1-10 recount the story known as 'The Centurion's Servant.' Matthew 8.6 describes the servant as being 'paralysed, in terrible distress' (παραλυτικός, δεινῶς βασανιζόμενος), but Luke 7.2 refers to the centurion's servant who 'was ill and close to death' (κακῶς ἔχων ἤμελλεν τελευτᾶν). Although Luke does not specify paralysis, instead focusing on the proximity of death, both narratives refer to the same episode.

The centurion asks Jesus to heal his servant and yet the servant is not present at the time. Distance could be seen as a minor component in the

narrative,[696] since the focus is on the ideal thought processes of the centurion, as an example of a "mind" that demonstrates faith.[697] However, if Matthew has specified that the "servant" is 'a paralytic to illustrate Jesus' healing of paralytics, referred to more generally in 4:24,'[698] then distance becomes a tool by which paralysis becomes effectively invisible. The focus on the centurion in both Matthew and Luke pushes the "servant" further into obscurity. Distance from the opportunity to exhibit faith enforces dependence on the centurion's agency, thereby denying the agency of the servant themself.

Both versions, or accounts, have a Christological function, focusing on Jesus' identity and authority. Luke 7.10 barely describes the centurion's messengers returning and finding the servant healthy and the Matthean passage mentioning the servant's health 'almost as an afterthought.'[699] The centurion is held up as a model of faith,[700] with his thought process, and therefore faith, deemed to impress Jesus in Luke 7.9, where Jesus says 'not even in Israel have I found such faith' (οὐδὲ ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ τοσαύτην πίστιν εὗρον).[701] Matthew 8.13 seems to contain an additional indication that healing is a direct response to faith: 'Go; let it be done for you according to your faith' (ὕπαγε, ὡς ἐπίστευσας γενηθήτω

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[696] Bovon, *Luke 1*, p. 259.

[697] Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1992), p. 142.

[698] Blomberg, p. 140.

[699] Blomberg, p. 143.

[700] W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 8-18* (London - New York: T & T Clark, 1991), p. 22.

[701] Matthew 8.10 varies slightly, with 'in no one in Israel have I found such faith' (οὐδενὶ τοσαύτην πίστιν ἐν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ εὗρον).

σοι). Neither account provides information on the subject of the healing. Despite that apparent lack of information, there are questions to be asked of the narrative(s) as to how the servant is portrayed, even if there are no definitive answers to those questions: how is the servant referred to by the texts? Does Jesus give the servant any agency, albeit agency that is hidden by distance and narrative focus?

Matthew uses the term παῖς, which could be translated as “servant”, “slave” or “child”. Luke prefers δοῦλος,[702] a term more akin to “slave”, although in Luke 7.2 it is qualified with ‘whom he valued highly’ (ὃς ἦν αὐτῷ ἔντιμος). For whatever reason, the person with some form of paralysis, who is to be healed in the narrative, is valued by the centurion. Commentary discussions surrounding the value of the servant can centre on what the relationship shows about the centurion[703] and the notion that the paralysis narratively highlights a need for healing or eradication of the impairment. The references to the value of that distant person might suggest something of a contradictory perspective to the automatic assumption of a lack of worth, implied by the reference to being paralysed (παραλυτικός). Is the centurion worried about a decline in the value of his servant that would accompany paralysis? Or does the centurion value the servant even though they are paralysed?

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[702] Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, p. 316.

[703] Green, *Luke*, p. 286. Green provides one example of the discussion. Another can be found in Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p. 8, where Luz uses ‘my son’ in his translation of Matthew 8.6 and ‘the son’ in 8.13 to indicate a potential familial relationship.

It could be said that there are hints in the Matthean text of a respect for the agency of the servant. W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison raise the point that ἐγὼ ἐλθὼν θεραπεύσω αὐτόν, Matthew 8.7, can be translated as either a statement ('I coming will heal him') or a question ('Should I coming heal him?')[704] The emphatic ἐγώ at the beginning could be 'a forceful statement,'[705] but could equally imply a question, either to test the centurion's faith or demonstrate Jesus' faithfulness to Jewish law regarding entering the house of a Gentile.[706] Jesus' asking of a question could equally refer to whether the servant has requested healing, given that he is not present. This may not be part of the narrative, but how gaps within the narrative are filled needs to be considered from perspectives other than an assumed passivity or dependency. Consideration of this possibility will not reinstate the personal identity of the servant, but it could lessen the distance by which they are removed from agency and rendered dependent.

Dependence caused by paralysis is, perhaps, more famously communicated in the pericope depicting a man being lowered through the roof of a house by other men, so that he can be brought before Jesus. In this case, none of Matthew 9.1-8,[707] Mark 2.1-12 or Luke 5.17-26 provide a name or identity for

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[704] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, pp. 21–22.

[705] Blomberg, p. 141.

[706] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 10.

[707] Technically, although the three accounts do correlate, Matthew 9 does not include lowering the man through the roof. Matthew 9.2 condenses events into 'And just then some people were carrying a paralyzed man lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."' The Matthean account does, though, include the same sequence of forgiving sins, Jesus' question ('For which is easier: to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Stand up and walk"?') and the man being told to pick up his mat/stretcher then walk.

any of the men; the man who is transported is referenced by his impairment. However, the man's impairment is barely described beyond the notion of paralysis or impaired mobility. He could not walk and so the narrative, on the level of the language, assumes dependence on those carrying him.

Similar to the depictions of the centurion's servant, all three versions of the "roof story" focus the narrative on Jesus, not the man apparently looking for healing. That man is, in fact, metaphorically positioned behind those transporting him. The Markan text makes this contrast starker by specifying that four people were necessary to carry the paralysed man (Mark 2.3), but in all three accounts the man explicitly associated with impaired mobility is practically passive, the linguistic object of someone else's verb, whilst the "carriers" are the ones depicted as acting within the description of the scenario. Behind the focus of the narrative on Jesus' identity, the foregrounding of his conversation with the "carriers", is there any clue as to whether the assumed metanarrative of dependence is entirely accurate? Can questions be asked as to the agency of the paralysed man, as well as his faith? Matthew 9.2, Mark 2.5, and Luke 5.20 state that Jesus responded to the group when he saw 'their faith' (τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν), but there is no linguistic specification of exactly whose faith is being referred to. Guelich asserts that 'the effort to reach Jesus functions as a nonverbal request for healing,'[708] with the 'extra effort exerted' by the "carriers" being the expression of faith.'[709] The practical demonstration of "faith" (πίστις)

[708] Guelich, p. 85.

[709] Guelich, p. 94.

being the action requesting healing would not attribute faith to the paralysed man and would exclude him from independent faith. The “carriers” are the ones deemed to have overcome difficulty in order to reach Jesus,[710] displaying the faith needed on behalf of the man they are transporting.

On the level of the narrative, the paralysed man is passive and dependent. Looking behind the linguistic assumptions, a reader can challenge that metanarrative. If the paralysed man had not wanted to be carried, he might have been able to prevent himself being taken to Jesus; in order for a stretcher to be lowered through a hole in the roof of a house, the occupant of the stretcher would have had to be still and cooperative for the practical operation to succeed. Stillness and cooperation are a choice and, consequently, a demonstration of faith in overcoming difficulty to approach Jesus.

Mark 2.5 details ‘Son, your sins are forgiven’ (τέκνον, ἀφίενταί σου αἱ ἁμαρτίαι) as Jesus’ first spoken response to the faith outlined by ‘their faith’ in the same verse. Jesus does not directly respond to the “carriers”: instead, he responds to the man being carried, calling him ‘child’ before announcing the forgiveness of his sins. Does the reference to the man as ‘child’ indicate relationship, or does it infantilise him? As the first spoken to, the paralysed man is responded to first, out of the whole group who have demonstrated faith in approaching Jesus. Being addressed indicates that the man’s faith would be

[710] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, p. 88.

included within ‘their faith’ (τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν).[711] Bovon, rightly, displays astonishment that none of the three gospel accounts acknowledge that ‘their faith’ is ‘also the faith of the paralyzed individual,’[712] but with the focus of the narrative being on Jesus, perhaps the assumption of inclusion is implicit.

Much is made of the ‘extraordinary means’ employed in order to ‘overcome the obstacle embodied in the crowd,’[713] instead of the crowd functioning as the obstacle to access. In all three Synoptic texts, Jesus seeing ‘their faith’ recognises ‘the obstacle posed by the crowd blocking their access to Jesus.’[714] Behind the narratives is a context where those considered “lame” could largely be alienated and the crowd is the textual representation of impaired mobility being prevented from accessing opportunity by society,[715] one which considers paralysis to be passive.

Whilst the crowd effectively alienates the paralysed man from society, the way in which Jesus refers to him indicates a different attitude, though commentators disagree as to exactly what that might be. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus refers to the man as ‘Son’ (τέκνον), whilst in Luke he is ‘Friend’ (ἄνθρωπε).[716]

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[711] Cf. James A. Brooks, *Mark* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1991), p. 58; Robert H. Stein, *Luke* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1992), p. 176. Also, Green, *Luke*, p. 240.

[712] Bovon, *Luke 1*, p. 181.

[713] Green, *Luke*, p. 240.

[714] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, pp. 184-185.

[715] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 98.

[716] NRSV translations are provided here but are not necessarily uncomplicated representations of τέκνον and ἄνθρωπε, as will be discussed briefly in the following paragraphs.

Τέκνον can be a term of endearment which, following the imperative “take heart” or “do not fear” (θάρσει),[717] would indicate a more sympathetic attitude on behalf of Jesus to the man who has been brought to him. However, as mentioned previously, τέκνον can also be a disparaging address when used towards an adult, one which would infantilise the man and his impairment. Another alternative is that τέκνον is ‘one of the typical ways in which the wise man, sage, or teacher addresses his pupil.’[718] Thus Jesus’ address could indicate reference to the faith of the man brought before him, since a student looks up to and recognises the authority of their teacher. Whichever way the relationship illustrated by τέκνον is interpreted, there is a hierarchical dynamic in the relationship between Jesus and the paralysed man. How far this relates to his disability pertains to how far a metanarrative of paralysis would imply Jesus might negatively judge the man on account of his impairment, an element that is impossible to evaluate. Luke 5.20 replaces “child” (τέκνον) with ἄνθρωπε, translated as “man” or “friend”. Nolland points out that Luke restricts τέκνον to father/child relationships,[719] so ἄνθρωπε may well still contain a more compassionate response indicating relationship, hence some English translations preferring ‘Friend, your sins are forgiven’ (for example, NRSV, CSB) to the more impersonal ‘Man, your sins are forgiven’ (for example, ASV, KJV). Perhaps,

[717] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, p. 88.

[718] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 185.

[719] Nolland, *The Gospel Matthew*, p. 235.

particularly in relation to the Matthean or Markan narratives, it is possible to assert that Jesus' address to the man brought before him shows the opposite of alienation, instead affirming relationship. It is also possible to argue the opposite, that the impersonal "man" indicates no previous relationship, that Jesus is addressing an "other". Again, how to interpret ἄνθρωπε depends on information not directly presented within the narrative, with translators and interpreters relying on their own understanding of Jesus' positioning in relation to the metanarrative of paralysis.

Acknowledgement of the paralysed man in the reported speech of Jesus prompts a looking back at the assumption of passivity in his approach to Jesus, where gaps in the narrative apparently purport to dependence. Whilst there is nothing in the narrative to suggest agency on behalf of the man being carried, as previously mentioned, there is also nothing to suggest he does not cooperate and there is nothing to suggest a lack of agency, complete dependency, or absolute passivity. If impaired mobility makes no comment on a person's thought processes, then it is entirely possible to suggest or attribute resourcefulness to the man assumed to be passive, potentially even a role in the planning of the approach to Jesus. Rather than separating the group of men referenced by 'their faith' into the "carriers" and "carried", Solevåg describes the man's approach to Jesus where 'Together with his helpers, he is able to get up to the roof, dismantle it, and be lowered into the room.'[720] Although the narrative denies agency to the

[720] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, pp. 36-38.

man being carried on a linguistic level, the plot leaves space for it to be acknowledged.

Once healing has taken place, the previously paralysed man's immediate obedience is often overlooked, in favour of Jesus' actions and authority. When considered with the man being the person whom Jesus first communicates with, this obedience demonstrates not only Jesus' power[721] and 'the instantaneous nature of Jesus' healing,'[722] but also the agency and role of the man in what is happening in the narratives. In Matthew 9.7, the man 'stood up and went to his home' (ἐγερθεὶς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ), faithfully doing as Jesus commanded him to do,[723] demonstrating the healing and his own obedience. Mark 2.12, 'he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out' (ἠγέρθη καὶ εὐθὺς ἄρας τὸν κράβαττον ἐξῆλθεν), and Luke 5.25, 'immediately he stood up' (παραχρῆμα ἀναστὰς), add an alacrity to the man's actions. Promptness of response could both reflect 'the instantaneous nature of Jesus' healing'[724] and the man's own faith in response to Jesus, which Luke emphasises by describing how he makes his way home 'glorifying God' (δοξάζων τὸν θεόν). The "carriers" are not mentioned once Jesus has spoken to the man and their reaction to the healing is not mentioned, indicating that the man's own agency has featured in events. Although Matthew and Mark use a passive of ἐγείρω to refer to the man's standing, he is still active

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[721] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, p. 95.

[722] Stein, p. 178.

[723] Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 28.

[724] Stein, p. 178.

in following Jesus' commands:[725] Luke chooses ἀναστὰς, an active version of "to stand/rise" (ἀνίστημι) to describe the man getting up, making him linguistically active. In all three cases, Jesus is given responsibility for the man standing, but the man is not dragged to his feet: he has to choose to stand in order to demonstrate the healing and, therefore, the authority, of Jesus, meaning that his role in the narrative is essential despite the narrative minimising his identity and agency.

Physiognomic consciousness would have led onlookers to assume the man's impairment had been linked to sin in some way, but the 'spiritual state of the man remains unspecified'[726] in all three versions of the narrative. Apart from the utilisation of "from-the-lesser-to-the-greater" logic, there is no direct connection between the forgiveness of sins and healing in any of the three renditions of the "roof story." A physiognomic reading might assume the man to be sinful, but forgiveness effecting healing is a problematic reading,[727] especially when the event of healing does not instantly follow the event of forgiveness. Watson suggests that, in the Lukan version at least, Jesus sees beyond impaired mobility to a man's state of righteousness and that attending to 'the man's physical and social well-being' is a separate task, demonstrating that the man's

[725] Matthew 9.7's ἐγερθεὶς is translated as 'he stood up' in the NRSV, instead of as the passive 'he was raised up.' Likewise, Mark 2.12's ἠγέρθη is also translated as 'he stood up' instead of as a passive. Regardless of this, though, the man still chooses to take his mat in front of everyone (Mark) and go home (Matthew).

[726] Blomberg, p. 153.

[727] Watson, p. 311.

healing does not result from forgiveness. In this sense, the man's spiritual state is irrelevant to the narrative purpose of his physical healing, if everyone is sinful; his corporeality provides the necessary evidence for the narrative to prove Jesus' authority. There is a denial of a named identity and the veiling of agency, yet still evidence of personhood and strength woven underneath a metanarrative of assumed passivity.

5.2 Passivity - Lethargy: John 5.1-15

Warren Carter analyses impaired bodies in New Testament writings, more specifically in the Gospel of John, as 'signs and sites of the assertion and negotiation of imperial power,' thereby narrating differences of political power within imperialized societies.[728] Since impairment can take on a symbolic function within John's Gospel, it is entirely possible that this level of meaning exists within the narrative of John 5.1-15. What is more important, though, for the discussion on corporeal standards within the text, is to take a step back from impairment or disability "as a means to narrate" and instead more explicitly examine how impairment itself is approached, leading to the necessity of asking a different question: what happens to the portrayal of a man with impaired mobility[729] if we identify and look beyond a metanarrative of passivity?

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[728] Carter, p. 129.

[729] "The man with impaired mobility" is used here, instead of "the paralysed man." As mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, person-first language, whilst preferred, is not necessarily appropriate; there is not enough information as to the precise nature of the man's situation to use person-first language. The man in John 5.1-15 is never referred to as "paralysed" although the description he gives of his situation does illustrate impaired mobility of some description. Given that paralysis is used in a broad sense for this chapter, the man's impaired mobility is covered within the present discussion of the lethargy element to a metanarrative of paralysis.

The focus of John 5.1-15 is on Jesus and his power to “heal,” not on impairment; the literary intent is to ‘spotlight’ Jesus.[730] The man with impaired mobility has his identity and personal situation ‘erased in different ways’[731] - he is not given a name and there are no real details as to what his impairment actually is, the only information being the thirty-eight year duration. That duration provides the setting for the miracle performed by Jesus and is not meant to denote anything about the man and his character. Lack of detail given about the man shows that he is an example of narrative prosthesis, not a person with identity but ‘a pawn in a normate narrative about Jesus revealing his own identity, power, authority, and ability as God’s agent.’ [732] If the man with impaired mobility is useful to the narrator ‘only insofar as he has a disability,’[733] with many details about him omitted, then readings of the text which attribute meaning to missing information, as in what the man supposedly did not do, must be seen as problematic.

Exegesis of the John 5 “healing event” also focuses on the timing of the event, with the story being set on the Sabbath: ‘the paralyzed man is overshadowed by Sabbath and Christological matters’ and fades further into the background of readings that make him effectively invisible.[734] It is not just the

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[730] Ernst Haenchen, *John 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 245.

[731] Clark-Soles, ‘John, First-Third John and Revelation’, p. 342.

[732] Clark-Soles, ‘John, First-Third John and Revelation’, p. 342.

[733] Clark-Soles, ‘John, First-Third John and Revelation’, p. 342.

[734] Carter, p. 130.

"cure" which 'alleviates discomfort by removing the unsightly from view,'[735] but the foci of the narrative. Jesus' reputation is not being built by 'healing the sick,' as in John 5 the focus is on breaking/working on the Sabbath.[736] The healing is not presented as important in itself, it 'is only the means of producing a sabbath conflict between Jesus and the Jews.'[737] If the Johannine Jesus never did anything unintentionally, it is possible to infer that he knew what he was doing in telling the man to pick up his mat and walk, as a deliberate challenge to the religious authorities and Sabbath laws.[738]

Commentators generally agree that '[the] pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha,[739] which has five porticoes' (κολυμβήθρα ἡ ἐπιλεγομένη Ἑβραϊστὶ Βηθζαθὰ πέντε στοὰς ἔχουσα) of John 5.1 was a genuine site[740] and that there is 'good internal and external evidence for considering the pool at Bethesda to be some

[735] Mitchell and Snyder, p. 8.

[736] Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), p. 113. [Though not directly examining disability, it should be acknowledged that Malina's contributions are being considered where relevant but as separate from his personal beliefs regarding Jewish religion and culture.] See also Deane Galbraith, 'The Perpetuation of Racial Assumptions in Biblical Studies', in *History, Politics and the Bible from the Iron Age to the Media Age*, eds. Jim West and James G. Crossley (London-New York: T & T Clark, 2016), pp. 116-134: p. 119; Crossley, p. 8.

[737] Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 255.

[738] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 295.

[739] The pool is referred to variously in different manuscripts. Βηθζαθὰ is cited in NA28, with the acknowledgement that Βηθεσδα, for example, occurs in Codex Alexandrinus and P66, amongst others, whilst Βηθσαιδα is used elsewhere and is not the only other name variation. In the interests of consistency, "Bethesda" will be used going forwards.

[740] Gosbell, p. 284. See also Nutzman, p. 94. For further details as to the history of the site, Nutzman, pp. 94-103.

form of healing sanctuary.'[741] There is more description of the pool, such as the number of porticoes, than of any individual gathered there, but the number of porticoes is not important in itself: the description of the space simply emphasises[742] the 'many invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed' (πλῆθος τῶν ἀσθενούντων, τυφλῶν, χωλῶν, ξηρῶν) gathered there. There is no information as to how those individuals arrived, no clue regarding whether they had been left there or whether they were there by choice, but the fact that there were multitudes under the porticoes must suggest that the system of healing at Bethesda had somehow left them behind, despite their presence. Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh raise the possibility that the 'many invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed' were not just at Bethesda to seek healing, but also to beg; they were 'among the socially expendables,' with no status and forced outside of social structures,[743] therefore left with no alternative. That position of being outside of social structures, judged as "other" by a society or culture that did not or would not include them, indicates the equivalent of impairment being transformed into what could be considered a disability from a more modern perspective.

In John 5.5, our attention is directed towards 'one man' only so far as it progresses the "Jesus narrative" of the Johannine text. If we actually focus on the man with impaired mobility, we can glean some details about his situation, but are also left with many questions that the text does not address, since those

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[741] Gosbell, p. 289.

[742] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 289.

[743] Malina and Rohrbaugh, p. 111.

details are not seen as particularly relevant to its primary focus of Jesus. There were many present at Bethesda unable to access healing, yet 'Jesus approaches only one man from the crowd to heal with no explanation for this choice'[744] and, since pity is not stated in the text,[745] readers can only guess the exact reason for the interaction. John 5.5-9 indicates that the man with impaired mobility would be 'totally unable to maintain even a minimally honorable social position' yet there are no details regarding how he survived for 38 years and no indication of being at the pool for the whole of that time.[746] John 5.5 provides the information that 'one man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years' (τις ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖ τριάκοντα [καὶ] ὀκτὼ ἔτη ἔχων ἐν τῇ ἀσθενείᾳ αὐτοῦ) and the following verse expands that Jesus saw the man and knew the man's physical impairment was long-term. "Knew" (γνούς) in John 5.6 could indicate a supranatural understanding of the situation, grasping knowledge unknown to others, but it could also reflect that Jesus 'had seen him laying' (τοῦτον ἰδὼν κατακείμενον) and could discern from both the man's position and appearance, given the assumptions made by society, that he had been ill for a long time, as previously clarified in the text. Some English translations, such as the NRSV and ESV, describe Jesus recognising the man as having 'been there [for] a long time' in verse 6, whereas others, KJV, ERV and AMP for example, recognise that [ὁ Ἰησοῦς] γνοὺς ὅτι πολὺν ἤδη χρόνον ἔχει refers to

[744] Gosbell, p. 287.

[745] Gosbell, p. 288.

[746] Malina and Rohrbaugh, p. 111.

the length of time the man had lived with impaired mobility and that there is no actual indication of how long the man had been waiting by the pool itself.[747] Interpretations of the man's assumed wait for healing have attributed blame to the man himself, the idea being that the man could have accessed healing if he had chosen to, but was lazy and did not properly attempt any real effort.[748] Commentators have used the length of time stated in the narrative as evidence that there must have been a way for the man to deal with his impairment,[749] whilst some disability scholars attribute responsibility to the man for not asking for help.[750]

In John 5.6 the narrative views the man through Jesus' eyes, but John 5.7 deserves more attention than it is customarily given, because it provides the man's view of his own situation, through direct speech. Although called by C. H. Dodd 'a feeble excuse'[751] for the presence of the man's impairment, when read in conjunction with the context of Bethesda the man's words provide an illustration of how the social organisation at Bethesda creates the man's "disability"; behind the metanarrative of lethargy is a glimpse at the reality of the situation. Firstly, the

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[747] The KJV translation reads 'knew that he had been now a long time in that case,' the ERV reads 'knew that he had been sick for a very long time,' and the AMP reads 'knowing that he had been *in that condition* a long time.'

[748] C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), pp. 319-320.

[749] Sandra M. Schneiders, *Written That You May Believe: Encountering Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Herder & Herder, 2003), p. 163.

[750] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 340.

[751] Dodd, p. 320.

man says “I have no one” (ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἔχω), showing he is ignored by society. It might be true that ‘he clearly has not made connections or built any community in thirty-eight years,’[752] but Jaime Clark-Soles judges connections and community to be those able to help the man access the pool at Bethesda. There is no reason to assume that the man has not “made connections” with those around him, but those around him are likely to be in a similar position to himself, in light of John 5.3, and therefore unlikely to be able to provide assistance. This then allows the situation described by the end of John 5.7: someone else always steps down ahead of the man with impaired mobility.

The ‘social institution’ at Bethesda ‘calls upon the man to “cooperate fully” and enter the pool at the prescribed time’[753] in order to access treatment for his impairment. Wynn describes this as someone ‘located in the institutional healthcare system of normate society’ with the problem being not the waiting for access to the pool, but ignoring life for the sake of the inaccessible ‘miracle cure.’ According to Wynn, the man has ‘bought into the role of the helpless dependent and the normate society has affirmed him in this role.’[754] The man is attempting, though, to engage with life by attempting to gain access, rather than waiting to be assisted, and it is others in society who move past him, potentially pushing him out of the way. In that sense, is the man not attempting to challenge the normate society of which he is on the periphery of, by continually trying to gain access?

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[752] Clark-Soles, ‘John, First-Third John and Revelation’, p. 340.

[753] Wynn, pp. 67-68.

[754] Wynn, p. 65.

The man's impaired mobility is never explicitly described, but the description of him laying in verse 6 and his slowness of movement in verse 7 suggest a degree of paralysis.[755] Gosbell purports that the man's presence at Bethesda was not choosing a dependent role, but that the impaired mobility described by the Johannine narrative meant that 'within his first-second century context there really was very little alternative available to him.'[756] The depicted customary scene[757] could, instead, show that the man's repeated attempts to access the pool credit him with a determination often ignored.

Though omitted from modern Greek editions on account of being labelled 'a gloss,'[758] John 5.4 adds detail to why someone entering the water ahead of the man was not the 'feeble excuse' described by Dodd.[759] The ending of verse 3, in the majority of manuscripts, describes those present as 'waiting on the movement of the waters'[760] and indicates that there was a reason for people congregating at a particular time. Longer explanations, or "additions," appear in a number of manuscripts, including Codices Alexandrinus, Coridethianus and Tischendorfianus IV, as John 5.4: 'For an angel of the Lord would come down

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[755] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 290.

[756] Gosbell, pp. 291–92.

[757] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 290.

[758] Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), p. 179.

[759] Dodd, p. 320.

[760] Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 244.

from time to time in the pool and stir up the water.' [761] Although manuscripts such as P66 or P75 B do not contain the additions,[762] the idea that the first into the pool would be the one cured[763] could be a way of explaining the congregation of people within the text and the man with impaired mobility's repeated attempts at access being thwarted by someone overtaking him as he made his way. The water itself could not have been curative, else there would either have been no one waiting or people spending as much time as possible in the water.[764]

Clark-Soles correctly asserts that a 'society disables people with impairments when it refuses to take steps to ensure that all members of society have equal access to the benefits of society.'[765] Access to the pool at the appropriate time for healing is denied to the man with impaired mobility in John 5, precisely because as he makes his way he is overtaken by those who can move faster than he is able to. It is not because he lacks the will or determination to try that he has been left discarded by the social structures of the society around him, since he has attempted to engage on multiple occasions. Wynn hints at, though does not expand on, this when he writes: 'The reader with a disability who has navigated the modern medical system may sympathize with the reality that the cure is prohibited by the disabled condition, thus insuring the continued

[761] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 290.

[762] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 290.

[763] Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 242.

[764] Haenchen, *John 1*, pp. 244–45.

[765] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 334.

institutionalization of the person with the disability.'[766] If John 5.1-15 were to be interpreted metaphorically, as an illustration of a person's willingness to engage with faith, it would be a damning illustration of communities preventing access to belief.

Jesus has prompted the man's words with θέλεις ὑγιὴς γενέσθαι (John 5.6).[767] English language translations render this as a question, though there are options as to the tone of that question. Options like the AMPC, 'Are you earnest about getting well?' or the TPT, 'Do you truly long to be healed?' read implication into the question, but θέλεις ὑγιὴς γενέσθαι, if it is a question, gives no direct guidance as to an expected or desired answer from its language.[768] To press the linguistic angle further, if the earliest known manuscripts were written in *scriptio continua* and without punctuation, there would have been no definitive indication whether the words attributed to Jesus are a question or a statement. If θέλεις ὑγιὴς γενέσθαι is a neutral yes/no question, then the man is being given choice out of respect for his individual identity; if it is grammatically a statement, which a literal reading could suggest given the present indicative active, then Jesus is making a statement as to the man's will, thereby negating the idea that the man did not want to be healed. In either case, the language would suggest a reading opposed to those outlining Jesus asking an almost rhetorical question containing

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[766] Wynn, p. 68.

[767] Translated literally, θέλεις ὑγιὴς γενέσθαι would read 'you desire well to become.'

[768] For example, there is no participle introducing the question and signalling an expected or desired affirmative answer, cf. Evert van Emde Boas et al., *The Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 477.

the assumption of lethargy in the face of opportunity.[769] A reader might presuppose that the man with impaired mobility would want to be healed, perhaps the narrative itself even contains that assumption given the context of the events described, yet if θέλεις ὑγιὴς γενέσθαι is a question, Jesus does not appear to make that assumption. Perhaps, in establishing contact in the way that he does, Jesus is shown not to be assessing the man's faith, but prompting him to tell his story, giving him a voice in a society where previously he has not been heard.

The man's response to Jesus' "question" is often criticised. Clark-Soles, though from a different viewpoint to Dodd, explores how a reader understands the "question" as regarding the idea that unless one has the will, the likelihood of 'wellness' remains 'slim.' The notion of the man's answer providing excuses stems from his response not answering as requested,[770] however his words do provide an answer and his actions evidence the fact that he has repeatedly attempted to access the opportunity, but has been prevented from doing so by the organisation of society around him.[771] The man 'never declares that he wants to be made well' but even Clark-Soles acknowledges that he 'readily follows Jesus' orders'[772] which surely must practically demonstrate an affirmative response and therefore the required will for Clark-Soles' argument.

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[769] Schneiders, p. 163.

[770] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 340.

[771] This interpretation is supported by Haenchen, who represents the man's answer as him wanting to be well but that it has been made impossible. Cf. Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 245.

[772] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 340.

Another possible interpretation of the man's supposed lack of answer to Jesus is that, since he does not recognise who Jesus is, he cannot ask for help; an affirmative answer would be pointless in his helpless situation.[773] At this stage in the narrative it might be the case that he only knows one possibility of healing and that someone always 'beats him' to the water, as he has no help to get there, but his repeated attempts prove that he has not given up hope. Alternatively, the man may not recognise Jesus[774] but interpret Jesus' words as an offer of help to reach the pool at the correct time.[775] Gaps in the narrative might lead the reader to interpret the man's words as responding to 'an offer from a kind stranger, so he suggests something Jesus might do for him.'[776] There is no direct request of Jesus though, simply a reporting of information; it is the man's actions in John 5.8-9 that best display his response to Jesus:

> Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take up your mat and walk." At once the man was made well and he took up his mat and began to walk.
>
> λέγει αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἔγειρε ἆρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει. καὶ εὐθέως ἐγένετο ὑγιὴς ὁ ἄνθρωπος καὶ ἦρεν τὸν κράβαττον αὐτοῦ καὶ περιεπάτει.

The man with impaired mobility does accept the normate view of his impairment, that it needs to be healed, but the narrative simply says he follows

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[773] Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 245.

[774] Malina and Rohrbaugh, p. 111.

[775] Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John - Volume Two: Commentary on Chapters 5-12* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1980), p. 95.

[776] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 293.

Jesus' instructions when Jesus says, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk' (ἔγειρε ἆρον τὸν κράβαττόν σου καὶ περιπάτει). Since the focus is on Jesus, for the narrative the important fact is that 'the man immediately became well' (εὐθέως ἐγένετο ὑγιὴς ὁ ἄνθρωπος), but the reader is not told how the man knew he could get up and walk. If, as has been argued by many commentators against the man with impaired mobility, in Johannine healings there needed to be willingness to participate, then surely the man taking up his mat and walking would display that willingness. It is difficult to understand why the man with impaired mobility is so negatively understood, unless there is the negative assumption of passivity that often accompanies paralysis; whilst that assumption is present on the level of the narrative, the depictions within that same narrative reveal alternative contextual considerations.

Negative representations of the man previously with impaired mobility are explicitly stated in much of the exegesis surrounding his next encounter with Jesus in John 5.14, particularly where Jesus says to him 'See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you' (ἴδε ὑγιὴς γέγονας, μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε, ἵνα μὴ χεῖρόν σοί τι γένηται). Debate has taken place as to 'the exact meaning of Jesus' directive μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε.[777] Pauline Otieno is one example of a commentator who believes that μηκέτι ἁμαρτάνω 'clearly indicates

[777] See Gosbell, pp. 294-297 for an overview. In terms of English translations, these range from 'Stop sinning' (AMP, CJB, GNT, for example), 'Sin no more'/'Do not sin any more' (such as in NRSV, ASV, ESV, KJV) to 'Don't return to a sinning life' (MSG). A literal translation of μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε would read 'no longer/no more/never again [after this] sin' which leaves ambiguity as to the man's current state, though, as discussed below, without direction as to whether he necessitates the imperative more than anyone else.

that Jesus thought that there was a connection between the man's disability and some sin.'[778] The "clear indication" of a connection depends on the assumption of a negative metanarrative associated with the man's previous condition. Even if the present imperative 'implies ongoing, habitual action' and the man is 'an ongoing sinner of some sort,'[779] a direct link between impairment and sin in John 5 would depend on 'a correlation between physical appearance and moral character' present in physiognomic beliefs of first and second century societies.[780]

It is somewhat problematic to assert that the man's previous thirty-eight year impairment was a result of a sinful character in John 5, yet simultaneously extol John 9.3 as Jesus refuting the disciples for connecting a man's blindness with the sin of either him or his parents. One suggestion made is that the man with impaired mobility is 'not congenitally paralyzed'[781] and, therefore, his sin cannot be attributed to anyone else. This argument can be negated by two key points. Firstly, if the man had been ill for thirty eight years and the average life expectancy in the ancient Mediterranean 'was approximately 25-30 years old,'[782] he was probably 'not much older' than the duration of time that he experienced

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[778] Pauline Otieno, 'Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Disability: Implications on the Rights of Persons with Disability in Kenya', in *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 29.4 (2009). <https://doi.org/10.18061/dsq.v29i4.988>

[779] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 341.

[780] Carter, p. 130.

[781] Schneiders, p. 163.

[782] Kristi Upson-Saia, Heidi Marx, and Jared Secord, *Medicine, Health and Healing in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming).

his impairment, so if it had been a personal sin serious enough to exhibit as the man's impaired mobility, it would have had to have occurred at an incredibly young age.[783] Secondly, if sins were of primary importance to Jesus, the issue would, from a literary point of view, been addressed at Bethesda and not later on in the narrative sequence.[784] If sin is not the cause of the man's disability, yet Jesus effectively rebukes him with μηκέτι ἁμάρτανε, then his behaviour must somehow necessitate the warning at that point in the narrative. It might be this equation which leads to the negative interpretations of his depicted actions within the narrative previously, but there is not enough provided information to substantiate those interpretations, or suggest that the man deserves the warning, at the point in time it is given, more than any other person would.

Gaps in the narrative allow some exegetes to assume a reader is meant to identify the man's disloyalty, that his physical condition reflects 'his moral and spiritual paralysis.'[785] A reader may, on account of assumptions made according to an expected metanarrative of paralysis, negatively judge the man for his assumed sinful behaviour, 'but there has been no hint up to now that Jesus judged or condemned him, or for that matter forgave him.'[786] It has been argued that it is the man's lack of response to Jesus which is evidence of his sinfulness,

[783] Gosbell, p. 295.

[784] Gosbell, pp. 294-295.

[785] Schneiders, p. 163.

[786] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 298.

that there is no evidence of his thanking Jesus,[787] or testifying to others regarding his miracle.'[788] If the focus of the narrative is the actions of Jesus and the issue of the Sabbath, given the lack of detail of the man's motivations, it cannot automatically be assumed that he did not thank Jesus, or that he did not testify to anyone else whilst he was on his way to the temple, where Jesus later meets him. Not using Jesus' name, John 5.13, can be said to display a lack of interest as to who healed him,[789] despite the man never explicitly being told Jesus' name and still following Jesus' instructions, which could alternatively show recognition of power and virtue, rather than name. Over-interpretation of the lack of narrative details leads to a "reading-in" of passivity and negative character traits. Similarly, the supposed absence of gratitude, leads to the "reading-in" of betrayal regarding John 5.15: why must it be interpreted that the man 'tattles'[790] to 'the Jews' (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοις), when we do not have any specific information as to his motivation? It is equally possible that he is testifying regarding Jesus' miracle when he 'told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well,' unless the assumption of spiritual paralysis is asserted. There is, as has already been exhibited, an undercurrent of challenge within the text. Jesus has warned the man not to sin, but there is nothing to prove that he ignores that warning and maliciously

[787] Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 246.

[788] Gosbell, p. 296.

[789] Schneiders, p. 163.

[790] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 341.

denounces Jesus.[791] The man with impaired mobility may well be a narrative puppet,[792] but it is one thing to assume narrative prosthesis and another to attribute malice. We do not know that he took no risks 'for the Gospel,' as per Clark-Soles assertion,[793] and we do not know that his retelling of his experiences to the Jewish authorities was not a risk for faith, since his motivation is not as important as the conflict between the authority of Jesus and the Sabbath laws within the narrative. There is no 'public declaration of faith' described by the narrative,[794] since the man's usage within the text is not to proclaim Jesus with his words, but that simply means it is not mentioned, not that it did or did not take place within the purported sequence of events.

The only direct speech that the man with impaired mobility, as a narrative character, is allowed to broadcast is that which effectively criticises the social organisation that has suppressed him. It is logical to ask why, as according to negative interpretations of his actions, the man would then go to denounce Jesus, who had "healed" him according to his own wishes, wishes displayed by previous and repeated attempts to access healing. The man with impaired mobility might function as a narrative tool to promote conflict between Jesus' actions and Sabbath rules, but he also concurrently challenges the assumptions

[791] Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 247.

[792] Haenchen, *John 1*, p. 248.

[793] Clark-Soles, 'John, First-Third John and Revelation', p. 340.

[794] Gosbell, p. 297.

brought to him through a metanarrative of paralysis, a fact often overlooked by surface interpretations of the text.

5.3 Passivity – Evidentiary Pawn

Paralysis, through assumed passivity, often functions as evidence of power within New Testament texts, in that power and authority is confirmed by the causation of a transition, through the healing of that paralysis, from passivity to activity. This is the case in Acts 3.1-10, where the apostolic authority of Peter, and by association John, is seen as being confirmed when a lame man (ἀνὴρ χωλὸς) is healed 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth' (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου). The man is not an important enough character within the text to be given a name or identity, but he is necessary in that he corporeally provides the evidence needed to prove the identity of the two disciples.

The beginning of the pericope contrasts Peter and John "going up" to the temple, using ἀναβαίνω, whereas 'a man lame from birth' (ὁ ἀνὴρ χωλὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ) is carried in by "someone" (Acts 3.2). The lame man is a beggar, whose existence is dependent on those carrying him to his begging position and on the charity of those walking past to the temple. His is relegated to being almost ignored by society. In terms of finding a possible role, though, he is still religiously integral to the 'pillars of Jewish faith,'[795] since rabbis taught the importance of 'giving alms' to those deemed less fortunate and existing on the

[795] John B. Polhill, *Acts* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1992), p. 126.

edges of society.[796] As a beggar, the man provided public evidence, for Jews entering the temple, of acts of charity; he is dismissed by society but is not completely invisible, since his presence provides necessary social testimony for those donating to him.

The story depicted in Acts 3.1-10 provides an example of a wonder or sign announcing 'the advent of the new age,'[797] where the disciples have the power of/from Jesus to heal and pronounce that sins are forgiven. According to Jewish law, not only did there need to be evidence, but there needed to be two witnesses to confirm a testimony, explaining the relatively unobtrusive presence of John, since the lame man is assumed to be passive and unable to be a witness.[798] The lame man narratorially needs to be lame from birth to make 'his healing all the more remarkable.'[799] He is identified in the narrative through information passed on about him, not by him, as evidentiary information which will support the narrative's message of apostolic authority.

Passivity is highlighted, in Acts 3.2, by the man being carried and placed, but the verse also refers to the man having a daily task of asking for alms, in a verbal and non-passive way. The action serves the function of being noticed, as the man specifically asks Peter and John for a monetary donation, which therefore leads to the question of who initiates the interaction between the man

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[796] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 93.

[797] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 93.; Bruce, *Acts*, p. 79.

[798] Polhill, p. 125.

[799] Polhill, p. 126.

and the disciples. Technically it is not Peter's directly quoted speech 'Look at us' (βλέψον εἰς ἡμᾶς), in Acts 3.4, which begins the conversation, but the lame man's reported asking to receive alms, of Acts 3.3. It is possible that the man begging was asking everyone who walked past, but it would be incorrect to state Peter's response to that request attracts his attention,[800] rather than focuses attention previously on a wider group entering the temple. Peter exhorts the man to examine their appearance for signs of disposable wealth, though this leads to the man naturally 'expecting to receive something from them' (προσδοκῶν τι παρ' αὐτῶν λαβεῖν) in Acts 3.5, since that is what he requested at the beginning of the exchange.

Healing is attributed to Peter's words and actions in Acts 3.6-7, under the authority of the name of Jesus. The command to walk is given by Peter as 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk' (ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ Ναζωραίου [ἔγειρε καὶ] περιπάτει) in Acts 3.6. According to the narrative text, the man's healing occurs in Acts 3.7, where Peter takes the man by his right hand and raises him up, with the text explaining that the man's feet and ankles 'were made strong' (ἐστερεώθησαν). The words and actions of Peter could depict passivity on behalf of the man being healed. However, at this point, although the healing may have taken place, there is not yet evidence of healing or authority. John B. Polhill depicts Peter 'grasping' the man's hand, 'as if at this point the man

[800] Bruce, *Acts*, p. 77.

needed all the encouragement he could get,'[801] and Bruce comments on Peter 'taking the cripple's right hand, rais[ing] him to his feet:'[802] the writer of Acts appears to want the agency to be Peter's. Even if Peter helps the man to stand, which may evidence some restored strength, it does not prove healing since no independent movement has taken place. It is not until 'Jumping up, he stood and began to walk' (ἐξαλλόμενος ἔστη καὶ περιεπάτει), where the man acts according to his own agency, that evidence substantiating the authority of 'the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,' as invoked by Peter, is available.[803]

'The man lame from birth' (Ὁ ἀνὴρ χωλὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ) has no identity, on a narrative level, beyond his impairment because it is that impairment that facilitates his corporeality functioning as evidence. He has no name, or personal identity, despite his function being to prove the authority of Jesus' name. The lame man proves within the narrative for Jesus what he is himself denied; his necessity to the narrative means he cannot be invisible, even though

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[801] Polhill, p. 128.

[802] Bruce, *Acts*, p. 78.

[803] In Acts 3.7 Peter 'took him by the right hand and raised him up' (πιάσας αὐτὸν τῆς δεξιᾶς χειρὸς ἤγειρεν αὐτόν), yet in Acts 3.8 'Jumping up, he stood and began to walk' (ἐξαλλόμενος ἔστη καὶ περιεπάτει). The NRSV translation creates confusion as to when the man actually rises, as well as how and by whose agency. This ambiguity is also present in the NA28 Greek text, if the use of ἐγείρω is viewed as referring to Peter raising the man up and bringing him to his feet, since ἐξάλλομαι can refer to leaping up or jumping up. The use of ἐγείρω does not have to refer Peter physically lifting the man to his feet, which would be practically difficult only using only the man's right hand; ἐγείρω could simply refer, figuratively, to the healing taking place and the man being "restored".

some commentators, such as Conzelmann, do not even mention his existence, other than to say a particular verb isn't used in connection with 'the beggar.'[804]

Behind the narrative, the lame man must have had an identity beyond his impairment; if, as in Acts 3.10, people recognised him after healing to be 'the one who used to sit and ask for alms' (ὁ πρὸς τὴν ἐλεημοσύνην καθήμενος), the man would have to have been known by more than his impairment. He might be holding on to Peter and John in Acts 3.11, but he was standing and not being carried, so not exhibiting what the narrative attributes to his identity. Acts 3.8 describes a person 'walking and leaping and praising God' (περιπατῶν καὶ ἁλλόμενος καὶ αἰνῶν τὸν θεόν), so the Acts 3.11 participle 'clinging' (κρατοῦντος), translated as "While he clung' in the NRSV, cannot be for support. Though he is used simply as evidence of healing, rather than spiritual salvation,[805] which Peter and John later point out to be evidence of power,[806] the response of the lame man to the name of Jesus of 'walking and leaping and praising God' must be evidence of an appropriate and faithful reaction, especially considering he then chooses to enter the temple with Peter and John.

Where someone in a New Testament narrative is "healed" from impaired mobility or paralysis, their corporeality functions as textual evidence for the identity of a named character, not their own. Another example of where a character represented by a form of paralysis functions as an evidentiary pawn for

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[804] Conzelmann, *Acts*, p. 26.

[805] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 95.

[806] Bruce, *Acts*, p. 78.

the writer, is Matthew 12.9-13/Mark 3.1-6/Luke 6.6-11. This event is not particularly deemed by commentators to be a healing story since 'the affliction is not described in detail:'[807] an unnamed man is simply presented as someone with 'a withered hand' in Matthew 12.10 and Mark 3.1, and only Luke 6.6 specifies that it was a man's 'whose right hand was withered' (ἡ χεὶρ αὐτοῦ ἡ δεξιὰ ἦν ξηρά). If the right hand was perceived to be the most important, a metanarrative of paralysis would automatically lead an ancient audience to consider economic, social and cultural dimensions to the man's impairment. [808] It might have been true that the impairment 'had probably not occurred recently and…in no way threatened the man's life or health' or that the 'situation did not require immediate action,'[809] but the only textual information is of paralysis or atrophy, because this element of the man's corporeality is all that is relevant for his 'supporting role in the conflict between Jesus and his opponents.'[810]

The man with a withered [right] hand is brought into a potential legal dispute between two sides, Jesus and the Pharisees. He is evidence placed in front of witnesses, rather than a person, from a narrative point of view.[811] All

[807] Brooks, p. 68.

[808] Stein, p. 189; Watson, p 311.

[809] Blomberg, pp. 197-198.

[810] Guelich, p. 133.

[811] Paula Frederiksen, 'Paul, the Perfectly Righteous Pharisee', in *The Pharisees*, eds. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), pp. 112-135: p. 123. Frederiksen asserts that the Matthean Jesus is more stringent than the written legal tradition he comments upon, 'yet the imputation of harsh legal interpretation, in all of the evangelists' accounts, always goes to the Pharisees.'

three Synoptic accounts represent the approach of the Pharisees to Jesus using κατηγορέω, 'a technical legal term meaning 'bring charges' or 'accuse'' and thereby presupposing a court setting of some kind.[812] Whether directly asking, as in Matthew 12.10, or watching in order to accuse, in Mark 3.2 and Luke 6.7, the Pharisees of the Synoptic narratives are looking to initiate a Sabbath controversy.[813] The man's healing is evidence forming part of the legal discussion on the issue of the Sabbath, with the narratives in no way centred on him as an individual. The Pharisees' question 'Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath?' (Εἰ ἔξεστιν τοῖς σάββασιν θεραπεῦσαι) in Matthew 12.10 apparently 'presupposes their belief that Jesus could genuinely heal the man,' meaning they 'already know that Jesus will heal on the Sabbath' and are only asking 'in order to have legal grounds for accusing him.'[814] Jesus' opponents have also seen the man with a withered [right] hand and aim at using him to prove their legal case against Jesus. Although Matthew does not set out the practical environment of the dispute, Mark 3.3 and Luke 6.8 include a command from Jesus for the man to come forward, to be in full view, which James A. Brooks explains in the context of synagogues having seating around the walls.[815] Corporeal evidence is presented in full view of the apparently impromptu court, yet in all three accounts the

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[812] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, p. 318.

[813] Blomberg, p. 197.

[814] Blomberg, p. 198; Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 187. See also Hermut Löhr, 'Luke-Acts as a Source for the History of the Pharisees', in *The Pharisees*, eds. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), pp. 170-184: p. 172. Löhr discusses how the Pharisees' 'characterization serves…narrative purposes.'

[815] Brooks, p. 68.

healing that is to be evidence is not performed until Jesus has presented his arguments and convicted his opponents of hypocrisy.[816]

Looking beyond the sabbath dispute, though narrative description of the man is scarce and the assumptions of the metanarrative of paralysis prevalent, there are points at which his agency can be glimpsed. The man with a withered [right] hand has no name and no identity beyond his impairment, but his actions display indications of choice and faith. In Mark 3.3 and Luke 6.8, where Jesus calls the man with the withered [right] hand forward and to visibility within the narrative's legal scene, the man recognises Jesus' authority and comes forward in obedience to Jesus' command. The order of events in Mark and Luke, where the legal case is explained by Jesus prior to healing taking place, indicates that the man choses to respond to Jesus and then waits whilst explanation and argument takes place. In all three texts, when Jesus commands 'Stretch out your hand' (ἔκτεινον [σου] τὴν χεῖρά), the man does exactly as he is requested to. Additionally, his responding action is specifically described in Matthew 12.13 and Mark 3.5 using the same verb as Jesus' command (ἐκτείνω), linguistically demonstrating exact compliance. Each text also cites 'and it/his hand was restored [as sound as the other]' (καὶ ἀπεκατεστάθη ἡ χεὶρ αὐτοῦ in Mark 3.5 and Luke 6.10, καὶ ἀπεκατεστάθη [ὑγιὴς ὡς ἡ ἄλλη] in Matthew 12.13) occurring directly after the man choosing to raise his hand, potentially being a consequence of that choice. At this point the man's action evidences Jesus' identity and validates his

[816] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, p. 321.

authority. Through his choice to act, the man with the withered [right] hand also effectively erases himself from the narrative, since after his hand is restored he disappears from the narratives. With his impairment removed, the man's necessity is negated and he becomes invisible, even though his choices are responsible for providing the evidence for Jesus' authority and question the notion of complete passivity for those positioned in the role of supporting evidence.

5.4 Passivity - Responsibility: Hebrews 12.12-13

The Letter to the Hebrews emphasises both the divinity and the humanity of Christ and Martin C. Albl argues that 'the Jesus of Hebrews is closely connected with disabilities.'[817] Hebrews 12.12-13, though, is part of a section of the letter regarding human attitudes towards Christ. Directly following descriptions of discipline, in Hebrews 12.3-11, and preceding exhortations to 'Pursue peace' and avoid becoming godless, in Hebrews 12.14-17, Hebrews 12.12-13 are a pair of verses regarding paralysis whose language and metaphors appear to be inherently exclusive when considering impairment, yet there are also implicitly inclusive elements to the statements made within these two verses. Hebrews 12.12-13 is, therefore, a point of contradiction.

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[817] Martin Albl, 'Hebrews and the Catholic Letters', in *The Bible and Disability – A Commentary*, eds. Sarah Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, and Amos Yong (London: SCM Press, 2018), pp. 427-457: p. 446. Albl's reasoning is that, based on Hebrews 2.17, Jesus was like other humans, and that Jesus was tested, with testing being associated with disability. Albl recognises that Jesus is never technically described as "disabled," but in order to have experienced the full range of human limitations, Jesus must have been viewed as "disabled" in some sense.

The ‘drooping hands’ (αἱ παρειμέναι χεῖρες) and ‘weak knees’ (τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα) are negative physical references and identity is subsumed by impairment; verse 13 refers to ‘feet’ (οἱ πόδες) but the specified feet are replaced with the reference to a singular more generic group, labelled as ‘the lame’ (τὸ χωλὸν).[818] In this case, the metanarrative assumed by χωλὸς may obscure a potentially more inclusive message intended by the writer of Hebrews, when the question of who is being addressed and why is considered, as well as what “paralysis” metaphorically represents in the text: is it a weakened resolve or failure of nerve, or could it be the result of exhaustion from worship or “training” in perseverance?

Lane argues that a ‘weakening of resolve and a failure of nerve are clearly presupposed for at least some of the persons addressed’[819] in Hebrews 12.12-13. The imperatives ‘lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees’ (τὰς παρειμένας χεῖρας καὶ τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα ἀνορθώσατε), in Hebrews 12.12, and ‘make straight paths for your feet’ (τροχιὰς ὀρθὰς ποιεῖτε τοῖς ποσὶν ὑμῶν), in Hebrews 12.13, assume there is a choice as to whether to act. By implication, the deemed necessity of the command suggests a voluntary passivity to the depicted impaired mobility.

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[818] Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), p. 659. In this context the continued metaphorical reference is ‘to a lame foot or leg,’ though Ellingworth asserts that χωλὸς may also refer to a ‘crippled hand.’ Ellingworth suggests a potential allusion to Malachi 1.8, which uses χωλὸς in the LXX and highlights how a sacrifice with impaired mobility was considered a sinful and unworthy offering

[819] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 430.

Few English translations reflect the passive voice evident in Hebrews 12.12; most translate ‘drooping hands’ and ‘weak knees,’ with ‘weakened knees’ only featuring in the CSB, HCSB and LEB, for example. Of these three translations, only the LEB features a passive voice for ‘slackened hands.’ However, the [caused to drop] hands and the [weakened] knees (τὰς παρειμένας χεῖρας καὶ τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα ἀνορθώσατε) indicates something or someone has weakened the described hands and knees, not that the hands and the knees are simply “drooping” or inherently “weak.” Παραλύω is always used with the passive voice in New Testament texts; in its use outside of Hebrews, in Luke-Acts, παραλύω is translated in terms of literal paralysis,[820] in that something has caused a physical impairment. Although in Hebrews 12.12 the usage of παραλύω is figurative, the outside influence implied by the passive voice is still relevant.

Elsewhere in New Testament writing, knees are mentioned metaphorically in relation to worship,[821] so logically, from a symbolic perspective, it is possible that a metanarrative of paralysis implies a current passivity. The knees in Hebrews 12.12 have been weakened through worship, hence the reason they are not directly criticised. Pastorally, the concern of the writer of Hebrews is communicated through ‘traditional images of exhaustion.’[822] Although the paralysis within the metaphor of verse 12 is considered a negative physical

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[820] Παραλύω is used five times within New Testament writings, one being in Hebrews 12.12 and the other four in Luke-Acts (Luke 5.18, 5.24; Acts 8.7, 9.33). All five uses are in the passive voice, in the sense of people being paralysed by an external cause.

[821] Ellingworth, p. 658.

[822] Harold W. Attridge, *Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 365.

impairment, it is the result of working hard and is therefore not laziness and not necessarily the choice implied by the assumed metanarrative of passivity.[823]

Hebrews 12.13 concludes with 'but rather be healed' (ἰαθῇ δὲ μᾶλλον), indicating that ἐκτρέπω ('so that what is lame may not be put out of joint' - ἵνα μὴ τὸ χωλὸν ἐκτραπῇ) should be understood in 'its medical sense of "dislocation,"'[824] raising the question of what type of "healing" is being discussed. If the translation is 'so that what is lame might not be dislocated,'[825] then "healing," though communicating through negative language relating to impairment, is actually discussing the inclusion of 'the lame' (τὸ χωλὸν) in the community. If there was an element of normality to a degree of impaired mobility,[826] then the assumption of a metanarrative of paralysis that 'those whose limbs are lame cannot compete in the race'[827] might be used metaphorically within the narrative of Hebrews 12.12-13. The same narrative which contains the prospect of physical healing, also contains the prospect that those with impaired mobility will not, or at least should not, be culturally disabled.

When verses 12 and 13 are considered as part of the whole of Hebrews 12, the narrative contains a level of meaning that could be said to consider

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[823] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 428. Neither is it, as Lane suggests, the erosion of faith when exposed to harsh circumstances.

[824] David L. Allen, *Hebrews* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), p. 583.

[825] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 398.

[826] Upson-Saia, Marx, and Secord.

[827] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 427.

impairment as “disciplinary suffering”, specifically parental discipline and training, as mentioned in Hebrews 12.9-11. Within this context, there is the presupposition by the writer that ‘the concept of disciplinary sufferings was already familiar to the community.’[828] It would be simple, from an ableist perspective, to assume that the mentioned impaired mobility constitutes suffering which is ‘corrective in character’ and ‘purposeful,’[829] but there is nothing in the text itself to suggest that impaired mobility enacts the discipline involved in filial training and is not, instead, an after effect or repercussion of it. David L. Allen links Hebrews 12.1-13 more concretely to the Pauline allegory of “running a race”, through a focus on ‘let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us’ (δι’ ὑπομονῆς τρέχωμεν τὸν προκείμενον ἡμῖν ἀγῶνα) in Hebrews12.1, with the race being the ‘living out of the Christian life through faith and endurance amid hostility’ and successful completion being a complete focus on Christ.[830] Textually, suffering is represented by impaired mobility, the result of the process of developing discipline and focus from practising endurance.[831] Although impaired mobility does represent a negative corporeal state, the implications of the representation are not all negative, even if considered as “training”. However, as has been

[828] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 429.

[829] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 429. I am not suggesting that Lane is ableist, but the position he outlines, that the impaired mobility within Hebrews is purposefully corrective, would be easy to adopt from an ableist perspective.

[830] Allen, *Hebrews*, p. 583.

[831] Allen, *Hebrews*, p. 584. From this perspective, although impaired mobility is not punitive discipline, it could be described as discipline in the sense of teaching, practice or preparation for something ahead.

previously mentioned, the cause of the impaired mobility does not necessarily substantiate the passivity often inferred by a metanarrative of paralysis. Impaired mobility in Hebrews 12.12-13 could represent the result of training or work that has already taken place, rather than training that is currently being undertaken.

Characterisation of the intended audience of Hebrews as a community needing the direction 'lift up' (ἀνορθώσατε), in relation to limbs, directly illustrates the 'appropriate response to divine discipline is a renewed resolved to engage in a demanding contest.' [832] Endurance is key, but it is a communal endurance,[833] as shown particularly by the second person plural address in Hebrews 12.13. Additionally, Hebrews 12.13 highlights the need to ensure 'what is lame may not be put out of joint,' which Lane proposes as showing 'concern for the weakest of their number.'[834] Such concern would be dependent on the corporeality of Hebrews 12.12-13 representing the community. Bruce considers the two verses in an even more positive way, in that regardless of the reason for a supposed lack of effort of those 'feeling especially discouraged and disinclined to make the necessary effort,' the rest of the corporate "body" is exhorted to 'do everything

[832] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 426.

[833] In his discussion on Hebrews 12.1-4, Scott D. Mackie discusses how the author of Hebrews 'employs vivid, pictorial imagery with the goal of engaging the community's imagination and helping them reconsider the source of their suffering,' in addition to maintaining an awareness of the benefits of committing to Jesus and the believing community itself. From this perspective, Hebrews 12.12-13 creates an illustration of how community endurance might function. Cf. Scott D Mackie, 'Visually Oriented Rhetoric and Visionary Experience in Hebrews 12:1-4', in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 79.3 (2017), pp. 476-497: p. 478. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2017.0128>

[834] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 426.

possible to help them.'[835] There are multiple interpretations of Hebrews 12.13's mandate to 'make straight paths for your feet' (τροχιὰς ὀρθὰς ποιεῖτε τοῖς ποσὶν ὑμῶν), specifically in relation to 'the lame' (τὸ χωλὸν). Lane follows a more physiognomic reading, with the paths needing to be made straight to prevent the lame straying onto crooked alternatives,[836] assuming that impaired mobility implies passivity and a lack of agency. Alternatively, Harold Attridge assesses the reference to lameness in Hebrews 12.13 as 'abstractly' characterising a state of exhaustion,[837] with making the paths straight a preventative measure to 'prevent this lameness from becoming a severe handicap.'[838] Given the pastoral aspect to Hebrews 12.12-13, the responsibility for guarding against departure from the straight path of wisdom by those exhausted from persecution, could indeed be compared to a duty of care for others in the believing community. Those considered 'lame' are, though, seen as being in need.

Dislocation, as indicated by the use of ἐκτρέπω, is a result of the path not being made straight by those responsible for doing so. Paul Ellingworth interprets 'strengthen your weak knees' (τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα ἀνορθώσατε) as 'the weak members of the community' having 'special need of "straight paths" because of their disability' and whilst the projection of impaired mobility meaning that an

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[835] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 347.

[836] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, p. 428.

[837] Attridge, p. 365.

[838] Attridge, p. 365.

individual is weak is somewhat ableist, the assertion that 'in literal language' the text states 'the strong must help the weak to develop (or recover) mature faith'[839] is not entirely inaccurate as a summary of the textual message of Hebrews 12.13. Impaired mobility from 'weak knees' is associated with general weakness within the language of Hebrews 12.12, but, despite that weakness, a community is meant to prevent the disabling of those with a more severe impaired mobility, "lameness," since it is the result of developing discipline. From a metaphorical perspective, the implication is that those who have less spiritual strength remaining, as a consequence of persecution, need to be included and supported by the community. The risk is of a "foot" turning to become dislocated and therefore being excluded from the community as a result of neglect, with physical impairment representing a weaker believer losing faith. The metanarrative of paralysis is a negative one, but it is used to communicate a message that attempts to prevent the creation of "disability". Injuries from the "race" should be 'bound up, so that the whole community may complete the course without loss.'[840]

Empathy is one of the writer of Hebrews' rhetorical goals; the weakened limbs of exhausted believers, impaired in their mobility as a result of effort in the face of persecution, is meant to arouse sympathy in the letter's audience and 'to induce them to help fellow believers who are suffering due to their faith in

[839] Ellingworth, p. 659.

[840] Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 348.

Christ.'[841] Hebrews 12.12-13 potentially uses empathy for those with impaired mobility, caused by the assumed negativity of their position, 'to create *community support*.'[842] According to Chee-Chiew Lee, the appeal to empathy cannot just be cognitive: it has to also be affective, making the audience of Hebrews feel as those suffering to induce help.[843] If most people in the first and second century had some form of impairment, then there is a practical element to the text. If metaphors by their nature use a known domain to communicate the unknown, the text might also be relating the message of inclusion to the personal experience of the audience. The language used to promote 'strengthening and encouraging one another to remain faithful to Christ'[844] is definitely problematic, but those with impairments are still included in the exhortation to faithfulness.

5.5 Concluding Remarks on the Metanarrative of Paralysis in New Testament Writings

The examples examined here have shown that New Testament narratives linguistically contain a metanarrative of passivity with regards to paralysis. The centurion's servant (Matthew 8.5-13 and Luke 7.1-10) is not even present at his own healing and one interpretation of the 'drooping hands' and 'weak knees' of Hebrews 12.12-13 is of voluntary weakness. However, there are alternative

[841] Chee-Chiew Lee, 'The Rhetoric of Empathy in Hebrews', in *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 62.2 (2020), pp. 201-218: p. 201.

[842] Lee, p. 216.

[843] Lee, p. 217.

[844] Lee, p. 216.

interpretations to texts like Hebrews 12.12-13, in that whilst the impairment used for the narrative's metaphor is a negative image, that impairment is potentially the result of working hard in service of the kingdom of God. The identity of impairment then becomes representative of effort and sacrifice, not passivity.

Where the paralysed person is present in the narrative, texts seem to assume a lack of agency on the part of that person, but they have also been shown to leave space for the agency of that person to have an effect. The man carried to Jesus in the "roof story" is effectively positioned behind those transporting him by assumptions of passivity, but gaps in the narrative regarding what he does or does not do, leaves open the option of his agency and cooperation. Likewise, the man at Bethesda, who is healed of whatever causes his impaired mobility (John 5.1-15), might not automatically have the quality of determination credited to him, but that is precisely what his repeated attempts to access healing demonstrate, and Jesus appears to be giving him a voice in a society where he has previously not been heard. The narrative may not immediately or explicitly acknowledge identity and agency, but elements within it do if they are considered from a disability studies perspective.

Where paralysis becomes communication, it is both an illustration and evidence; it is important to recognise that within that crucial evidence, the function of the corporeal example being used is not effective without a choice to act by the person in the evidentiary role. For example, the lame man in Acts 3.1-10 is meant to illustrate Peter and John acting 'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.' Healing is announced by the narrative, but it cannot prove the

authority and identity of Christ unless the person previously paralysed, lame or with impaired mobility chooses to respond and move. The aforementioned lame man jumps, stands, and walks in order to show observers what has taken place. Paralysed characters need to choose to demonstrate healing has taken place, as there is no proof until they do so. In that choice and agency, they often fulfil their narrative function and remove themselves from the text.

In part the use of paralysed characters as narrative prosthesis can be explained by an authorial focus on the person and identity of Christ, but this cannot explain away the elements of social comment that also seem to, almost subversively, appear. The man with ‘a withered hand’ is brought in from the periphery of society to demonstrate obedience to Jesus, where authorities are preoccupied with apparently mistaken interpretations of the law. Society prevents access to opportunity, such as in “the roof story” and for the man at Bethesda in John 5, leading to paralysis becoming a vehicle for comment on community. Crowds function as obstacles for those with need trying to reach Jesus for healing. Hebrews extols the virtue of communal responsibility for preventing further harm to those who are paralysed, or at least preventing those with impaired mobility from becoming paralysed. Paralysis is never viewed in a completely positive way, but the apparent assumptions in the various narratives can be used for comment other than adhering to a metanarrative of passivity, such as where that metanarrative is subverted to comment on the authorities or the observing “crowd”. Even in this capacity, those characters who are paralysed, lame or with impaired mobility are present for their textual function rather than

their personal identity, but as outlined above, that textual function can be more than a trope of passivity.

CHAPTER 6

THE TREATMENT OF A PROBLEMATIC REASONING PROCESS

As has been outlined in chapter 3, the reasoning process, usually rendered as “mind” in modern English translations, refers to a corporeal function within New Testament writings. Whilst not always explicitly defined or consistent, an ideal exists for that process, from the perspective of the various narratives. Given that a standard creates the opportunity for judgement, it is therefore possible to examine how a “mind” that deviates from the assumed ideal standard of reasoning is considered by specific writings.

Reasoning processes deemed “problematic” do not seem to be directly attributed to possession, though “right mind” as correct reasoning can be a consequence of exorcism, as in the case of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5/Luke 8). Problematic reasoning is associated with personal choice, false teaching, and a lack of faith; failure to understand is, therefore, blamed on a corrupt or depraved reasoning process, the responsibility for which is attributed to the individual. The assumed intentional nature of an impaired reasoning process also has eschatological consequences and, whereas there are New Testament textual examples of impaired bodies being healed, impaired reasoning processes are judged “foolish” and the inability to understand to be a corporeal state from which a person cannot re-join the believing community.

It would be impossible in this context to evaluate every reference to incorrect reasoning, but example references to “deviant” reasoning processes within New Testament writings, which show negative judgements and potential or

perceived consequences, will evidence that there is a range of negative attitudes towards those who do not meet corporeal expectations in terms of reasoning and, as a result, demonstrate potential eschatological implications for those in the various audiences who might be considered "other" from an intellectual perspective.

Intellectual disability (ID) is a modern question that is 'unanswerable by persons belonging to an ancient civilization, the thinking of which was structured utterly differently' making modern categories, in many ways, inapplicable.[845] Although it is often a concept taken for granted,[846] despite having fluctuating definitions even now, as Goodey observes if one were to look far enough back in the past, to the first and second centuries, 'no such people' or concept equivalent to the modern "learning disability" existed in historical record.[847]

The vast majority of first century populations were agricultural communities, where those with moderate ID could easily be employed in the fields and households.[848] Physicians never thought to cure congenital conditions, including ID,[849] but it would have been those more socially noticeable that drew comment since a 'direct connection between congenital disability and personal

[845] Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties', p. 117.

[846] C. F. Goodey, *Learning Disability and Inclusion Phobia* (London - New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 1.

[847] Goodey, *Learning Disability*, p. 2.

[848] Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties', p. 124.

[849] Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties', p. 127.

sin...was never absent in the popular mentality.'[850] Deviation from the ideal or expected reasoning process becomes "other" and the object of negative judgement. Beginning from the assumption that the 'definition of intelligence is at best a matter of consensus' and that 'consensuses do not last,'[851] what follows is a discussion of textual examples which consider the treatment of reasoning processes deemed unacceptable.

6.1 An Assumed Immaturity and Deficiency in Faith

Hebrews 5.11-14 introduces teaching that is apparently not inherently difficult, but which the author finds difficult 'to present in such a way that the readers will understand because of their dullness.'[852] The text is an example of where a lack of understanding is purported to stem from an assumed immaturity and a deficiency in faith. For the purposes of considering references to the "mind" as the reasoning process, specific focus will be given to two aspects of 5.11-14, namely 'since you have become dull in understanding' (ἐπεὶ νωθροὶ γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς) in verse 11 and the metaphorical use of 'milk' (γάλα) as opposed to solid

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[850] Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties', p. 127.

[851] Goodey, *Learning Disability*, p. 32.

[852] Cf. David L. Allen, *Hebrews* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), p. 335, 339; Ron Guzmán and Michael W. Martin, 'Is Hebrews 5:11-6:20 Really a Digression?', *Novum Testamentum*, vol. 57.3 (2015), pp. 295-310: p. 306 <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341483>. In the NRSV translation, Hebrews 5.11-14 is introduced with the subheading 'Warning Against Falling Away' and directly precedes 'The Peril of Falling Away' (Hebrews 6.1-12), which is followed by 'The Certainty of God's Promise' (Hebrews 6.13-20). This division is not consistent in every translation, with the ESV, for example, including the smaller section within a larger grouping of verses 5.11-6.12, entitled 'Warning Against Apostasy.' Commentators vary in their treatment of the four verses, in terms of whether they are part of a larger section, or a distinct pericope with meaning connected to what follows.

food,[853] in the discussion of potential implications of a “non-ideal” reasoning process.

‘Since you have become dull in understanding’ (Ἐπεὶ νωθροὶ γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς) is given as the reason why the teaching which follows is difficult to explain or make clear. There is, though, some debate as to what the phrase represents or indicates. If αἱ ἀκοαί references the ability to hear, then becoming either ‘sluggish in hearing’ or ‘hard of hearing,’[854] would represent a sensory capacity.[855] If it is the process of listening that is being described,[856] then νωθρός ταῖς ἀκοαῖς would indicate more of an intentional process. Given that in first and second century texts ears can represent ‘receptivity and understanding,’ [857] νωθροὶ γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς could also be a description of the state of mind or reasoning process of the writer’s audience; they have become intellectually “other,” in that they are not deemed to currently have the mental capabilities desired by the author of Hebrews. Not understanding teaching is a negative judgement that contrasts with those who do understand, leading to a boundary being set out

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[853] Albert J Coetsee comments that the parallel drawn between Hebrews 5.13 and Deuteronomy 8.3 is superficial, in part because whilst the description of only consuming milk is negative in Hebrews 5.13, in Deuteronomy 8.3 it is largely positive. See Albert J. Coetsee, ‘Deuteronomy’s Concept of Life in Hebrews’, in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, vol. 75.3 (2019), pp. 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5374>

[854] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1991), p. 131.

[855] Attridge echoes the translation ‘sluggish in your hearing.’ See: Attridge, p. 155.

[856] Koester moves from “listening” to the process of “listening” in his translation ‘sluggish in listening.’ See: Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews* (New York – London: Doubleday, 2001), p. 300.

[857] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, p. 131.

within the text and introducing the scenario of consequent inclusion or exclusion on the basis of that boundary.

The description of someone or something being νωθρός only occurs in Hebrews 5.11 and 6.12, in terms of New Testament writings. Hebrews 6.12's 'so that you may not become sluggish' (ἵνα μὴ νωθροὶ γένησθε) contrasts with Hebrew's 5.11's 'since you have become dull in understanding' (ἐπεὶ νωθροὶ γεγόνατε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς), but Hebrews 6.12 does not directly link to hearing, listening, or understanding. This being said, the connection is made with looking towards 'those who through faith and patience inherit the promises' (τῶν διὰ πίστεως καὶ μακροθυμίας κληρονομούντων τὰς ἐπαγγελίας). Although there is apparent temporal incongruity between the two verses, what is interesting about Hebrews 5.11 is the potential that the perfect tense of γεγόνατε indicates a previous, and possibly better, spiritual condition, as in some form of regression has taken place; in 5.11 the audience has become "slow" or "dull," having formerly not been, but in 6.11 they are asked to show 'diligence' (σπουδή) in order to not become νωθρός. In either case, νωθρός is an undesirable state. Noticeably there is 'no indication that the readers must remain in such a state.'[858]

Attridge suggests that the writer's stance is ironic, since 'this material is difficult because you are slow-witted' is followed by a more positive Hebrews 6.1-3 and 6.9-12, and that Hebrews 5.11 is designed to elicit a defensive response,

[858] Allen, pp. 334-335.

of being ready to hear.[859] Though outside of a consideration of 5.11-14, it is worth noting that Hebrews 6.4-8 is definitely not positive in terms of potential consequences, with the possible encouragement of 6.9-12 being preceded by threat. The addressees of Hebrews need renewed commitment, but this is more likely to be produced via reaction to the fear of consequence or the shame of the negative judgement of not understanding.

Translating νωθρός as "unambitious", Peter S. Perry makes the interesting proposal that the label connotes 'a shameful failure to recognize and act on advantages.'[860] The addressees are 'not the believers they should be'[861] and νωθρός 'is associated with immaturity, lack of experience, lack of diligence, and behavior leading to destruction.'[862] There has to be an element of choice in understanding νωθρός as "unambitious", which, though not highlighted by Perry, is reflected by his observation that the accusation of being νωθρός is followed by the exhortation to not be.[863] If the addressees can be encouraged to not be νωθρός, then their state of "mind" must be a choice; where reasoning is deemed to be flawed because it does not result in correct choices, a person can then be judged as not acting according to ideal reasoning. A choice not to act in a reasoned or

[859] Attridge, p. 157-158.

[860] Peter S Perry, 'Making Fear Personal: Hebrews 5.11-6.12 and the Argument from Shame', in *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 32.1 (2009), pp. 99-125: p. 99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X09339645>

[861] Perry, p. 100.

[862] Perry, p. 106.

[863] Perry, p. 104.

disciplined way could be analogous within the text, at least to a certain extent, with laziness, meaning that a person not following a prescribed way of reasoning could be seen as "lazy" at best. Perry argues that νωθρός, by indicating "unambitious", does not then indicate 'slow physical or mental response.'[864] However, if "unambitious" in this context includes being slow to recognise and act on advantages, which is what Perry argues, then it has to relate to the reasoning process, at least in terms of speed, if not in terms of capacity or capability. Whichever way νωθρός is translated, it is clear that in Hebrews 5.11 and Hebrews 6.11 it is a negative judgement on the ability of addressees to understand "reasonable" teaching, whether because of a lack of ability to hear, or a lack of capacity to reason, with that "lack" seen as something of a choice.

Hebrews 5.11 is associated with both moral state and inexperience, not being, according to Perry, 'simply slow.'[865] Despite intellectual disability being an unspecified concept in the first and second century, it is visible within the text as the metaphorical domain referenced to explain the spiritual state of the addressees. There is a negative depiction of "dullness" in receptivity, to depict that the addressees need 'deeper insight into what they profess,'[866] with the writer doubting if they are ready or able for teaching[867] through the linking of the spiritual and intellectual capacity of the audience.

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[864] Perry, p. 109.

[865] Perry, p. 105.

[866] Attridge, p. 158.

[867] Ellingworth, p. 298.

Inability to access necessary teaching has dangerous eschatological consequence, since elementary teaching is not enough to prevent the writer of Hebrews' addresses falling 'back into a worse state than before.'[868] That inability, as mentioned previously, is judged to be on account of a lack of 'theological effort,'[869] with the implication of the lack of effort being inadequate response and commitment to the gospel and an 'apathetic attitude.'[870] Allen uses the translation 'because you are slow to learn,'[871] raising obvious concerns for the portrayal of intellectual disability, if the speed of learning in a particular way is judged to be the cause of spiritual danger. Translations of this text are somewhat ableist, in that they presuppose a particular standard of mental perception. Inability to access necessary teaching has dangerous eschatological consequence, since elementary is not enough to prevent regression or encourage progression.

Grammatically, if the perfect tense of 'you have become' in Hebrews 5.11 indicates a previously more positive state, then it is possible to question how far their condition could be described as an intellectual disability, since it is portrayed as transitory and somewhat volitional. The lack of ability to reason could either "just" be a negatively viewed state operating as a metaphorical source domain, through which the cultural attitudes towards an involuntary lack of approved reasoning is evident, or the narrative is communicating the idea that a lack of

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[868] Ellingworth, p. 297.

[869] Attridge, p. 158.

[870] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, p. 136.

[871] Allen, p. 335.

reasoning is a choice, the consequence of a lack of effort. Neither portrayal, of reasoning not following a prescribed path, is positive.

Notions of development versus regression in reasoning contain the challenge to progress towards what is considered mature faith, with the author of Hebrews chiding the audience for their immaturity,[872] given that verse 12 contains disappointment in the length of time they have been believers, without developing the ability or understanding to teach. Bruce describes 'a disinclination to press on in the Christian way,' so that immaturity is a chosen state, an unwillingness to put in the effort to understand more sophisticated teaching, possibly because that teaching is 'unpalatable'[873] to the reasoning process of the audience. If Hebrews adheres to the belief that it was a mature believer's duty to teach those less experienced, then by potentially regressing 'to the point that they are in need of being taught again the elementary principles of basic doctrine'[874] or an inability to understand resulting in a need to be taught again,[875] the addressees are failing in their obligation to God by not communicating truth to those they should be teaching.

It is important to notice the shame projected onto apparently not sharing the state of maturity, since maturity is considered to be those who can understand and are reasoning according to the expected ideal. The comparison

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[872] Attridge, p. 158; Allen, p. 333.

[873] Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 136.

[874] Allen, p. 333.

[875] Attridge, p. 158.

of the addressees to other, unspecified, believers who, 'given the same length of time and circumstances, would have become teachers of others,'[876] evidences judgement against standards or expectations. There is no sympathy for not understanding the first time or not progressing towards an ideal reasoning process at the envisioned speed. This shame is further amplified by the metaphorical comparison of milk to solid food, as an illustration of the teaching that the audience of Hebrews is capable of understanding. 'Milk' functions as a cultural marker of identity[877] and the image takes the believers cited in Hebrews further back in terms of their maturity and learning, to the status of babies,[878] only capable of processing easily digestible doctrine, "milk", with their underdeveloped reasoning preventing them from accessing any higher levels of instruction and, by implication, belief. Being compared to a very young child who had not reached legal, adult age (ὁ νήπιος) was a humiliating insult potentially aimed at 'goading listeners to greater zeal for understanding.'[879] If milk represents basic instruction in faith[880] or 'elementary Christian ethics,'[881] then Craig R. Koester's paraphrase 'Now everyone who partakes of milk is not proficient in reasoning about

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[876] Perry, pp. 104-105.

[877] John David Penniman, *Raised on Christian Milk: Food and the Formation of the Soul in Early Christianity* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 5. Penniman specifically discusses (p. 71) how, in 1 Corinthians, Paul argues that a need for milk instead of solid food demonstrates a lack of *pneuma* within the Corinthian community.

[878] Attridge, p. 160.

[879] Koester, pp. 302-303.

[880] Allen, p. 336.

[881] Bruce, *Hebrews*, p. 135.

righteousness since he is a child'[882] would encapsulate the shame and insult of likening the audience's reasoning process to a child, given the eschatological consequences of not being 'complete' (τέλειος), Hebrews 5.14, or properly acquainted with teaching on righteousness, as exhibited by being able to process "solid food".

Hebrews 5.12-14 links two traditional educational metaphors:[883] whereby the growth of child into an adult could be seen in terms of development, by integrating the metaphorical domain of training and athletics the writer of Hebrews refers back to choice and lethargy. The addressees need 'to have their understanding of Christ deepened and strengthened,' with that doctrine and understanding of Christ being the "solid food" that 'adults can intellectually absorb,' necessary to run the metaphorical athletic race.[884] The acquisition of understanding is via the constant use (ἕξις) of reasonable perception, or those senses or faculties 'trained by practice to distinguish good from evil' (γεγυμνασμένα ἐχόντων πρὸς διάκρισιν καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ). This obviously raises the, albeit very modern, question as to what a person who genuinely cannot absorb "solid food" is meant to do, since the text itself does not acknowledge that possibility: ID is not a concept in first century thinking. Every person is considered to have the capacity to train if they choose to do so. The need to re-learn is considered sinful, as is the neglect of discipline, since this places the

[882] Koester, p. 300.

[883] Attridge, p. 156.

[884] Attridge, p. 156.

audience of Hebrews into a category of people unable to distinguish between good and evil.

Despite the admonishment within Hebrews 5.11-14, the author makes 'no attempt…to review the basics,'[885] and, in fact, does progress to teaching later in the letter that is not "elementary". Moving on to more difficult teaching implies that the shame in Hebrews 5.11-14 must function as a challenge, since there would be no purpose in taking the time to provide more sophisticated teaching if the audience was not capable of understanding it. That challenge might be purely rhetorical, or it might reflect the voluntary nature of the perceived immaturity. In either case, impaired reasoning is the negative judgement used and establishes something of a hierarchy based on the ability to understand.

It is 'impossible' to restore those who have 'fallen away' once they have been 'enlightened' (Hebrews 6.4-6). That impossibility, coupled with Hebrews still communicating teaching with its audience, suggests that although the reasoning process of those addressed by Hebrews 5.12-14 is judged negatively, their non-ideal reasoning process is not judged to be apostasy; this is not to say they are not seen as being "at risk", but that they have not reached the "point of no return" yet. Hebrews 5.11-14 illustrates both a potential progression towards an ideal standard of reason and relative distance in moving away from it.[886]

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[885] Allen, p. 334.

[886] It is worth mentioning that these verses describe lack of progression towards the ideal as the fault, rather than a movement away from, whereas 'fallen away' in Hebrews 6.6, the reverse movement, is not explicitly linked to the process of reasoning.

Contextually, the audience of Hebrews may have been suffering 'public abuse and persecution, prison, loss of property,' the fear of which could have led to them drifting from Christian community, by not gathering to worship, for example.[887] The focus of Hebrews on the reasoning process and how it should be trained to over-ride perception and emotion promotes its primacy in the functioning of faith, implying that the inability to reason, whatever the cause, carries serious implications for a person's righteousness, or lack of. Part of the metaphorical domain of the child, as used in Hebrews 5.11-14, is the inexperience of righteousness, the natural consequence of that inexperience is the risk of apostasy, warned about in Hebrews 6.4-6; Hebrew 5.11-14 provides the context for that warning, so even if the negative judgement of the audience's reasoning process is not apostasy in itself, the ramification of not progressing correctly, as described in Hebrews 5.12, is community regression. Ron Guzmán and Michael W. Martin specifically identify 'lack of advancement' as the focus of the censure in Hebrews 5.11-14's epideictic content,[888] and the dire warnings that follow suggest that if a community is not moving forwards, towards an ideal standard of reasoning, then they will drift away from that ideal: remaining stationary is not a viable option.

Training as the metaphorical means of facilitating understanding and reasoning (Hebrews 5.14) underlines the notion of choice, as in choice to train or understand, meaning that the cause of a lack of understanding, maturity or

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[887] Perry, p. 99.

[888] Guzmán and Martin, p. 308.

progression is portrayed as laziness, a lack of effort or will, with lethargy then affecting believing status. Although τέλειος refers to maturity in Hebrews 5.14, it carries connotations of completeness, wholeness, so the inability to reason or understand indicates not just immaturity, but also incompleteness. The status of being incomplete or immature is, however, a point from which to develop, if childhood is meant to be 'a training ground for adult life,' even if it is not valuable in and of itself[889] and if educational development depends on access to teaching.

6.2 Unprepared Reasoning Process as Irresponsibility in 1 Peter 1.13

An individual bears the responsibility for the consequences of an incorrect, assumed to be untrained, reasoning process. The idea of a personal responsibility to train the reasoning process appears in 1 Peter 1.13:

> Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.
>
> Διὸ ἀναζωσάμενοι τὰς ὀσφύας τῆς διανοίας ὑμῶν νήφοντες τελείως ἐλπίσατε ἐπὶ τὴν φερομένην ὑμῖν χάριν ἐν ἀποκαλύψει Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Uncontrolled reasoning is a dire consequence of not training or preparing that particular corporeal function. Exactly what uncontrolled reasoning means is not explicitly outlined; there are implications of the lack of control, though, as is evidenced by the presentation of the ethical nature of the responsibilities presented.

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[889] Judith M. Gundry-Wolf, 'The Least and the Greatest: Children in the New Testament', in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia J. Bunge (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 29–60: p. 34.

Διὸ ἀναζωσάμενοι τὰς ὀσφύας τῆς διανοίας ὑμῶν is translated as 'Therefore prepare your minds for action' in the NRSV. This paraphrases the sentiment behind the familiar ancient metaphor[890] of "girding one's loins", or pulling up robes and tying them out of the way, linking the idiomatic expression on preparedness to the reasoning process. The translation as an imperative does not reflect the sequence of the actions that need to take place. The metaphor is one of preparedness, acknowledging that something arduous is ahead and that in order to have the capacity to succeed, an individual is expected to remove obstacles, protect vulnerable parts of their body, and/or assemble relevant weaponry.[891] Ramsey Michaels argues that ἡ διάνοια in 1 Peter 1.13 alludes to the intellectual capacity that results from redemption,[892] but the participle ἀναζωσάμενοι could suggest something of a sequential order instead. If the beginning of 1 Peter 1.13 is translated as 'having girded up the loins of your "mind",' then a correct reasoning process has to exist before it is possible to follow the imperative 'set your hope' (ἐλπίσατε). Interestingly, Ramsey Michaels characterises that imperative as process of becoming mentally alert and ready

[890] Cf. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, pp. 53-54.

[891] Katherine Low, 'Implications Surrounding Girding the Loins in Light of Gender, Body, and Power', in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, vol. 36.1 (2011), pp. 3- 30: pp. 3-4 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089211419417>. Following on from a brief outline of loin girding as a metaphor, Low provides an interesting, gendered analysis of the image in terms of performative corporeality and power in Old Testament writings. Whilst the metaphor is not directly related to judgements of the reasoning process in Low's discussion, the link made in 1 Peter 1.13 to expectations regarding the reasoning process could relate to the power of those able to gird their loins correctly being those with more power.

[892] Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, p. 54. Ramsey Michaels interprets ἡ διάνοια as "mind," whereas here we will consider it as "reasoning process" (as per the discussion in chapter 3).

for action,[893] instead of a choice of faith resulting from correct reasoning. The sequence in 1 Peter 1.13 could be translated as 'Therefore, binding up the loins of your mind, being self-controlled, fully hope on the grace being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.' This translation illuminates that the preparation of reasoning and understanding, together with the establishment of self-control, is situated in priority over physical perception, as the necessary conditions to follow the imperative of hoping in the grace being brought by Christ's revelation. It also recognises the implication that a lack of reasoning, understanding and self-control relates to a lack of redemption, an "otherness" that is outside of redemption and belief.

All three occurrences of νήφω in 1 Peter 'are eschatologically conditioned,'[894] in the sense that each concerns being mentally disciplined so as to be focused on Christ (1 Peter 1.13), prepared for the end being near (1 Peter 4.7) and alert to the devil seeking 'to devour' (1 Peter 5.8). Usages of νήφω in 1 Thessalonians and 2 Timothy also indicate clarity of thought and judgement, as "self-control" regarding the reasoning process.[895] Being prepared and training the reasoning process can, in turn, shape the choice of what reasoning is focused

[893] Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, p. 52.

[894] John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 356.

[895] 1 Thessalonians 5.6, 1 Thessalonians 5.8 and 2 Timothy 4.5 use νήφω in terms of "being sober" (NRSV translation) and self-controlled. In each case the believer(s) addressed is(are) exhorted to be clear and appropriate in their thought processes, always with the shadow of threat behind the narrative. In 1 Thessalonians non-believers are asleep and not protected by the metaphorical armour described, whilst in 2 Timothy someone not reasoning correctly is implied to be not carrying out the expected ministry fully. See also Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), p. 66.

on. Lack of that preparation would prevent the possibility of choosing to hope. The lack of choice, following no preparation through appropriate reasoning, or the wrong choice being made, would prevent easy access to the revelation of Christ. Textually, the reasoning process becomes linked to the choice to hope, by which it is also linked to faith, the absence of which threatens salvation.

Interestingly, 1 Peter 1.13 is followed, in verse 14, by the warning to not let the reasoning process be shaped or controlled according to 'the desires that you formerly had in ignorance' (αἱ ταῖς πρότερον ἐν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ ὑμῶν ἐπιθυμίαι). There has been a progression from a lack of understanding, with obedience showing a correct choice being made, but there is still further progression needed towards the ideal reasoning process, emphasised by the reference to 'obedient children.' Children, though obedient, in this context represent the beginning of an intellectual journey to maturity. Those not obedient must be of a lesser status than 'obedient children,' perhaps not even heirs if they cannot partake in the identity informed by the process. They reside instead in a state of ignorance, through an incorrect reasoning process. Reacting to impulses negates the idea of self-control; improper reasoning is evidenced by the inability to follow the actions of understanding. Marshalling of the reasoning process portrays redemption, with the inability to reason portraying the opposite.

6.3 Lack of Understanding

Understanding, in Romans 1.21, is an obligation towards God, evidenced by honour or thankfulness. The NRSV imposes the modern concept of a discrete

"mind" onto the New Testament reasoning process, by translating ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία, as 'their senseless minds were darkened,' instead of ending the verse with the singular 'their foolish heart was darkened.'[896] Taking this further, if ἡ καρδία is the place where reasoning occurs, as discussed previously, then if it is "senseless" or "foolish" the reasoning process of ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία is an impaired one; if ἀσύνετος is more severely understood as 'void of understanding,'[897] then ἡ καρδία in Romans 1.21 represents a corporate reasoning process empty of appropriate reasoning.

In Romans 1.18-20, the truth about God is described as obvious and shown. Those who choose to ignore or suppress it, therefore, have no excuse. According to Romans 1.21, truth is spurned by not recognising God and demonstrating that understanding through honour and thanks, actions which would then communicate truth. Understanding the necessity of glorifying or giving thanks to God is, according to Paul's writing, a believer's obligation, so if an individual does not exhibit those signs of a correct reasoning process, it would be assumed to be a sign on impiety or 'an indication of depravity.'[898] Those deemed to be suppressing the truth, through their choice to ignore expected understanding and resort to problematic reasoning, are addressed as having a group identity external to the believing community.

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[896] The translation is my own, but Dunn acknowledges the broader use of καρδία, as 'the seat of inner life,' making the verse a reference to 'the faculty of thought and understanding.' Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 60.

[897] *BDAG*, p. 146.

[898] Jewett, *Romans*, pp. 157-158.

In some ways, it is the passive voice within Romans 1.21 which is the most troubling: 'they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened' (ἀλλ' ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία). Those judged as ignoring the truth, choosing to not accept it since their understanding would have been evidenced by their actions, *were made* foolish or worthless in their thinking and their singular καρδία *was* darkened. The individuals who have an impaired reasoning process have been acted upon in such a way that affects that reasoning process. Logically, at least according to Paul's narrative, 'those who by their wickedness [have chosen to] suppress the truth' (Romans 1.18) thereby have a problematic reasoning process prior to any action upon them. However, their process of reasoning and understanding, as a corporeal function, is acted upon and becomes further impaired, potentially with even more negative consequence. The sequence of events is slightly ambiguous, but Romans 1.21 seems to imply that the choice to suppress truth and not honour God occurred before the darkening of the communal heart, with the darkening potentially a response to that choice. Darkening does not have to be the imposition of darkness; it could be, as is discussed below, the withdrawal of light.

Futility of thinking, as the result of problematic reason being acted upon, cannot simply be the 'darkness of outlook' envisioned by Joseph A. Fitzmyer,[899] since the outlook of those refusing to understand was already "dark" prior to their

[899] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 282.

being acted upon. Those being depicted are being moved further away from an ideal reasoning process, so who or what is proactively moving them and "darkening" their communal space for understanding becomes an issue to consider. There is definitely a progression away from the ideal of understanding and exhibiting truth, where this is the ideal reasoning process and its active demonstration, but Romans 1.24 states 'Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts' (διὸ παρέδωκεν αὐτοὺς ὁ θεὸς ἐν ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις τῶν καρδιῶν αὐτῶν),[900] with Paul's narrative indicating verse 21 is the reason for God taking away his influence; ἡ καρδία is empty of understanding, but, according to verse 24, filled with 'lusts' or 'evil desires' (αἱ ἐπιθυμίαι). Darkness, within other New Testament writings, represents light being taken away or obstructed.[901] The sun, moon, and stars in Revelation 8.12, for example, are struck, which affects the light they can produce. In Matthew 24.29 and Mark 13.24, the sun and moon are prevented from giving light, but it is unclear as to the exact reason why. Truth is often equated with "light" and, if we follow that association in the context of Romans 1.21, truth is enabled to enlighten ἡ καρδία by "proper" reasoning, the absence of which prevents light. Light is also blocked from the communal reasoning space by the presence of "improper" reasoning. The further away the reasoning process moves from truth, or light, the darker it becomes, or, the more "improper"

[900] Romans 1.24 could be translated as 'God handed them over because of/on the grounds of the desires of their heart,' with 'desires' representing the results of an improper reasoning process.

[901] It is only in Romans where passive darkening is directly linked to the process of reasoning; the other occurrence of a passive darkening is Romans 11.10, where that darkening *relates to* οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ and functions differently. This particular reference will be examined in the following chapter, 'Blindness in Relation to Seeing-Knowing.'

reasoning that fills the space, the less light is allowed in. The passive darkening of the heart in Romans 1.21 could then be caused by the improper reasoning, further impairing the reasoning itself and triggering the events of Romans 1.22-24, with God choosing not to act and interfere in the consequences of the choice to suppress truth.

The thought processes (οἱ διαλογισμόι) of those involved might happen in a singular space, but are not a singular process, suggesting that the collective choice of individuals creates the scenario in Romans 1.22-23, where those claiming the collective identity of 'wise' (σοφοὶ) are shown to be foolish (ἐμωράνθησαν)[902] and the group concerned is separated from the glory of God. The worthless reasoning described by Romans 1.21 is understood as "incorrect" and operating in opposition to truth. That reasoning is what leads to individuals, as a group, being shown to be foolish by the evidence of their incorrect reasoning. The responsibility for that incorrect reasoning lies with the choice to

[902] Μωραίνω, in Romans 1.22 is translated in a range of ways, from 'they became futile in their thinking' (NRSV), to 'they became vain in their reasonings' (ASV) or 'they became vain in their imaginations' (KJV). It is a somewhat problematic word to represent in English, particularly when used in the passive voice, as here. In the passive, μωραίνω can be rendered as "make foolish" or "show to be foolish." Another alternative, not in the passive voice, is "to be foolish or stupid" or "to be wayward or irresponsible." The passive voice in Romans 1.21 suggests some kind of outside action, not an action being done by the individuals not honouring God. Either their choice to not honour God causes their thinking to be futile, or the lack of understanding they are displaying is evidencing their incorrect reasoning, thereby showing them to be foolish. There is no "best translation," as it were, of μωραίνω; for the purposes of this discussion, the group affected by μωραίνω will be understood as shown to be foolish by virtue of the comparison between their reasoning, with the evidence of its flaws provided by their actions, and the expectation of evidence of ideal reasoning, which would have been what they are said to not be doing (cf. *BDAG*, p. 663; *Cambridge II*, p. 954.) Interestingly, μωραίνω is also used in the passive in 1 Corinthians 1.20, but in this case God is explicitly acknowledged as making the wisdom of the world foolish. If God does not create the wisdom of the world, given that it is the opposite to the ideal wisdom of God, then the 1 Corinthians 1.20 usage of would μωραίνω indicate God is showing the wisdom of the world to be foolish, suggesting that "show to be foolish" could indeed be the more likely usage in Romans 1.22.

refuse to worship God, instead embracing the idolatry of images. A 'comprehensive process of disabling and distortion that involves intellectual, emotional, and physical dimensions of the human being' does take place, as Jewett states, but the notion that it is 'divinely imposed'[903] negates the sequence of the narrative in terms of the reasoning process affecting and being affected by the consequences of itself. 'God gave them up' (Romans 1.24) in response to their increasingly impaired reasoning process. Whilst it is possible to disagree with Dunn regarding the how and why, his assessment that 'Paul's point is that the man's whole ability to respond and function not least as a rational being has been damaged'[904] summarises the condition of the impaired reasoning process that has been outlined.

Romans 1.18-21 'establishes human culpability in suppressing knowledge of God'[905] and the incorrect reasoning leading to the decision to suppress that truth leads to the withdrawal of God from those who refuse to reason correctly. Ideal reasoning in Romans 1 relates to a particular understanding of identity in Christ,[906] highlighting the idea that incorrect reasoning is reasoning that does not embody that expected identity. Those who do not choose to follow an ideal reasoning process and do not exhibit understanding of truth cannot reason from ἡ

[903] Jewett, *Romans*, p. 159.

[904] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 60.

[905] Alec J Lucas, 'Reorienting the Structural Paradigm and Social Significance of Romans 1:18-32', in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 131.1 (2012), pp. 121-141: p. 131. <https://doi.org/10.2307/23488215>

[906] Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 15.

καρδία of a believing community with eschatological expectations. Impaired reasoning, then, threatens believing identity, through the binary opposition between truth and sin, reason and disbelief.

6.4 "Double-Minded" Doubt

The motif of personal responsibility for lack of understanding appears in James 1.5-8, through the instruction to ask for wisdom and the metaphorical depiction of a person who does not make that request, since God 'gives to all' if asked:

> If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.
>
> Εἰ δέ τις ὑμῶν λείπεται σοφίας, αἰτείτω παρὰ τοῦ διδόντος θεοῦ πᾶσιν ἁπλῶς καὶ μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος, καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ. αἰτείτω δὲ ἐν πίστει μηδὲν διακρινόμενος· ὁ γὰρ διακρινόμενος ἔοικεν κλύδωνι θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένῳ καὶ ῥιπιζομένῳ. μὴ γὰρ οἰέσθω ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι λήμψεταί τι παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου, ἀνὴρ δίψυχος, ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ.

Preceding these verses, in James 1.3-4, is the assertion that faith will be tested and exhortation to 'let endurance have its full effect' in order to become 'mature

and complete' (τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι).[907] Against the background of the expectation of a 'character free from defect,'[908] a believer's reasoning process is expected to follow the ideal, in order to understand the teaching necessary to endure the tests they will face.

Lacking wisdom in itself, cannot be a negative judgement, given that the teaching in James 1.5-8 encourages believers to ask for ἡ σοφία; the decision to ask is the result of understanding its necessity, as well as understanding the role and character of God. The writer of James presupposes the need for wisdom, as a practical necessity, with regards to what believers will be facing.[909] Asking for wisdom must be done according to the understanding of the character of God stated in verse 5, or the asker is deemed to be 'the one who doubts' (ὁ διακρινόμενος). 'The one who doubts' is an important negative label because it describes someone with an insecure reasoning process, who should not expect to receive anything from God, who is supposed to give 'to all generously' (πᾶσιν ἁπλῶς). Doubting, or insecure reasoning, is compared in James 1.6 to turbulent and unsettled waves, 'tossed by the wind.' This allusion is familiar in Jewish literature which denotes 'wicked or heretical or hypocritical people as those who

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[907] It is worth highlighting that although James 1.4 uses the language of physical wholeness, τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι are not being used as they would to describe the physicality of priests, for example. The 'brothers [and sisters]' addressed are acknowledged as facing trials that necessitate endurance, with the focus being on how this affects their reasoning process. Presumably the indicated trials may well include physical persecution, at which point the addressees would not be physically perfect or whole, yet according to James 1 they still have the opportunity to be τέλειοι καὶ ὁλόκληροι.

[908] Ralph P. Martin, *James* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1988), p. 16.

[909] Ralph P. Martin, p. 17; Patrick J. Hartin, *James* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), p. 59.

are at the mercy of the unruly ocean.'[910] Incorrect reasoning being linked to doubt, and the consequent inability to receive from God, casts an impaired reasoning process outside of the benefits of the believing community. The literary association of a well-known metaphor automatically associates impaired reasoning with heresy or hypocrisy.

James 1.7-8 describes the person who doubts in further detail: they are 'double-minded' and indecisive.[911] Showing a lack of certainty is interpreted as evidence of incorrect reasoning and lack of faith, despite the idea in James 1.5 that 'every believer still "lacks" that which would make him or her perfect and whole in faith,'[912] or there would be no need to request wisdom. Wisdom, therefore, must be separate from the reasoning process, at least to an extent, if believers can lack wisdom but not doubt. God intends, in Kurt A. Richardson's reading of James, for believers 'to request wisdom in the midst of trial.'[913] To ask indicates intent and intent a reasoning process that understands the necessity, if not an element of wisdom that provides the understanding of further need. Richardson asserts that the doubt in focus for the writer of James 1.5-8 is not

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[910] Cf. Ralph P. Martin, p. 19. Critical reasoning, or asking questions, is not in itself being criticised, more the motivation behind the questioning. If reasoning is incorrect, as in not coming from the perspective of understanding the character of God, then the request for wisdom is not made for the purpose of actually obtaining true wisdom. If the character of God is understood, there would be no doubt, if doubt by its nature involves questioning the character of God.

[911] Ralph P. Martin, p. 20. According to Martin, indecision is the 'hallmark of unbelief' for the writer of James.

[912] Kurt A. Richardson, *James* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1997), p. 63.

[913] Richardson, p. 64.

regarding the existence of God, but the type of God the believer serves.[914] Despite reasoning as to the necessity of reasoning, a doubter's reasoning process is too far from what it is expected to be because they misunderstand the character of God.

Misunderstanding the character of God, in James 1.5-8, suggests a notional group of believers who have, within the context of the letter, impaired reasoning, since understanding the character of God is the product of unimpaired reasoning. This, in turn, exposes an instability in faith, if doubt is considered disobedience, prompting the believer to become 'like the wicked.'[915] Whilst in the texts previously discussed the lack of mature reasoning and understanding is a choice, in James 1.5-8 the personal responsibility is not directly linked to the highlighted choice. A choice not to ask for wisdom would be irrational, given the necessity of wisdom as practical support in future trials, yet the instability of doubt, caused by a lack of secure reasoning, is linked to a believer choosing to ask for wisdom, but without understanding of the character of God. James 1.5-8, within the wider context of a letter that considers the testing of faith, seems to be focusing on believers who are 'double-minded,' insecure in their reasoning process and, therefore, not true believers.

'The doubter' (ὁ ἀνὴρ δίψυχος) is symbolic of uncertainty. Peter H. Davids translates the image as 'a two-sided man,' the background being in the Jewish

[914] Richardson, p. 66.

[915] Richardson, p. 67.

image of loving God with an undivided heart.[916] By providing additional description as to what the doubter is like, the idea of the "double-minded" man[917] presents an uncertain reasoning process which does not display faith. True understanding and faith, for the writer of James, is constant and resolute, not wavering in the face of potential persecution, so to be double-minded is to claim trust but not rely on reasoning which understands the character of God, divided loyalty leading to hypocrisy when professing faith.[918]

Martin interprets δίψυχος as a word which describes someone 'marked by irresolution where moral choices are concerned, hence the indictment of that person's character as one controlled by the moods of doubting, hesitating to act decisively.'[919] Although Martin's definition does not relate to a person's reasoning process, instead ignoring that factor and using the modern concept of mood, δίψυχος does appear to refer to some form of indecision, one caused by a problematic reasoning process. Indecision is caused by the reasoning process not being secured and being susceptible to outside influences. Allison, Jr. raises the interesting question, in terms of the description δίψυχος, that "double-minded" could relate to loyalty and suggest something of the dynamics of community life:

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[916] Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 73.

[917] Hartin, pp. 60–61.

[918] Linguistically, δίψυχος is similar to, or perhaps modelled on, δίγλωσσος or "double-tongued" (cf. Sirach 5.9; Ralph P. Martin, p. 20). The notion of a double allegiance also appears in Psalm 11.3 [12.2] LXX - ἐν καρδίᾳ καὶ ἐν καρδίᾳ

[919] Ralph P. Martin, p. 20.

if a person were to only share the believing community's ethos with half a mind, they could be potentially already "half out" with respect to their participation in that community.[920] Philip F. Esler asserts that 'every group generates a sense of belonging, an identity, into which its members are socialized.'[921] Taking this slightly further, a believer who does not reason according to the community's expectations, expectations which help to form its identity, threatens their sense of belonging and socialisation, risking the judgement of "other" or being external to the identity of their community. Who is responsible for "othering" a deviant reasoning process? If a person is judged "other", then the community could be expelling them according to their system of shared values, assuming that following an expected standard of reasoning embeds a believer in a community. If a person chooses to not adhere to expected standards, then they are already placing themselves "half out."

In relation to James 1.5-8, Dale C. Allison, Jr. places "doubting" (δίψυχος) as the opposite of "mature" (τέλειος),[922] with the relationship between "doubting" (δίψυχος) and "unstable" or "fickle" (ἀκατάστατος) being that of elaboration or synonyms.[923] This would mean that the word δίψυχος must include instability of

[920] Dale C. Allison, Jr., *James* (New York - London: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 165.

[921] Esler, p. 10.

[922] Obviously τέλειος can be translated in a variety of ways, from "perfect" or "unblemished," to "mature," "fully developed," or "complete" (cf. *BDAG*, pp. 995-996; *Cambridge II*, p. 1366.) In James 1.4, τέλειος refers to the reasoning process being fully developed, yet in James 1.17 it is used to describe a 'perfect gift.' In each case, the meaning of τέλειος relates to a standard of some kind, even if it is difficult to directly translate into English.

[923] Allison, Jr., p. 166.

reasoning if ‘the doubter’ (ὁ διακρινόμενος) is ‘unstable in every way’ (ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις).

The opposition between being doubting or double-minded (δίψυχος) and being mature (τέλειος) is potentially reflected, or even expounded upon in James 4.8, where the description ‘double-minded’ (δίψυχος) is set in binary opposition to purity, by the instruction that αἱ καρδίαι of those described as ‘double-minded’ need to be purified. Cleansed hands and purified hearts are set as antonyms to sinners and the “double-minded”. The implication of this apparently simple equation is that an impaired reasoning process is the opposite of the desired ideal of mature reasoning. Where purification and cleansing recalls priests in the temple and promotes the focusing of attention prior to approaching God in spiritual service,[924] those with impaired reasoning lack the required focus for spiritual service and cannot, therefore, approach in the necessary manner.

Whereas in James 1.7-8 ‘the doubting man’ is advised not to expect anything from God, in James 4.8, though a sinner, he is still told to ‘draw near to God,’ despite not yet being cleansed and purified. The sinner being addressed is a member of the audience, presumably also of the believing community; they are being encouraged to move towards God, implying that their reasoning is not, as of this point, irretrievable. If this is the case, although impaired reasoning is negatively judged, there is still the possibility to approach God and take part in both belief and the community, rather than being separated by the impenetrable

[924] Ralph P. Martin, p. 153; Richardson, p. 185.

barrier of a reasoning process judged problematic, as indicated by other New Testament writings.

6.5 The Insult of an "Incorrect" Reasoning Process

From a modern perspective, an impaired reasoning process is often considered as Intellectual Disability (ID). ID is an ambiguous category which lacks consensus of definition,[925] but it is a category into which those whose reasoning process is considered "other" are often placed. There is a lack of explicit mention of ID in ancient texts, but this does not prevent the potential identification of attitudes towards those deemed "other" on account of their reasoning process, as has been discussed above. Ancient terminology is 'neither compatible with modern medical categories…nor does it quickly reveal the ancients' own categories'[926] and any partially visible classifications are transitory and shifting.[927] Nonetheless, the designation of "other," with respect to negative judgements of a reasoning process, is evident in New Testament writings, such as through the usage of "foolish" (μωρός).

[925] Dominika Kurek-Chomycz and Emma Swai, 'Excluded from the Kingdom or Leading the Revolution? Môroi and the Question of Intellectual Disability in New Testament Writings', in *'Madness' in the Ancient World: Innate or Acquired? From Theoretical Concepts to Daily Life*, eds. Christian Laes and Irina Metzler (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

[926] Kellenberger, 'Learning Difficulties', p. 119.

[927] Goodey, *Learning Disability*, p. 2.

As outlined by Christian Laes, in antiquity μωρός does contain at least potential connotations of, or reference to, ID.[928] "Foolish" (μωρός) appears relatively infrequently within New Testament writings, but when it is used the meaning is somewhat pointed, usually containing something of a negative metanarrative associated with someone deemed to be "empty"[929] in terms of intellect and reasoning. This does not mean that there is a complete consistency of reference, as there is variation in terms of the degree of the insult, perspective of control and level of humour contained within differing usages. In the Gospel of Matthew, a person described as "foolish" is the opposite of someone who is wise, prudent or sensible, with "foolish" forming the unfavourable half of a binary comparison or constituting a direct insult or reproach. For many Greek readers of Paul's Corinthian letters, "fool" or "foolish" 'designated the attitude and behaviour of a particular social type: the lower class buffoon.'[930] ID, considered within the New Testament writings as 'a weakness or deficiency of intellect,'[931] could either be a means of social alienation or a theatrical tool based on received stereotypes.

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[928] Christian Laes, 'Introduction', in *'Madness' in the Ancient World: Innate or Acquired? From Theoretical Concepts to Daily Life*, eds. Christian Laes and Irina Metzler (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming).

[929] Peter Fiedler, 'μωρς', *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament - Volume 2*, eds. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 449-450.

[930] Laurence L. Welborn, 'Paul's Appropriation of the Role of the Fool in 1 Corinthians 1-4', in *Biblical Interpretation*, 10.4 (2002), pp. 420-435: p. 424.

[931] Welborn, p. 424.

There are no directly identifiable examples of ID within the Gospel of Matthew, but linguistically the attitude of the text to ID is suggested. By looking specifically at narrative instances of "fool" (μωρός), the textual presentation of those attitudes can be brought further into focus. As a form of reproach, "fool" becomes a linguistic weapon[932] to denounce someone who does not follow accepted standards of reasoning; to not understand according to convention appears to necessitate the label "fool". If, as asserted by Anthony Saldarini, the author of Matthew 'seeks to undermine the traditional, established leadership of the Jewish community in order to legitimate his own group and its leadership,'[933] then the use of "fool" in the gospel's narrative becomes a point at which the creation of "other" occurs as a negative intellectual judgement against the purported opposition.

The term μωρός is used in four places in the Gospel of Matthew narrative. These instances can be divided into two categories of usage, a vocative insult and a negative value comparison. The negative value comparisons occur in two of the parables told by Jesus: chapter 7's analogy of two house-builders beginning with different foundations, and chapter 25's account of the ten bridesmaids. In each case, the descriptions "foolish" (μωρός) is the undesirable

[932] Bar-Asher Siegal, 'Matthew 5:22: The Insult "Fool" and the Interpretation of the Law in Christian and Rabbinic Sources', in *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, vol. 234.1 (2017), pp. 5-23: p. 9.

[933] Anthony J. Saldarini, *Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community* (Chicago - London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 46.

side of a binary equation. Elsewhere in Matthew, “fool” is a vocative insult, a term of abuse.

Parables narratorially construct social standards of behaviour and/or thought process. Through its opposition to ideal reasoning, by not meeting expected standards, foolishness is represented as failure, the incompetence, deliberate or otherwise, of not thinking according to the terms required by God. In Matthew 7, one of Jesus’ parables describing a “wise” and a “foolish” housebuilder, the difference between “foolishness” and “wisdom” is the failure to act correctly. Not acting correctly is the evidence of a lack of understanding and a lack of understanding displays the potential for ‘utter ruin’ with an ‘overtone of judgement.’[934] The consequences of being “foolish,” in Matthew 7.26, are dire:

> And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand.
>
> αἰ πᾶς ὁ ἀκούων μου τοὺς λόγους τούτους καὶ μὴ ποιῶν αὐτοὺς ὁμοιωθήσεται ἀνδρὶ μωρῷ, ὅστις ᾠκοδόμησεν αὐτοῦ τὴν οἰκίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἄμμον.[935]

It might seem easy for modern commentators to report that “foolish” (μωρός) ‘does not refer to intellectual capacities’ in Matthew 25’s parable of the ten bridesmaids and that the narrative concerns contrasting a right decision with its opposite, by specifying that ‘the point is simply that readiness, whatever form

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[934] Nolland, *Matthew,* p. 344.

[935] The parable of the two builders does not appear in Mark’s Gospel, but a version does appear in the Gospel of Luke. The Lukan narrative, however, makes no reference to μωρός and simply presents the choices made by the builders as evidence of their character.

it takes,' is what relates to the eschatological picture being created.[936] This apparently simple point, though, centres on the use of "foolish" where the connotation is that 'the stupidity of the "foolish" is obvious, since without oil the rags would go out immediately.'[937] The idea that "foolishness" (as designated by being described as μωρός) is not being prepared, potentially bringing in the idea of 'self-deceived'[938] with reference to consequence, suggests that usages of "foolish" are linked in to a metanarrative of choice. "Foolishness" can be avoided and, therefore, the person deemed "foolish" is responsible for both their intellectual state and the consequences of it, potential eschatological exclusion. Where foolishness becomes a lack of preparation affecting entry into the kingdom of heaven, the parable of the bridesmaids becomes an effective judgement on intellect: those who are not mentally prepared are excluded, regardless of explanation. The bridesmaids being shut out of a celebration meant to include the whole community[939] represents the alienation of impaired reasoning from the Kingdom of God.

The second type of μωρός usage within the Gospel of Matthew is as a direct vocative insult. In Matthew 5.22, Jesus outlines "fool" as being seriously offensive; the narrative uses a parallel literary structure which equates the

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[936] W. D. Davies and D. C. Allison, *Matthew 19-28* (London - New York: T & T Clark, 1997), p. 396; France, *Matthew*, p. 947.

[937] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, p. 231.

[938] France, *Matthew*, p. 286.

[939] Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, p. 232.

Aramaic ריקא (*reqa*) with μωρός, as part of 'elaborations on the prohibition to become angry with another person.'[940] In Matthew 5.22, the label of "fool" casts those it is directed towards in the role of outsider in terms of social order and expectation:[941]

> But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; [whoever calls his brother "Raca"] will be liable to the council; [whoever says] 'You fool,' will be liable to the hell of fire.
>
> ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι πᾶς ὁ ὀργιζόμενος τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ ἔνοχος ἔσται τῇ κρίσει· ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ· ῥακά, ἔνοχος ἔσται τῷ συνεδρίῳ· ὃς δ' ἂν εἴπῃ· μωρέ, ἔνοχος ἔσται εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός.

Commentators disagree as to how serious of an insult "fool" (μωρός) is when Jesus effectively prohibits its use against a fellow believer. Ulrich Luz argues that it meant nothing more than the equivalent of "daft" with, perhaps, 'a nuance of disrespect,'[942] whilst Craig L. Blomberg highlights 'overtones of immorality and godlessness as well as idiocy.'[943] Both μωρός and the Greek transliteration of Aramaic ῥακά appear to be quasi swear-words implying "empty head",[944] which might not have been exceptional but would have been significant as a public challenge to a person's honour.

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[940] Bar-Asher Siegal, p. 7.

[941] Bar-Asher Siegal, pp. 9-10.

[942] Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 235.

[943] Blomberg, *Matthew*, p. 107.

[944] Fiedler, pp. 449-450.

The situation Jesus describes in the Matthew 5 narrative does not refer to "fool" as a harmless insult. Here "fool" suggests a misunderstanding of Torah laws, therefore constituting a public judgement of a fellow believer regarding the validity of their membership of the Kingdom of God.[945] Labelling someone as "fool" functions as the identification of being an "outsider" or "deviant."[946] This potentially places impaired reasoning within the realm of apostasy[947] according to the social values present within the narrative. A weaponised insult cannot be "mild" or "unimportant" if it is akin to spilling blood[948] and is taken so seriously.

Whereas in Matthew 5 the main complaint against the "fool" insult appears to be an unjustified usage towards a fellow believer, in Matthew 23.17 "fool" is used as a pejorative epithet. In this context "fool" (μωρός) forms part of 'a structured series of charges' aimed at Jewish community leadership, with a 'vitriolic tone'[949] that seems to be exactly what 5.22 warns against:

> You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the sanctuary that has made the gold sacred?
>
> μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί, τίς γὰρ μείζων ἐστίν, ὁ χρυσὸς ἢ ὁ ναὸς ὁ ἁγιάσας τὸν χρυσόν;

[945] Bar-Asher Siegal, p. 8, 21.

[946] Bar-Asher Siegal, p. 10.

[947] Barclay, p. 297.

[948] Bar-Asher Siegal, p. 9.

[949] Saldarini, p. 49, 52.

This verse is the only place where “foolish” (μωρός) and “blind” (τυφλός) appear together within New Testament writings.[950] “Blindness” is also used as a term of abuse in this passage, where the image is used to undercut the authority of the listening pharisees; the metanarrative of darkness that blindness links to the insult of “fool” implies an intellectual darkness, bringing in the dark or primitive as opposition to the light or developed reasoning.[951]

A “fool”, lacking in correct understanding or reasoning, would stand in opposition to God and full participation in a believing society, the Kingdom of God. For this reason, Jesus labelling the ‘scribes and Pharisees would be accurate from a Matthean perspective,[952] assuming the warning in 5.22 was against an unjustified use of the term. The vocative insult ‘foolish and blind’ in Matthew 23.17 describes not understanding the obvious difference between gold connected to the sanctuary and any other gold, within the Jewish purity system, in terms of the sanctuary imparting holiness.[953] Jesus’ insult, then, would be justified if the assumption was that anyone should be able to understand what was directly presented in front of them and his use of “fool” was referring to people who could not.

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[950] The combination μωροί καὶ τυφλοί does appear in some textual variants of Matthew 23.19, including Codex Vaticanus, Tischendorfianus IV and Ephraemi Rescriptus. .

[951] The relationship between “blindness” and “understanding” will be considered further in the following chapter.

[952] Blomberg, p. 107.

[953] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 936.

Paul uses two different words to refer to “fool” in his Corinthian correspondence: μωρός and ἄφρων. In *The Westminster Wordbook of the Bible*, K. A. Farmer suggests that ‘Paul seems to make a distinction between the associative meaning attached to these two word families.’[954] In fact, μωρός is used ‘exclusively’ in 1 Corinthians and ἄφρων in 2 Corinthians,[955] making a distinction between the two likely in Paul’s application of the terminology.

Solevåg describes the opening of 1 Corinthians as ‘a defense of the gospel as madness or foolishness.’[956] 1 Corinthians 1.20 highlights that the Gospel is understood as contradicting the accepted rationale of the time:

> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?
>
> ποῦ σοφός; ποῦ γραμματεύς; ποῦ συζητητὴς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου; οὐχὶ ἐμώρανεν ὁ θεὸς τὴν σοφίαν τοῦ κόσμου;

Wisdom is set in opposition to foolish language, strength against weakness, bringing in something of a direct opposition despite the ambiguity of approaches to measuring intellect. In his New Testament writings, Paul both accuses opponents of stupidity and makes foolishness a virtue.[957]

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[954] K. A. Farmer, ‘Folly, Fool, Foolish, Simple’, in *The Westminster Theological Wordbook*, ed. D. E. Gowan (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), pp. 140-144: p. 143.

[955] Jeffrey M. Horner, ‘Leading Like a Fool: An Evaluation of Paul’s Foolishness in 2 Corinthians 11:16-12-13’, in *Perichoresis*, vol. 16.13 (2018), pp. 29-43: p. 29.

[956] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled* Body, p. 109.

[957] Jeremy Punt, ‘Apostolic Folly: Pauline Foolishness Discourse in Socio-Historical Context’, *Stellenbosch Theological Journal Supp.*, vol. 5.2 (2019), pp. 455-472: p. 455.

According to Welborn, ‘Paul portrays himself as a well-known figure in the mime: the befuddled actor,’[958] which is true in the sense that Paul is taking on the freedom to talk about dangerous topics in order to challenge the reliance upon wealth and knowledge by the church at Corinth, and the ‘superiority which these things engendered.’[959] Paul’s fool is not someone ridiculed for impaired reasoning, as in some theatrical tropes, even though he assumes the benefit of freedom of speech associated with that role. Paul is contrasting divine wisdom with conventional wisdom, rebuking the wisdom of the world by reversing what is appropriate reasoning and what is not: the world’s wisdom becomes the negative standard. Where impaired reasoning contrasts with what the world judges appropriate, appropriate worldly standards of reasoning becomes “foolish”. If impaired reasoning is the binary opposite of culturally expected reasoning, then reasoning that does not follow the culturally expected ideal, judged foolish in 1 Corinthians, could then embody the wisdom of God. Yong explains Paul’s use of μωρός and its cognates in 1 Corinthians 1.18-2.5, with their ‘pejorative connotations,’ as precisely what Paul says is being redeemed by the Gospel, making it possible for those considered outcasts, on account of being deemed “foolish” (μωρός), as those putting the wisdom of world to shame.[960] By suggesting μωρός as a challenge to accepted standards, albeit still using the pejorative

[958] Welborn, p. 430.

[959] Welborn, p. 434.

[960] Yong, *The Bible, Disability, and the Church*, p. 98.

meanings of the language to do so, Paul's message is somewhat subversive to the social hierarchy. Weakness and shame, describing the experience of those designated as "other", undermines boasting of human wisdom and power, establishing that those judged lowly could also be raised higher than those meeting the expected cultural standard.

Within the Corinthian correspondence, 2 Corinthians 11 is often called "The Fool's Speech" by commentators, a term 'justifiable by the recurring vocabulary of "foolishness" (ἀφροσυύνη, ἄφρων, παράφρων) within this passage (11:1, 16, [twice], 17, 19, 23; 12:6, 11).'[961] The question of who is considered the "fool" is often discussed: "fool" is mostly used as a first person pronoun and in the singular, evidencing that, to a large extent, Paul casts himself as in the role of "fool" (ἄφρων).[962] Paul does, though, draw both the Corinthians and his opponents into the status of "fool" where rhetorically appropriate (11.16; 19.20).

As mentioned previously, Paul uses both μωρός and ἄφρων for "fool". Μωρός tends to relate to a lack of understanding or correct reasoning, whereas ἄφρων appears to relate to deliberate "foolishness" (ἀφροσύνη) and the taking on of a

[961] Barnett, p. 494.

[962] Barnett, p. 495.

role.[963] Paul might be uneasy taking on the role of the fool (ἄφρων),[964] but he has chosen to imitate his adversaries. He uses impaired reasoning as a rhetorical costume to speak in the manner of a mimic fool and highlight 'the sinfulness of the pseudo-apostle's explicit questioning of Paul's authority and implicit questioning of the gospel he taught.'[965]

It is possible to take the position that 2 Corinthians 11 is 'the central passage in which madness vocabulary is invoked.'[966] A number of different terms used for "fool" or "foolish" in relation to the process of reasoning (ἄφρων, ἀφροσύνη, παραφρονέω) can also refer to madness. It is worth noting that whilst in 2 Corinthians 11.21 Paul admits to speaking like a fool, in 11.16 he denies that he is a fool, not wanting his own reasoning process to be undermined or deemed impaired:

> I repeat, let no one think that I am a fool; but if you do, then accept me as a fool, so that I too may boast a little.
>
> Πάλιν λέγω, μή τίς με δόξῃ ἄφρονα εἶναι· εἰ δὲ μή γε, κἂν ὡς ἄφρονα δέξασθέ με, ἵνα κἀγὼ μικρόν τι καυχήσωμαι.

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[963] Harris, pp. 732-733. Harris asserts that, in Paul's usage, μωρός 'has distinctly theological overtones, denoting a perceived lack of understanding or certain ideas.' Those overtones might be read into the language, but μωρός does refer to impaired reasoning leading to ignorance. Harris assumes the foolishness of ἀφροσύνη 'refers to an act of deliberate folly in pursuing a particular course of action in order to achieve commendable ends, and therefore is neither ignorant stupidity nor crass foolishness.' Deliberate foolishness is an interesting aspect to 2 Corinthians, if Paul is then said to be effectively "acting" and taking on the role of someone with an impaired reasoning process.

[964] Harris, pp. 733-734.

[965] Horner, p. 30.

[966] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 108.

Requesting a favourable reception, as would be given to a mimic fool, highlights a duality in Paul's usage of "fool" and "foolishness". He does not want to be recognised as a "fool" but wants to use the accompanying advantages of being able to speak in that role. "Fool" (ἄφρων) represents a stereotype encompassing negative intellectual values, often the object of humour, but a person in that role is often allowed to speak due to not being seen as having the ability to challenge reason in any way. It is possible that Paul is uncomfortable at his decision to play the role of a fool, but key is his insistence that his audience recognises his 'distinction between a temporary playing of the role of a fool and actually being a fool.' Paul rhetorically chooses the role of "fool"; it is not logical for it to be both a communicatory decision and a representation of his own rationality. If a "fool" for Paul is not a theatrical representation but the reality of 'the person who thinks or acts improperly and without due measure,'[967] then there would be consequences for his authority.

Further developing the "fool" motif, in 2 Corinthians 11.17, Paul's boasting does not make him a "fool" *per se*, but since boasting is what "fools" do, it is possible to infer that 'Paul is imitating and parodying' his opponents:[968]

> What I am saying in regard to this boastful confidence, I am saying not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool
>
> ὃ λαλῶ, οὐ κατὰ κύριον λαλῶ ἀλλ' ὡς ἐν ἀφροσύνῃ, ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ ὑποστάσει τῆς καυχήσεως

[967] Harris, p. 781.

[968] Barnett, p. 528.

Thus, one interpretation of Paul's repeated noting that he is speaking as a fool is that Paul is guiding his audience. From this perspective, the so-called "fool's speech" is 'akin to a comic performance,' parodying the boasts of his opponents via the known aspects of the theatrical "fool".[969] Impaired reasoning effectively becomes a comedic tool for the purposes of rhetoric, methodology which would be ethically dubious by modern standards. An alternative interpretation, advocated by Ryan S. Schellenberg, is that whilst still a rhetorical strategy, Paul's 'foolish boasting' is not parodying opponents but reasserting his own social position. By responding to his critics in a self-deferential manner, Paul is rebutting the claim that he is 'self-important,' at the same time as repeating his own claims to authority and status.[970]

Both of these perspectives consider using the projection of an impaired reasoning process, inherently negative, as an aspect or tool of communication. Incorrect reasoning is, on one level, undesirable, but it is useful in order to encourage Paul's audience to support him once more.

6.6 Corrupted or Depraved?

Within the context of 1 Timothy, specifically 1 Timothy 6.5, a reasoning process that does not follow the ideal standard is seen to be "depraved". This occurs against the background of 1 Timothy 6.1-2 giving instructions to slaves

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[969] Horner, p.34-35. Horner also comments on the possible provision of 'vocal cues' for performance,' so a reader of the letter knows how to perform the role "appropriately" and create the necessary parodic tone.

[970] Ryan S. Schellenberg, 'Paul, Samson Occom, and the Constraints of Boasting: A Comparative Reading of 2 Corinthians 10-13', in *The Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 109.4 (2016), pp. 512-535.

not to be disrespectful to their masters, urging slaves in the letter's audience to respect the social position of master'[971] and the description of the false teachers in 1 Timothy 6.4. Whilst "disease" (νόσος) appears elsewhere in New Testament writings,[972] "to be diseased" (νοσέω) only appears at this point in 1 Timothy, where it is used figuratively. George W. Knight III comments on νοσέω being used figuratively in relation to "being sick" or someone "having an unhealthy craving",[973] but the participle, as a verb, contains a process. Luke Timothy Johnson suggests νοσῶν περὶ ζητήσεις καὶ λογομαχίας could be translated as 'having a morbid fascination for debates and controversies.'[974] John's translation reflects the participle nature of the phrase and the idea that the problematic reasoning process is focused on 'controversy and disputes about words' (ζήτησις καὶ λογομαχία), potentially in light of a reasoning process that "craves" unhealthy elements. The "unhealthy elements" are debates and discussions deemed unnecessary, asking questions that do not follow expected reasoning and displaying a problem with the reasoning process itself.

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[971] George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), pp. 245-246.

[972] Νόσος occurs eleven times within New Testament writings. Five occurrences are in the Gospel of Matthew, one in the Gospel of Mark and five in Luke-Acts. In each instance νόσος is used in reference to "every kind of disease."

[973] Knight III, p. 251.

[974] Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 292.

As a section of argument, 1 Timothy 6.3-5 is an ‘indictment of false teachers,’ [975] but 1 Timothy 6.5 uses the language of reasoning to show opposition to the truth:

> and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.
>
> διαπαρατριβαὶ διεφθαρμένων ἀνθρώπων τὸν νοῦν καὶ ἀπεστερημένων τῆς ἀληθείας, νομιζόντων πορισμὸν εἶναι τὴν εὐσέβειαν.

Philip H. Towner examines 1 Timothy 6.4-5 from the perspective that the rejection of the Gospel and adherence to false doctrine is the ‘benchmark’ by which to illustrate moral flaws and that the “constant friction” of verse 5 adds to the provided list of typically evil qualities, some traditional vices and moral defects.[976] Knight argues, differently, that ‘these people have such characteristics’[977] because of ‘being depraved in mind’ (διεφθαρμένων τὸν νοῦν). [978]

It seems that ‘continual arguing’ (διαπαρατριβαὶ) could continue the list of nouns indicating vices in 1 Timothy 6.4, and ‘men depraved in their reasoning process’ (διεφθαρμένων ἀνθρώπων τὸν νοῦν)[979] provides the conditions for continual arguing, with ‘defrauded of the truth, presuming that piety is a means of gain’

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[975] Knight III, p. 249.

[976] Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 395-396.

[977] Knight III, p. 252.

[978] Knight III, p. 252.

[979] The NRSV translation of διεφθαρμένων τὸν νοῦν reads 'those who are depraved in mind'.

(ἀπεστερημένων τῆς ἀληθείας, νομιζόντων πορισμὸν εἶναι τὴν εὐσέβειαν)[980] forming a separate clause. Alternatively, 'men depraved in their reasoning process, defrauded of the truth, presuming that piety is a means of gain' (διεφθαρμένων ἀνθρώπων τὸν νοῦν καὶ ἀπεστερημένων τῆς ἀληθείας) provides a description of the "men" who, because of that reasoning or lack of understanding, 'have been corrupted in their mind and have been robbed of the truth,'[981] and consequently suppose piety is a means of monetary gain. Whichever is intended by the text, διαφθείρω contains a physical sense of destruction which when applied to the reasoning process has moral connotations.[982] The writer of 1 Peter does not imply a causal relationship between διαφθείρω and ἀποστερέω τῆς ἀληθείας: the two perfect participles in 1 Timothy 6.5 are both passive and concurrent. The "false teachers" have had their reasoning processes corrupted and have been deprived of the truth, by someone or something in the past, which causes their current, incorrect supposition of monetary gain resulting from piety.

William D. Mounce and Knight both argue that that the passive voice, such as 'being defrauded of the truth' (ἀπεστερημένων τῆς ἀληθείας), indicates the role of the devil in corrupting the reasoning process of and stealing the truth from "false teachers", given that the devil is recognised, for example in 1 Timothy 1.20, as being active alongside, or possibly within, areas of the believing community who

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[980] The NRSV translation of ἀπεστερημένων τῆς ἀληθείας, νομιζόντων πορισμὸν εἶναι τὴν εὐσέβειαν reads 'bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.'

[981] William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 333.

[982] Cf. *BDAG*, p. 90.

are the audience of the letter.[983] 'Defrauded of the truth' is indeed puzzling, since it indicates that the truth, understood as the gospel, has been taken from the false teachers. Whereas a reasoning process can be corrupted by individual choice, as a result of personal focus or not understanding (cf. 1 Timothy 6.4), truth is treated as a concrete object that can be removed. The removal of this abstract object has eschatological and salvific consequences, since understanding or possessing truth equates to belief and believing identity.

Despite his suggestion of the devil being active in the context of 1 Timothy 6.5, Mounce also suggests that 'being defrauded of the truth' (ἀπεστερημένων τῆς ἀληθείας) does not mean that the individuals described are the victims of 'someone else's thievery,' contradicting his own observations.[984] If there is an element of personal responsibility, this must be related to choice and, from the point of view of the text, to the reasoning process being used to make that choice. It could be that choice of corrupted reasoning that "stole" the status of believer, by moving them outside of truth. Towner's observation on 1 Timothy 6.4 explains how opponents were conceited and felt they felt they knew 'better than the apostle,'[985] which could be the "disease" at the beginning of the process. That process ends with 'presuming that piety is a means of gain' as its product.

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[983] William D. Mounce, p. 340; Knight III, p. 252.

[984] William D. Mounce, p. 340. Mounce cites 1 Timothy 1.6 as evidence 'the opponents know exactly what they are doing,' do not participate in reasoning according to the gospel message, opposing instead of misunderstanding.

[985] Philip H. Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1994), p. 135.

The text contains no sympathy for a difference of opinion or interpretation. Believers should be reasoning according to the message presented to them and understanding is accepting that message, or at least they should be moving towards it, not acting as opponents of truth. 1 Timothy 6.5 rhetorically creates a boundary between faith, as an acceptance of truth, and "the other." As a result, an incorrect reasoning process, which rejects the presented truth, is "othered". References to previously mentioned false teachers promoting a different doctrine, not agreeing with the teaching presented in 1 Timothy as 'the words of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Timothy 6.3), illustrates the error of their teaching as "otherness," since the text assumes 1 Timothy's instructions to be correct. Disagreement is judged unhealthy and associated with vice, since actions or consequences prove the validity of a reasoning process.

6.6.1 Choosing a Corrupted or Depraved Opposition to Truth?

Foolishness and ignorance are affiliated with heresy in 2 Timothy 2.23, where foolish and uneducated debates are the cause of disagreement and the audience is admonished 'to refute speculations.'[986] It is not simply that controversies are marked as negative by being "foolish" and "ignorant", but those controversies are 'sinful and culpable'[987] in not understanding. 2 Timothy 2.23 describes the effects of following a different reasoning process to the ideal,

[986] Knight III, p. 422.

[987] Knight III, p. 422.

opposing truth being heresy. Impaired reasoning as opposition to truth then follows in 2 Timothy 3.8:

> As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth.
>
> ὃν τρόπον δὲ Ἰάννης καὶ Ἰαμβρῆς ἀντέστησαν Μωϋσεῖ, οὕτως καὶ οὗτοι ἀνθίστανται τῇ ἀληθείᾳ, ἄνθρωποι κατεφθαρμένοι τὸν νοῦν, ἀδόκιμοι περὶ τὴν πίστιν.

As is evident in the NRSV, English translations can leave out the passivity of κατεφθαρμένοι τὸν νοῦν, a negative action which happened and is potentially still happening. If the text were translated as 'in the manner Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, they oppose the truth; men with reasoning processes that have been corrupted are proven false concerning faith,' then corrupted reasoning processes are rejected on the basis of not evidencing faith, rather than corrupted "minds" and "counterfeit faith" being the background to, or cause of, opposing the truth. Consequently, the NRSV translation does not relate the sequence of the judgement of unqualified or worthless faith resulting directly from a reasoning process previously corrupted. The adversaries in 2 Timothy 3.8 have made the choice to oppose truth, that decision being influenced by a flawed reasoning process, a process which is then further corrupted by the decision that has been made.

Jannes and Jambres are not named as being in Pharoah's court (cf. Exodus 7.12) but are named in Jewish tradition, for example in writings such as

CD 5:17-19 and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.[988] Through an apparently well-known story, the writer of 2 Timothy incriminates false teachers, challengers, by attributing to them the crimes of the villainous story characters.[989] Opposing Moses, God's chosen servant, is inconceivable within the narrative context of belief, indicating that, for the writer, those not adhering to the stated message and reasoning of the letter must have an impaired reasoning process. Failure in faith is evident, thereby heightening the deceptiveness[990] involved when that incorrect reasoning is used to question the teaching the letter proposes. Κατεφθείρω, a New Testament hapax if 2 Peter 2.12 in the Textus Receptus is not taken into account, in this context literally indicates destruction and ruin of an appropriately functioning reasoning process, but the emphasis should be on "appropriately" as the opponents' reasoning process must be functioning in some way in order for them to challenge the teachings deemed appropriate and necessitate a response. Johnson outlines the textual position as false teachers not being able to 'teach truth, for their minds themselves cannot contain it, so ruined are they,'[991] but the opponents must be able process the teaching to an

[988] For further information, see Lester L Grabbe, 'The Jannes/Jambres Tradition in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Its Date', in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 98.3 (1979), pp. 393-401: pp. 394-395 <https://doi.org/10.2307/3265763>; Siam Bhayro, 'On Early Jewish Literature and the Aramaic Magic Bowls', in *Aramaic Studies*, vol. 13.1 (2015), pp. 54-68: pp. 58-61. <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455227-01301005>

[989] Towner, *Letters*, pp. 564-565. Towner describes how wordplay substantiates the link between past and present.

[990] William D. Mounce, p. 549. According to Mounce, the two points of comparison with Jannes and Jambres are their opposition to the true message and their evidence of failure proving their deceptiveness.

[991] Johnson, *Timothy*, p. 408.

extent, as they formulate negative responses to it. What is judged as unfitness in faith and inability to reason, is, or at least begins with, the choice to reject what is present in 2 Timothy as the truth (ἡ ἀλήθεια).

Those who are vocal in their promotion of alternative reasoning, or in their differing interpretation of teaching, are seen at best as disruptive, at worse as depraved. Titus 1.15 sets impaired reasoning in opposition not just to belief but also to purity:

> To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted.
>
> πάντα καθαρὰ τοῖς καθαροῖς· τοῖς δὲ μεμιαμμένοις καὶ ἀπίστοις οὐδὲν καθαρόν, ἀλλὰ μεμίανται αὐτῶν καὶ ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ συνείδησις.

Judging opponents as “other”, the writer juxtaposes them with a bestial Cretan stereotype (cf. Titus 1.12) [992] and this verse continues to emphasise their depravity. It is possible that these opponents are Cretans, but for the purposes of analysing reasoning, they are nevertheless considered to be ‘unqualified, rebellious, and inappropriate for positions of leadership in the church,’[993] highlighted along the lines of ethnicity and cultural identity. T. Christopher Hoklotubbe proposes that the heresy originated from opponents ‘belonging to the notorious circumcision faction, infatuated with “Judean myths”, and as

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[992] Towner, *Letters*, p. 694.

[993] William D. Mounce, p. 395.

embodying the worst qualities of Cretans,'[994] with Titus 1.13-14 outlining that to be healthy or sound in faith (ὑγιαίνω ἐν τῇ πίστει) means not paying attention to 'Jewish myths and commandments of those who reject the truth' (Ἰουδαϊκοῖς μύθοις καὶ ἐντολαῖς ἀνθρώπων ἀποστρεφομένων τὴν ἀλήθειαν).

Titus 1.15 applies apparently traditional logic, in that the pure are genuine believers from the perspective of personal purity and goes on to explain who is really defiled and what the source of their defilement is: if a believer is pure and everything is pure for them, then nothing is pure for those who are not believers. Within the text, a believer seems to be someone with a correct reasoning process, meaning that an incorrect reasoning process, impaired reasoning or the inability to understand, is impure. Towner argues that 'the mind and conscience' (ὁ νοῦς καὶ ἡ συνείδησις) are corrupted by unbelief,[995] but the corrupt and unbelieving are defiled, as well as their reasoning process and their conscience being defiled, in a self-directed trio of concurrent actions. The impure act upon their own corporeality through adherence to false ascetic teaching and cannot be made acceptable to God in any way,[996] in part because of their impaired reasoning process. In terms of progress towards or away from an ideal, if the direction of movement regarding reasoning is moving away from purity, it would

[994] T. Chrisopher Hoklotubbe, 'Civilized Christ-Followers among Barbaric Cretans and Superstitious Judeans: Negotiating Ethnic Hierarchies in Titus 1:10-14', in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 140.2 (2021), pp. 369-390: p. 369. <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1402.2021.8>

[995] Towner, *Letters*, p. 706-708.

[996] William D. Mounce, p. 401. Mounce paraphrases Titus 1.15 as 'All things are (ritually) clean to the (morally) clean' and states the those who are 'morally defiled and do not believe cannot be made acceptable to God even by ritual purity.'

appear there is no way back. The process of corruption is something of a self-fulfilling prophesy, in that once an individual chooses to corrupt their reasoning process, the process then acts upon itself and cannot be rescued.

Considering Titus 1 in the light of subjugated groups negotiating ethnic hierarchies and the context of social competition, Hoklotubbe discusses the idea that part of the definitive rejection of the "other" could be from the perspective of subjugated groups competing for resources and needing to 'evoke, reify, and critique culturally presumed hierarchies of ethnic groups in order to protect and secure the social position and capital of their own group at the expense of others.' By emphasising Christ-followers as civilized subjects and depicting "others" as subversive, the writer of Titus is creating an element of social kudos as an attempt to combat the Roman 'pervasive perception of Christ-followers as superstitious and potentially seditious disruptors of civilized society.'[997] It is not merely that 'the requisite purity only issues from proper belief:'[998] proper reasoning needs to solidify communal identity within "civilized" society.

Perhaps one of the most negative depictions of improper reasoning appears in Jude 1.10:

> But these people slander whatever they do not understand, and they are destroyed by those things that, like irrational animals, they know by instinct

[997] Hoklotubbe, p. 370, 378.

[998] Frances Young, *The Theology of the Pastoral Epistles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 38.

οὗτοι δὲ ὅσα μὲν οὐκ οἴδασιν βλασφημοῦσιν, ὅσα δὲ φυσικῶς ὡς τὰ ἄλογα ζῷα ἐπίστανται, ἐν τούτοις φθείρονται

The writer of the text engages in 'character assassination' by placing 'placing [opponents] in a long line of debauched and condemned figures from ages past.'[999] Those opponents are likened to 'irrational animals' (τὰ ἄλογα ζῷα), inhuman creatures without the capacity for a correct reasoning process.[1000] Alicia J. Batten, in her discussion of Jude in relation to invectives, emphasises how vilification relates to social structures; through the language of purity verses pollution, each person is "encouraged" to keep to 'his or her proper place.' The 'beloved' are in their correct place, 'kept for Christ' (Jude 1.1) and, in retaining that place, they 'keep themselves in the love of God' (Jude 1.21). Opponents, meanwhile, have manoeuvred themselves to 'where they do not belong' (Jude 1.4)[1001] and can no longer be legitimately included within "civilized society," even if they pretend to function within it.

Social order and organisation, according to proper reasoning processes, are important, within the believing community depicted in the text of Jude 1.10. The language of Jude 1.10, as well as its preceding verses, betrays frustration at the perception of impure reasoning infiltrating the group of believers being addressed. In attempting to 'counter the perceived invasion,' the writer of Jude

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[999] Alicia J Batten, 'The Letter of Jude and Graeco-Roman Invective', in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, vol. 70.1 (2014), pp. 1-7: p. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v70i1.2750>

[1000] 2 Peter 2.12, a text which includes the same insult, also adds that said creatures should be 'caught' and 'destroyed.'

[1001] Batten, pp. 2-3.

portrays incorrect reasoning as not only impaired and animalistic, but also indicates opponents to the truth expressed in the letter, by virtue of their incapacity to reason as expected, cannot experience salvation. If the purpose of Jude, specifically Jude 1.10, is to outline the subhuman nature of opponents through the decimation of their character, there can only be, according to the writer, adverse eschatological consequences for a problematic reasoning process. Impaired reasoning, represented as opposition to truth, shows opposition to the correct reasoning of the writer to be at the very least dishonourable. Within a culture where such a judgement would be 'damning' because the pivotal values of honour and shame 'pertained to almost every dimension of life.'[1002] A person or group deemed irrational, without a correct reasoning process, is textually viewed as subhuman, an "other" so far outside of society that no consideration is given for any progression towards a return to human identity.

6.7 Concluding Remarks on Problematic Reasoning Processes

New Testament writings each contain context-specific corporeal expectations, slightly varying ideals as to what a believer's reasoning process should be. The presence of a standard allows for the discussion of deviance. There are similarities between the texts discussed, however, in that a person who chooses to not adhere to the expected standard of reasoning then potentially places themselves outside of the identity of belief and in opposition to

[1002] Batten, p. 7.

truth. Texts such as James 1.5-8 and Romans 1.21 position a believer as being obligated to display the consequences of an expected standard of reasoning, such as through understanding the character of God in requests for wisdom (James 1) and behaving in such a way as to show honour and thankfulness to God (Romans 1) because of that understanding. Where reasoning does not result in certainty and faithfulness, doubt is then evidence of impaired reasoning.

A believer has a personal responsibility to have, or prepare and train, a correct reasoning process. 1 Peter advocates for training, whereas the audience of Hebrews are admonished for allowing their understanding to fall below expected standards, having chosen to not apply the required effort. The consequences of choosing to neglect the reasoning process include allowing its "light" to dim, such as in Romans 1.21, and permitting "darkness" space within ἡ καρδία. The eschatological consequences of rejecting gospel truth include separation from God, a deplorable state depicted as even more so by the nature of voluntary entry. Once a reasoning process separates from God, it further negatively impacts itself, emphasising and increasing the distance.

The various New Testament writings position incorrect reasoning differently in relation to the believing versus non-believing identity boundary. The audience of Hebrews has not crossed the boundary into "otherness" as of yet, but are warned they are not progressing in the ideal direction. In 1 Peter, the marshalling of reasoning in the correct way is portrayed as leading to redemption, with the implication being that the inability to reason leads to the opposite. Both of these letters would have included "believers" within their

audience, indicating that those deemed to possess reasoning that was not ideal have not yet been deemed “other” in terms of their relationship to the believing community. However, the insult or designation of “fool” within the Synoptic Gospel writings suggests that impaired reasoning places the person so labelled on the wrong side of the boundary of belief and ideal reasoning. The parable of the bridesmaids, for example, exemplifies alienation from the Kingdom of God for not being mentally prepared, regardless of any potential excuse, and shows a “zero-tolerance” attitude towards impaired reasoning. The seriousness of being deemed to have non-ideal reasoning is so severe, in these texts, precisely because it positioned that person outside of the Kingdom of God, making to label a fellow believer a “fool” a grave offence. It appears that the seriousness of the offence could vary, perhaps according to community and/or context: Paul both accuses his opponents of being fools in some of his writings, utilising the insult, as well as making foolishness a virtue in others.

Community identity is based on the boundary of belief, with that identity in part constructed according to whether a person does or does not reason correctly. Impaired reasoning can also be used as a tool in the communication of identity, such as where impaired reasoning threatens believing identity, as per Romans 1, through the binary opposition between truth and sin, reason and disbelief. The sinner being addressed in James 1 is a member of the audience and is, therefore, being encouraged to move closer towards an ideal reasoning process focussed on God, showing that it is possible that incorrect reasoning was not cast out or explicitly designated “other” in every text. The writers of 1

Timothy, 2 Timothy and Jude, though, cast reasoning that does not adhere to their expected standards of reasoning as at best culturally “other” and heretical, at worst subhuman. The position of where impaired reasoning relates to the boundary of belief depends on the text considering that boundary.

Commonality in depicting “other” as deviant and potentially heretical is problematic from a modern perspective, in terms of ecclesiastical implications when misinterpreted, but within the context of the writings discussed in this chapter, a problematic “mind” is simply one which departs from the reasoning process expected of a believer. Obviously, ableism is not an acknowledged concept within New Testament writings. However, each of the texts discussed contains the assumption that if a person is presented with truth, in the form of teaching that followed an ideal, or at least correct, reasoning process, then that individual should be able to understand, follow and reason according to that truth, unless they choose not to. The inability to understand, caused by an impaired reasoning process, is portrayed as a voluntary problem and consequently sinful. If correct reasoning is agreement to the reasoning presented, then challenging or rejecting the presented reasoning is heresy, regardless of the intention, or lack of. There is no way of a reader actually knowing whether the “false teachers” depicted opposed the gospel message or just the writers’ interpretations of it. Any analysis of New Testament writings must pay attention to the connotations of the language used, be prepared to consider nuances and possibly even look beyond the surface meaning, heeding contextual viewpoints. As will be shown in

the following chapter, this is especially important with respect to portrayals of blindness.

CHAPTER 7

BLINDNESS IN RELATION TO SEEING-KNOWING[1003]

"Blindness" is often considered as 'a generally easy-to-define category of impairment,' one which is 'uniquely positioned socially, culturally, politically and theoretically.'[1004] This does not reflect the continuum of vision, from those with high visual acuity to people who don't perceive by visual means. Visual impairment, in Greek and Roman antiquity, is recognised on a social level as corporeal and social corruption. In addition, the linguistic relationship between "seeing" and "knowing" is 'neither innocuous nor innocent.'[1005]

Linguistic depictions of or references to corporeality, contained within texts, evidence a *topos* or metanarrative with respect to "blindness" which functions not simply through association of meaning, but by the fusion of metaphor domains affecting how language can be used. This consequently relates to "mind" as reasoning process, a corporeal function, since the distinction between body and "mind," physical and mental perception, 'is alien to the biblical worldview.'[1006] "Seeing" and "reasoning" are interlinked within biblical writings,

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[1003] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, pp. 18-21. Bolt discusses blindness in relation to 'the ubiquitous' seeing-knowing metaphor, the foundation of which is 'the idea that not seeing is synonymous with not knowing.'

[1004] Ben Whitburn and Rod Michalko, 'Blindness/Sightedness: Disability Studies and the Defiance of Di-Vision', in *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*, 2nd edition (Oxon - New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 219-234: p. 219. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429430817-16>

[1005] Whitburn and Michalko, p. 220.

[1006] Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York - London - New Delhi - Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 26.

meaning that portrayals of deviance from the ideals of seeing and knowing cannot be looked at separately.

The interrelation between “blindness” and “understanding” within New Testament writings is not a simple issue to consider, not least because “blindness” is used both literally, to refer to physical ocular impairment, and metaphorically, to refer to a distorted or non-existent reasoning process, sometimes concurrently on both levels. It is, therefore, necessary to consider and examine the interrelation between these two corporeal functions, since that interrelation affects the usage of “sight”/“blindness” and “understanding”/”lack of reasoning” in the contexts of the texts being examined.[1007]

7.1 Blindness in Historical Context

Beginning from the concept that societies contemporary to the texts being considered operated from corporeal ideals which nobody attained, that there was a continuum of vision ‘no greater or lesser than any other thing that occurs within a population,’[1008] it would be logical to assume that everyone within those societies had vision that was impaired in some way. Martha L. Rose suggests that there was not the gulf between sighted people and blind people as there is today.[1009] However, Bill Hughes cites this point to argue Rose ‘conflates

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[1007] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 22. ‘For sensory anthropologists the senses are to be conceived in reference to culture,’ recognising that knowledge is culturally and historically embodied language.

[1008] Rod Michalko and Tanya Titchkosky, ‘Blindness: A Cultural History of Blindness’, in *A Cultural History of Disability in the Modern Age*, eds. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder (London - New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 61-77: p. 62.

[1009] Rose, *The Staff of Oedipus* (2003), p. 79.

propinquity with empathetic knowledge and assumes that the ubiquitous presence of blind people forms a bulwark against 'sightist' and ableist attitudes.'[1010] There is a general lack of evidence for Rose's proposition; whereas Rose proposes an integrated blind community in antiquity, Georgina Kleege suggests blindness, in antiquity's visual cultures, was a synonym for inattention and ignorance.[1011] Sightlessness is not a simple concept within Greco-Roman literature; though not always the case, in Greek literature the specific description "blind" can be associated in with ignorance and moral vice, a metaphor potentially arising, according to Eleftheria A. Bernidaki-Aldous, from the movement of those physically blind being deemed to be "confused" or "misguided".[1012] The explicit description "blind" (τυφλὸς) in New Testament writings represents a specific negative condition, more than simply a seeming complete lack of physical sight. Although lack of sight is in itself negative in New Testament writings, "blind" (τυφλὸς) relates to a particular type of assumed negative metanarrative, located according to the association between seeing and knowing.

The metanarrative accompanying New Testament references to or depictions of "blind" or "blindness" relates to physiognomic rhetoric,[1013] given that

[1010] Bill Hughes, *A Historical Sociology of Disability: Human Validity and Invalidity from Antiquity to Early Modernity* (London - New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 166.

[1011] Georgina Kleege, *Sight Unseen* (New Haven - London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 456.

[1012] Eleftheria A. Bernidaki-Aldous, *Blindness in a Culture of Light* (New York - Bern - Frankfurt am Main - Paris: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 49.

[1013] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 27. According to Parsons, physiognomy was 'part and parcel of rhetorical theory' and was 'especially useful' when trying to condemn or blame.

the eye 'is central to physiognomic thinking' and commonly connected to moral character in Greek and Roman antiquity.[1014] Some ancient physiognomic beliefs held that a person's process of reasoning or understanding could be known through their eyes, [1015] within a cultural context where 'darkness was an abyss of ignorance into which only the worst and most damned had been consigned.'[1016] Effectively, by considering a literary culture that operates from an ideal corporeality, or at least close enough to it, blindness becomes a particular deficiency that operates on both a physical and metaphorical level, the latter being the point at which impaired perception and reasoning become fused.

In his seminal work *In the Beginning There was Darkness*, John Hull states that 'the Bible was written by sighted people' and expresses the 'distinctive perspective' of sighted people,[1017] despite the likelihood of some form of visual impairment in any potential audience. New Testament writings do not seem to recognise any spectrum of visual acuity, with blindness frequently being metaphorically symbolised 'as spiritual darkness and sin' and blind characters functioning as 'props' in 'indirect characterizations,' for example of Peter, disciples, or Jewish leaders.[1018] It is important to probe the portrayals of

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[1014] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 77.

[1015] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 34. Parsons states that whilst the eye was important within physiognomic thought, it is important to remember that the notion of the physical body indicating moral character was not upheld by all in antiquity. Taking this as a starting point, it would then be possible for those physiognomic standards to be both communicated and challenged within biblical texts.

[1016] Hughes, pp. 164-165.

[1017] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 4.

[1018] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 8.

blindness in New Testament writings for implicit details,[1019] even if, as explored by Yael Avrahami, 'embarking on a journey to reveal embedded cultural notions in an ancient text is not a straightforward task.'[1020]

It is the normate subject position, the sighted viewpoint in New Testament writings, that proposes and uses the "sight as understanding" metanarrative. According to Bolt, the metanarrative of blindness purports 'an overriding narrative that seems to displace agency,' leading to the recurrent use of tropes, such as the blind beggar.[1021] In the case of literary opposition between "sight", as high visual acuity, as opposed to "blindness", not perceiving by visual means, within New Testament writings referencing blindness there appears be an almost binary attitude to the sight/blindness boundary. Characters can either "see" appropriately, or they cannot, understand and reason, or find themselves "other" in terms of their understanding.

7.2 Terminology

The word "blind" has negative connotations and 'dreaded associations.' It is not a neutral or purely descriptive adjective, instead connoting 'darkness, destitution, despair,' and the stereotypical beggar[1022] in many texts, including New Testament writings. That metanarrative is not anachronistic, even if it is

[1019] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 7.

[1020] Avrahami, p. 4.

[1021] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, p. 10. Though not centred on New Testament writings, Bolt's perspective is directly applicable, particularly with respect to characters in literature being defined by their blindness.

[1022] Kleege, p. 19.

identified from a modern perspective, as it originated before the societies and cultures in which New Testament texts were written.[1023] Although there are a range of words in Ancient Greek relating to 'various degrees' of visual impairment,[1024] the majority of references to impaired sight in New Testament writings, of which there are not as many as might be imagined, use τυφλός to designate "blind". Within this literary context specifically, "blind" (τυφλός) appears to mean more than the definition 'being unable to see.' This is reflected in the second definition and gloss in the BDAG, which provides the additional option of 'being unable to understand, *incapable of comprehending*.'[1025]

The Greek words for "see" (ὁράω) and "know" (οἶδα) are etymologically linked,[1026] so it is unsurprising that blindness as metaphor for ignorance was 'quite widespread' in Greek and Roman literature.[1027] The pre-existing metaphorical link between the domains of sight and knowledge, the moral and

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[1023] Kleege, p. 21.

[1024] Van den Abeele, p. 69.

[1025] *BDAG*, p. 1021.

[1026] In terms of etymological development, the aorist of the root of οἶδα became the aorist of ὁράω, meaning that "know" and "see" are intrinsically linked at a linguistic level. Both words denote processes, the boundaries between which, in certain contexts, seem somewhat flexible. For example, ὁράω can indicate the equivalent of "knowing," such as when "seeing" involves realisation or comprehension, and "knowing" (οἶδα) can be described as "seeing" using the reasoning process, as a non-visual corporeal function. Cf. Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2008), p. 73. See also James Morwood, *The Oxford Grammar of Classical Greek* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 95; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 483; P. Kotzia, 'Philosophical Vocabulary', in *The History of Ancient Greek From the Beginnings to Late Antiquity*, ed. A. F. Christidis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 1089-1103: p. 1010; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden - Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 597-598, 1476.

[1027] Hartsock, p. 73.

ethical implications of 'the seeing-knowing metaphor'[1028] are culturally embedded in any depictions in which τυφλός plays a role. For this reason, it is important to keep in mind Bolt's warning that 'much as the metaphorical ignorance associated with blindness grounds the epistemological construct of sight, the alterity evoked by the term *the blind* grounds the normalcy of the sighted.' The word "blind" is 'problematic [in modern English] because it denotes much that bears no relation to visual impairment.'[1029] Similarly, τυφλός is used to represent total and permanent blindness,[1030] when used in relation to sight and in relation to the reasoning process. There are clear implications made through the usage of τυφλός, meaning that it is significant when it is not used for impaired vision, such as in relation to Paul[1031] being "unable to see" rather than being referred to as "blind" in Acts 9 (see below).

7.3 The Blending of Metaphor Domains

Seeing-knowing forms a blended metaphor domain and because of this the majority of references to blindness, as the opposite of seeing-knowing, contain layered meanings. Blindness is one of the more ableist metaphors in biblical texts, specifically of those where sensory impairments are a signifier, but 'modern commentators have often not questioned those assumptions' linked to

[1028] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, pp. 18-19.

[1029] Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness*, pp. 23, 18.

[1030] Van den Abeele, p. 69.

[1031] In the interests of consistency and clarity, for this thesis the nominal reference of Paul will be used in all instances where New Testament writings refer to Saul/Paul.

blindness when considering potential meanings, leading to naturalised biases in thinking and interpretive 'blind spots.' Lawrence sums this up by observing that there is 'much to support the idea that "blindness" has been "naturalized" in this way in the gospel narratives' portrayals of characters with visual impairments.'[1032] Corporeal diversity was "the norm" in the ancient world,[1033] with few meeting the ideal corporeal standards embedded within language. New Testament writings, though, use the false binary between sight and complete darkness. The metaphorical use of blindness, functioning by linking the supposedly known domain of sight to the unknown of knowledge, uses perception of complete sight as the ideal as opposed to darkness, rather than the reality of a spectrum of visual acuity.

Metaphorically, blindness and not understanding create something of a fused domain, where conceptual blending projects a simple thought or image[1034] in such a way that the meaning appears obvious, but is in actuality 'indisputably not "there".'[1035] In exploring the idea of conceptual blending, Giles Fauconnier and Mark Turner prove that the fusing of metaphorical domains develops a structure whereby there are 'relations available in the blend that do not exist in

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[1032] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 39.

[1033] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, pp. 40-41.

[1034] Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), p. 18. Conceptual blending or integration appears to be a simplistic mental operation, but is, in fact, highly imaginative in the sense that two disparate domains essentially become seen as one; this type of operation is essential to thought but often unacknowledged.

[1035] Fauconnier and Turner, p. 20.

the separate inputs.'[1036] Essentially, the language of seeing-knowing contains meanings not present in "blindness" or "not understanding": the blended domain produces a portrayal that is 'counterfactual'[1037] outside of its linguistic context. To a certain extent, the notion of blindness being used in relation to a lack of understanding functions in a similar way to an idiom, from the perspective that as a metaphor becomes an idiom, 'it can gain properties which are incompatible with the original image but which are compatible with its new rhetorical functions.'[1038] Within New Testament writings, the use of blindness to signify ignorance and misunderstanding, or even inner darkness, creates the situation where texts consider 'the sighted body as the norm and the sightless body as a deviation from it' and scholars have uncritically echoed that projection, despite embedded linguistic values not necessarily reflecting audience reality. Texts seem to contain sight/no sight and understanding/foolish binaries, without acknowledging 'the embodied intricacies of sensory differences.' References to blindness are not 'innocent turns of phrase but rather ideologically laden statements' revealing more about the author or text than the blind person being depicted.[1039]

[1036] Fauconnier and Turner, p. 42.

[1037] Fauconnier and Turner, p. 31. Fauconnier and Turner discuss linguistic examples which, according to philosophers of language, are 'contrary to fact' - showing that the created meaning does not necessarily reflect the original linguistic meaning.

[1038] Michael Billig and Katie MacMillan, 'Metaphor, Idiom and Ideology: The Search for "no Smoking Guns" across Time', in *Discourse & Society*, 16.4 (2005), vol. 459-480: p. 471. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926505053050>

[1039] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma in the Gospels*, pp. 35-39.

Chad Hartsock recognises that ‘the physiognomic use of blindness and the metaphorical use of blindness are at times different things,’ yet in effect they should be treated together as ‘in terms of their literary function both accomplish the same goals when it comes to characterization.’[1040] Even physical and metaphorical description cannot necessarily be separated, given the literary function of blended metaphor domains. It is worth also noting that even in New Testament examples where blindness is a physical description, potentially without explicit connotations as to a lack of understanding, the blind person is usually an example of narrative prosthesis and not an independent character.

Whilst acknowledging that to be designated as “other” ‘in the mind of a physiognomically-conscious world is to fall short of the desired mark,’[1041] Hartsock seems to construct “disability” as a right/wrong binary rather than as the “other” judged to be too far from the ideal on account of distance. Physiognomics was not necessarily the judgement of a binary standard, so with respect to physical impairment in general Hartsock’s judgement might need adjustment, but with regards to blindness New Testament writings do appear to evidence a sight/blind and understanding/ignorance corresponding binary equation, making the blended metaphorical domain a distinct case for examination. This being said, Hartsock’s *topos* of blindness in ancient literature is an interesting place to start in terms of potential context for New Testament writings. According to this *topos*, there are four broad elements of “blindness” that need to be considered,

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[1040] Hartsock, p. 2.

[1041] Hartsock, pp. 54-55.

the first three relating to an explicitly negative condition: the ‘worst of misfortunes that can befall a person,’ creating the condition of helplessness; punishment, by God or man, for a crime; denoting ignorance of truth, immorality, possibly as a judgement of physically sighted characters. On rare occasions, blind prophets can represent the inverse of ignorance; this notion needs the three negative elements to provide metaphorical strength.[1042] Positive depictions of “blind” (τυφλός) in New Testament writings emphasise the negative aspects of the metanarrative of blindness by the exceptionality of their nature.

Whilst New Testament writings do uphold the blindness as ignorance metanarrative, there are points within narratives where the language embedded with that metanarrative is concurrently challenged by itself; this tends to occur where there is both physical and metaphorical blindness explicitly featured. For example, metaphorical blindness is negative, yet physically blind characters in the so-called healing narratives challenge the automatic assertions that they should be completely helpless and spiritually ignorant, according to Hartsock’s *topos*, if they are not specified as prophets. Additionally, by virtue of the narrative nature of many New Testament references to blindness, descriptions of blindness in relation to character can be ambiguous, despite their physiognomic context.

[1042] Hartsock, pp. 64-65. According to Hartsock, the three negative elements are true of almost every blind character.

7.4 The Importance of the Eye in Relation to Character

Against the discursive backdrop of the contrast between external and internal righteousness (Matthew 6.16-18) and the suggestion that genuine internal piety leads to treasures in heaven (Matthew 19-21), Matthew 6.22-23 is a proverbial statement that contains 'a cleverly constructed riddle which can be read on two different levels.'[1043] Francois Viljoen, as well as Davies and Allison[1044] among others, respond to commentators tending to regard the eyes as windows with light entering the body by highlighting the anachronism of ignoring the extramission theory of vision, which is more relevant to the textual context of Jesus' proverbial statement.

Since the eye is figured as a corporeal lamp, the opposition posed by Matthew 6.22-23 is "healthy/good" (ἁπλοῦς) versus "unhealthy/wicked" (πονηρός), followed by querying whether light or darkness is being sent out by the eye in question:[1045]

> The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

[1043] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 639. See also Candida R. Moss, 'Blurred Vision and Ethical Confusion: The Rhetorical Function of Matthew 6:22-23', in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 73.4 (2011), pp. 757-776: pp. 760-761.

[1044] Francois P Viljoen, 'A Contextualised Reading of Matthew 6:22-23: "Your Eye Is the Lamp of Your Body"', in *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, vol. 65.1 (2009), pp. 1-5 <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v65i1.152>; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 635.

[1045] Hartsock, pp. 143-144.

> Ὁ λύχνος τοῦ σώματός ἐστιν ὁ ὀφθαλμός. ἐὰν οὖν ᾖ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου ἁπλοῦς, ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου φωτεινὸν ἔσται· ἐὰν δὲ ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου πονηρὸς ᾖ, ὅλον τὸ σῶμά σου σκοτεινὸν ἔσται. εἰ οὖν τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν, τὸ σκότος πόσον.

The eye as a lamp (ὁ λύχνος) expressed the common Hellenistic affirmation as to both the importance of the eye and the widespread belief as to the human eye containing fire or light, with ancient Jewish texts reflecting the conviction of the eye containing its own light source.[1046] It is the light within the person, not their eyes, that is crucial to Matthew 6.22-23; the initial level of the proverbial statement considers the physical condition of the eyes, but the metaphorical interpretation considers the condition of the person's understanding or reasoning process, as reflected by the light their eye produces. Although there are two levels to the imagery, neither can actually be separated from the other. Physiologically the question is whether the eye is "healthy" or "sick" and "malfunctioning". Ethically the comparison is between "good" and "evil".

Layered metaphoricality enables the presence of both a medical sense and an ethical one in Matthew 6.22-23. This can be taken further than the possibility of double vision: if the eye is "bad", a person's body must be full of darkness, since the sick eye is a result of projecting that inner darkness.[1047] As a recognisable ethical term, "evil eye" (ὀφθαλμὸς πονηρός) could indicate that this text

[1046] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1- 13* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 2000), p. 158; Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, pp. 332–33; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 625.

[1047] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 301; Davies and Allison, *Matthew 1-7*, p. 640. One meaning of ἁπλοῦς is literally single or simple, meaning that "healthy" can indicate clear as opposed to double vision.

concerns morality.[1048] Near Eastern cultures' "evil eye" was covetous and, metaphorically speaking, 'an evil, covetous eye is the source of darkness,'[1049] but the projection depicted by a lamp could indicate something more sinister within the imagery. Moss states that the juxtaposition in Matthew 6.22-23 of two possible conditions, "unhealthy/dark" (πονηρός/σκότος) and "healthy/light" (ἁπλοῦς/φῶς), together with their interdependence, 'suggests that the meaning of the logion cannot be reduced to a simple indictment of jealousy.'[1050] A lack of internal light, an unethical character, leads to a defect caused by sin when that internal light goes out; once the eyes' source of internal light becomes darkness, an individual becomes blind. If the reasoning process is affected by what it perceives, then impaired perception causes something of an echo chamber for the person within that scenario. There is a cycle of internal darkness causing blindness, with a lack of perception in turn causing further impaired reasoning and consequent internal darkness.

Luke 11.34-36 uses the lamp metaphor and its duality, but verse 35 ('Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness' - σκόπει οὖν μὴ τὸ φῶς τὸ ἐν σοὶ σκότος ἐστίν) makes the challenge as to 'moral and spiritual readiness

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[1048] For a more detailed discussion of late-antique visual theory, in the context of Rabbinic culture, see Rachel Neis, *The Sense of Sight in Rabbinic Culture: Jewish Ways of Seeing in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 27-40. For "evil eye" specifically, see p. 31.

[1049] Hagner, *Matthew 1- 13*, p. 158-159. According to Alvar Nuno, 'the Romans considered that just about anyone could, under the right circumstances, cast the evil eye. Envy and the evil eye are so intimately related that sometimes it is not possible to differentiate between them.' See Alvar Nuno, p. 297.

[1050] Moss, 'Blurred Vision', p. 762. If the whole body is filled with darkness, then the image has to be closely connected with unrighteousness and eschatological judgement.

to see' more explicit.[1051] The Lukan version of Jesus' proverbial statement also focuses more overtly on the light emitted by the eye as corporeal lamp. As per the evil eye tradition, assuming an extramission theory of vision, a blind person would be deemed to be projecting darkness. Physiognomic assumption of blind eyes emitting darkness contributed to the rejection and fear of blind people in antiquity:[1052] part of what makes this text uncomfortable is the idea that blindness could project out its own supposed darkness and affect the eschatological status of others.[1053]

Knowing and understanding run concurrently to the enlightenment of ocular perception, according to Ephesians 1.18, which reads:

> so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints
>
> πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας [ὑμῶν] εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς τίς ἐστιν ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ, τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις

Although the eyes of the heart are not the focus of the text, eyes must contain light, as correct internal reasoning, in order to know hope and future calling in faith. Andrew T. Lincoln uses the perfect tense of 'being enlightened'

[1051] Nolland, *Luke 9.21-18.34*, p. 657.

[1052] Hartsock, pp. 145-146.

[1053] Perhaps asking this question probes the metaphorical nature of the text too far, but nevertheless, its problematic potential does need to be considered.

(πεφωτισμένους) to show that Ephesians 1.18 has the sense of a completed action which has continuing force and references 'the illumination of conversion.'[1054] Enlightened eyes may display correct reasoning through the light they emit, but the notion that there is a continuance to the process of being enlightened indicates that correct reasoning and understanding must continue in order for eyes to function. If, as discussed in earlier chapters, reasoning takes place in the heart, eyes cannot emit light if there is none in the heart to project. Those without a correct reasoning process only have access to darkness and, by default, do not have the understanding of a "converted person". Where correct reasoning ceases, light ceases and so does sight, both physically and metaphorically. Without "enlightenment" eyes are 'darkened in their understanding' (Ephesians 4.18).

7.5 The Hypocrisy of Blindness and Sin?

Impairment of vision is used to represent sin within gospel metaphors, making blindness a negative character trait. It is specifically used to illustrate hypocrisy in Matthew 7.3-5 and Luke 6.41-42, which both compare impediments to vision in terms of size. In both versions, those who claim they can see are depicted with a log (δοκός) in their eye, which, though hyperbolic even from a metaphorical point of view, would make vision impossible.

[1054] Lincoln, p. 58. Light represents inner knowledge, according to Lincoln, which if considered as the process of reasoning purports to understanding, thereby linking light to correct reasoning. Via the extramission theory of vision, blindness is linked to darkness, as incorrect light, and problematic reasoning.

Matthew 7.3-5 summarises the issue of having 'unfairly critical attitudes to others…combined with a naïve lack of self-criticism.'[1055] The hypocrite being addressed is rebuked for pointing out the small item (κάρφος) in someone else's eye, unaware, or choosing to ignore, the larger item obstructing their own vision; they are not in a position to clearly see in order to help the person they are attempting to chastise.[1056] France draws attention to two related points, that it is inappropriate to focus on someone else's failings when yours is greater, and that it is impractical to offer help until your problem is dealt with.[1057]

Neither Matthew 7.3 nor Luke 6.41 explicitly attribute hypocrisy or inappropriate reasoning to a deliberate choice, it is more a "failure to notice" rather than deliberate deception, a person losing sight of their own situation.[1058] Although blindness is not stated, it is visualised through a definitive and shocking image. [1059] Nolland also points out the change of verb usage, from "see" (βλέπεις - normally literal) to "notice" (κατανοεῖς - mental perception, not vision),[1060] showing

[1055] France, *Matthew*, pp. 273-274.

[1056] See also Duffield, pp. 117-118. Duffield also explains how the Matthean Jesus is not deriding discernment, more exhorting the avoidance of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy in this case is to assume that one might have the authority to judge without fault, effectively inappropriately claiming personal divinity.

[1057] France, *Matthew*, p. 275.

[1058] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 276 (with particular reference to Matthew 7.6), 319.

[1059] Τυφλός is not used and so cannot explicitly add the specific connotations of the narrative. However, the imagery is situated within the seeing-knowing domain and so those associations are never far away.

[1060] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 320. Although Nolland makes these distinctions, which is somewhat helpful to consider here, the blended domain of sight and understanding makes a true separation of literal and metaphorical sight difficult.

that the physical obstructions to sight are illustrative of interference with, or obstacles to, the reasoning process. “Failure to notice” might not be a direct result of choice, but a hypocrite is still responsible for their inability to perceive accurately.

Removal of an obstruction from the eye, which is somehow embedded and prevents sight, would have been acknowledged by the audiences of Matthew and Luke as a surgery. Surgery, as a medical procedure, was a last resort because of the associated risks, in part from the lack of institutionalized training for surgeons.[1061] Those who did not die from eye surgery would probably have not recovered the vision necessary to perform any medical procedure or surgery on another person. The original patient, the one with a log or large object in their eye, would most likely have impaired vision after surgery and therefore be unable to be the one to remove the relatively minor obstruction, the speck, from the person they had previously criticised. If the message of the image is to not judge without clarity of vision, then the source domain of the metaphor would suggest that, even with the removal of an obstruction, no one has the clarity of sight to judge anyone else. If every person has impaired vision, some degree of physical blindness representing spiritual blindness, then no one has the capacity to judge anyone else.

[1061] Van den Abeele, p. 73.

7.6 Blind Guides

Matthew 15.14 and Luke 6.39 raise the question of whether someone who is "blind" (τυφλὸς) can guide another person who is blind, as well as querying where the responsibility for blindness lies, when both people are referenced with the same description.

Matthew 15.14:

Let them alone; they are *blind* guides of the blind. And if one *blind* person guides another, both will fall into a pit.

Luke 6.39:

He also told them a parable: "Can a *blind* person guide a *blind* person? Will not both fall into a pit?

As a proverbial idea, a blind person leading another blind person into a pit addresses the issue of wisely choosing whose lead to follow. The people following the Pharisees are described as blind, but the cause of their blindness is initially not the 'blind guides,' so are they blind because they have made the wrong choice in consciously choosing to follow leadership that does not recognise Christ? Or are they unaware and trust religious leaders who know and choose to ignore?

In his response to Matthew 15.14, Hull argues that the apparently popular proverb is, actually, 'a sneer at the problems of blind mobility' that is false to the experience of blind people. Blind people can lead or guide one another along a familiar route, showing that 'blind guides' is an example of how metaphors from

the sighted world can be used to marginalize or diminish.[1062] The Matthean language assumes not only that "blind" (τυφλὸς) represents someone with no sight at all, but also that metaphorical blindness describes someone without correct understanding or capacity to reason. What Donald A. Hagner describes as the 'absurdity' of the situation, of both people falling into a pit, makes it 'hard to find a more vivid image of lostness, hopelessness, and futility.'[1063] Even where there seems to be two different states of reasoning within the proverb, in this context blindness is considered as a negative judgement applying to both.

Interpretations of Matthew 15.14 and Luke 6.39 often focus on leadership, implying that the leaders have failed in their responsibility to open the spiritual eyes of those under their care. The leaders in focus are a 'damaging influence' because they 'have themselves missed the way in their understanding of what it means to be the people of God' and propagate distorted values,[1064] passing on distorted misunderstanding as teaching. Religious authorities could portray themselves metaphorically as guides to the blind,[1065] taking on the responsibility for teaching those under their leadership how to follow a standard of correct reasoning, towards the ideal of understanding. This positioning would indicate that it was possible to learn how to spiritually see and move out of ignorance, with the "blind guides" preventing any potential progress. Matthew 15.14 links

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[1062] John M Hull, 'Difficult Texts', p. 35.

[1063] Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* (Nashville - Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1995), p. 436.

[1064] France, *Matthew*, p. 585. Matthew 15.7-9 is cited as evidence, by France, for these powerful allegations.

[1065] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, p. 533.

onward to Matthew 23.16-26, where the Pharisees' blindness consists of their inaccurate interpretation of the law. They are failing to distinguish between the important and the unimportant, facing catastrophe because they, according to the Matthean narrative, completely miss the will of God.[1066] Those who are blind to the will of God, who fail to see it on account of their problematic reasoning, should not have the responsibility of leading those who are blind on account of not yet having the opportunity to see. Instead of being an unchangeable state, the condemnation of the "blind guides" is that they have chosen to remain in their blindness and falsely guide others, forcing them to remain "blind" and facing the same fate.

Luke 6.39 could be interpreted, like Matthew 15.14, as an anti-Pharisaic polemic, providing context for Luke 6.41-42 attacking those judging others, or as exhorting believers, in general, to not advise others if they themselves are "blind". Bovon suggests that rather than all areas of leadership being addressed, it is 'intellectual leadership that is being illustrated.'[1067] Nolland moves further away from Pharisaic leadership when he comments that verse 39 and its surrounding text does not actually specify who the blind leaders are, instead interpreting the proverbial image from the perspective that a disciple is restricted by their teacher, so those who suggest an alternative to the will of God 'leave their disciples in their blindness.'[1068] Attributing responsibility to the intellectual leaders does not

[1066] Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 333.

[1067] Bovon, *Luke 1*, p. 248.

[1068] Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, pp. 306-307.

deny the responsibility of others, as noted with regards to both the guide and the follower described as “blind”. Every believer is required to take on instruction and work towards spiritual sight, understanding and maturity. The metaphorical use of “blind” stresses the association of sight with insight and faith, with “blind” relating to the lack of both.

During the seven woes of Matthew 23.16-36, “blind” appears five times as part of a ‘metaphorical marginalization of the Pharisees as a group.’[1069] The verses linked to their blindness form a subset within the woes, with three references to blindness in the third woe (vv13-22) and one each in the fourth and fifth (vv23-36), forming a central part of ‘a scathing attack upon the Jewish leadership.’ Hull, amongst others, warns against building negative pictures of ancient Judaism and being sensitive to anti-Jewish prejudice from this criticism of a particular group of leaders.[1070] In Matthew 23.17 the group of Pharisees are specifically addressed as ‘fools and blind’ (μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί),[1071] the only occasion

[1069] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 34.

[1070] John M Hull, ‘Difficult Texts’, pp. 34-35. See also Yair Furstenberg, ‘The Shared Image of Pharisaic Law in the Gospels and Rabbinic Tradition’, in *The Pharisees*, eds. Joseph Sievers and Amy-Jill Levine (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), pp. 1990-239: p. 199. Furstenberg writes that ‘any attempt to outline the legal positions of the Pharisees, their policies and exegetical approaches, is obstructed by the nature of the sources.’ As such, any interpretation is, by its nature, is reliant on one-sided and biased sources, ones in which particular groups of opponents are depicted, who happen to be members of the Jewish authorities in that specific place/time.

[1071] The NA28 Greek text presents the descriptions as μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί. English translations render this as both ‘fools and blind’ (cf. KJV, ASV, AMP as examples), keeping both the two separate plural nouns, and as the order of the Greek text, and ‘blind fools’ (cf. NRSV, ERV), rendering “blind” as an adjective and then following English grammatical word order. Although the see-knowing blended domain indicates a somewhat blurred boundary between “not seeing” and “not knowing,” μωρός and τυφλὸς are not synonymous and not all commentators treat them as such. Luz, for example, writes that Jesus ‘refutes these “blind men” and “fools,”’ separating two synchronous descriptions, cf. Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, p. 120. See also Kurek-Chomycz and Swai.

where μωρός and τυφλὸς appear together in New Testament writings. The phrase Μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί links a problematic reasoning process to blindness and the connotations associated with the adjective "blind" (τυφλὸς). The woes against the Pharisees are centred around Pharisaic teaching on the practicalities of the law, who are alleged to ignore the importance of justice, mercy and love. Lawrence argues that one of the purposes of Matthew 23 is to affirm the disciples by contrasting them with Pharisees, who have rejected Jesus and are therefore purported to maintain their followers in blindness.[1072] The description "fool" refers to a problematic reasoning process leading to the inability to understand, presumably by choice, and "blind" refers to both the inability to perceive and the projection of misunderstanding to those following the "blind" Pharisees. Whilst being 'fools' (μωροὶ) may have caused the state of being 'blind [people]' (τυφλοί), each description can technically be made without the other, as exhibited in other "woes" referencing "blind" without "fool". By describing the Pharisees as both μωρός and τυφλὸς, Matthew 23 is amplifying its criticism of them.

According to Hagner, the Pharisees have been making a distinction between supposedly non-binding oaths, made in name of the temple and by the gold of the temple, and binding oaths, made by the altar and by the gifts on it. If this is the case, then the repeated point of "blindness" concerns their lack of recognition that the temple and altar make the gold and the gift holy.[1073] It is not

[1072] Luz, *Matthew 21-28*, p. 119; Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 34.

[1073] Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p. 669.

simply a misunderstanding of values, but that an oath in every case should be regarded as binding: exceptions allowed by these Pharisees are not allowed by Jesus (Matthew 23.20-21), necessitating their rebuke.

Interestingly, the use of "fool" (μωρός) as a rebuke seems to directly contradict Matthew 5.22, where calling a brother (ἀδελφός) by the label "fool" is expressly 'liable to the hell of fire.' That contradiction only dissipates, according to Davies and Allison, if it is assumed that Jesus is exempt from the prohibition or if the prohibition only refers to addressing "brothers".[1074] Given that, within Matthew, "brother" is often used to refer to a fellow believer, where Jesus refers to the group of Pharisees as "fools" he is both designating them as outside of the believing group on account of their incorrect reasoning, as well as rebuking their choice to not follow the reasoning process he expects. As unbelievers, they are potentially liable to the hell of fire due to their choice to not understand; they are also liable to judgements on account of projecting darkness through their eyes as they attempt to falsely teach others how to follow their incorrect reasoning process.

A non-specific problematic teacher, described using the concept of being "a guide to the blind," appears in the second chapter of Romans.[1075] Against a backdrop of hypocritical judgement, in Romans 2.17-19 Paul 'indicts the Jewish

[1074] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 19-28*, p. 291.

[1075] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, pp. 89–90. Dunn discusses Romans 2.1 as outlining an attack aimed at hypocrisy, but also at what Pauls deems 'a typically Jewish attitude.' Dunn's evaluation of the opponent being addressed may well be accurate, but we should be careful with respect to assuming that Paul is criticising Jewish attitudes in general.

person who knows the law, claiming thereby to know the will of God'[1076] and 'augments the previous depiction of the pretentious bigot'[1077] given at the beginning of the chapter, by highlighting a series of boasts that those who in reality need to teach themselves (cf. Romans 2.21) are apparently making. Those boasts include being 'a guide to the blind', but the language of Romans 2.19 frames this with the notion of confidence, adding an element of uncertainty to the description: 'if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind' (πέποιθάς τε σεαυτὸν ὁδηγὸν εἶναι τυφλῶν).[1078] The NRSV translation takes the meaning of πείθω as 'to be so convinced that one puts confidence in something,' resulting in the translation 'if you are sure that you are a guide to the blind.' However, depending on context, πείθω can also be used as 'to cause to come to a particular point of view…to persuade, mislead.'[1079] Romans 2.19 could, therefore, also be read as 'you persuade that you yourself are a guide of the blind.'[1080] If the non-specific problematic teacher cannot teach appropriate reasoning or understanding, they cannot be 'a guide to the blind' because of their lack of correct reasoning and spiritual blindness. Yet they have potentially persuaded others that they can

[1076] Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids - Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 125.

[1077] Jewett, *Romans*, p. 221.

[1078] Some translations, such as the ASV, remove the "if," turning Romans 2.19 into more of a statement, presumably on account of the present indicative active: '[thou] are confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind.'

[1079] Cf. *BDAG*, pp. 791-792.

[1080] Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p. 111. Dunn interprets the use of πέποιθάς τε σεαυτὸν as indicating a choice not to know, that the "blind guides" have persuaded themselves, rather than being given their present conviction by God.

guide them. If they are understood as “blind”, then extramission understandings of blindness, in effect the broadcasting of darkness, or “dark sight”, would emphasise the absurdity of their claim to be ‘a guide to the blind’ given their own metaphorical blindness.

Interestingly here, the description “blind” and the designation “fools” are separate: ‘a guide to the blind’ (Romans 2.19) and ‘a corrector of the foolish’ (Romans 2.20).[1081] Within many Greek and Hellenistic Jewish cultures, being a tutor or teacher (παιδευτής) was a supreme accomplishment,[1082] particularly if the tutor enabled their charge to reason in the expected way. ‘Of fools’ (ἀφρόνων) in Romans 2.20 conveys a sense of superiority, even if the text is also undermining that superiority by suggesting its absurdity. Fools were frequently considered ‘ineducable’ by Greek and Jewish writers, even if the tutor had to attempt ‘to overcome this barrier.’[1083] From this perspective, ‘a corrector of the foolish’ might be interpreted as a pointless task. When considered alongside Roman 2.21’s ‘will you not teach yourself,’ the superiority of the problematic teacher is further undermined. Effectively, the person attributing both sight and wisdom to themselves is shown to be both “blind” and “foolish” – spiritual blindness is unspoken but evident by the layers of meaning to the various titles listed.

[1081] Romans 2.20 uses ἄφρων to designate “fool.” Whilst both are translated into English as “fool,” μωρός and ἄφρων are not synonymous with each other. Within Pauline literature, μωρός is used in 1 Corinthians and ἄφρων is used in 2 Corinthians, to describe a more momentary state of foolishness or insanity, as opposed to a permanent condition. See Kurek-Chomycz and Swai.

[1082] Jewett, *Romans*, p. 226.

[1083] Jewett, *Romans*, p. 226.

7.7 The Punishment of Blindness

Blindness appears to be referenced as punishment in a variety of places in biblical texts, but 'there are only two unambiguous cases of it actually taking place' and only one of those occurs within the New Testament collection of writings.'[1084] In Acts 13.6-12 Elymas, also called Bar-Jesus, is effectively cursed by Paul when he tries to distract and/or oppose Barnabas and Paul as they provide teaching and the word of God to the proconsul, Sergius Paulus.[1085] When Elymas, described as 'a certain magician' (τινὰ μάγον), 'opposed them and tried to turn the proconsul away from faith' (Acts 13.6), Paul's reaction is vehement and forceful (Acts 13.10-11). Elymas is called "You son of the devil" (υἱὲ διαβόλου) on account that he is 'full of all deceit and villainy' (πλήρης παντὸς δόλου καὶ πάσης ῥᾳδιουργίας), then is caused to lose his sight completely. Against a backdrop of physiognomic consciousness and extramission theories of vision, 'it is only natural that Elymas' eyes be blinded'[1086] because his reasoning process is incorrect and he is, metaphorically, filled with darkness and he cannot emit light through his eyes. The conceptual blending of blindness and ignorance could mean that from the perspective of the narrative it was a natural progression from ignorance to physical blindness, if the corporeal function of the reasoning process then affects the related corporeal function of ocular perception. Elymas was not following the reasoning process expected of him, according to the

[1084] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 59.

[1085] Acts 13.9 is the point of literary transition of Saul into Paul.

[1086] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 80.

standard set in the narrative, because 'he claimed falsely to be a medium of divine revelation.'[1087]

The punishment of Elymas is a marker in the Acts narrative. 'Filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 13.9) Paul is able to look intently at Elymas and immediately understand his reasoning process to be incorrect. That insight and the authority to pronounce the judgement of blindness, evidenced as being given by God, effectively pronounces the validity of Paul's new mission. What is interesting is that Elymas' blindness is said to be temporary, set to last 'for a while' (ἄχρι καιροῦ), and the divine judgement made has the potential to be reversed in some way. I. Howard Marshall suggests that, although we do not know the actual result, the temporary nature of the blindness is intended as stimulus to conversion,[1088] but whilst physical impairment in general has the opportunity, via healing, to be reversed, the progression into ignorance where there has been the choice to ignore revelation from God is more difficult. The connotations of ignorance associated with blindness and the choices evidenced earlier in the Elymas narrative suggest that although the "ending" as such is left unknown, it seems unlikely Elymas was converted and actually regained his sight. Surely Paul would have been credited with such a convert, should that conversion have taken place. The temporary nature of the judgement of blindness leaves space

[1087] The practice of magic is against the expect standard of reasoning within the narrative, yet Elymas obviously chosen to claim magic as effective reasoning. I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 232; Bruce, *Acts*, p. 249.

[1088] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 533.

for mercy in the character of Paul, directly contrasting with the cruelty of Paul's nature before his own conversion (Acts 9.1).

Additionally, Marshall argues that the temporary character of the judgement against Elymas 'suggests an analogy with what earlier happened to Paul himself.'[1089] Hull agrees that there are similarities, in that opposition and obstruction of the Gospel led to temporary blindness, even proposing that without Elymas' blindness the proconsul 'might not have accepted the Christian message, so the blindness of one led to the insight of the other.'[1090] The statement 'he believed' (ἐπίστευσεν) in Acts 13.12 is vague; it is possible that it refers to the first stage in the conversion process, but this is not necessarily the case.[1091] Blindness has a role in the narrative, of creating the prospect of conversion and spiritual sight, but the spiritual and metaphorical blindness of Elymas is not in itself reversed. Interestingly, Sergius Paulus is described as discerning (an intelligent man - ἀνήρ συνετός) and not ignorant at the beginning of the Acts 13.6-12 pericope, perhaps because whilst ignorant of the Gospel message he has not been previously exposed to it and chosen to ignore or work against the word of God. At the same time as being 'intelligent,' though, Sergius Paulus entertains the presence of a false prophet or magician. In any case,

[1089] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 533.

[1090] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 61.

[1091] The range in specific meaning of πίστεύω, from "to trust with complete confidence" to "consider possible," leads to a range of potential interpretations regarding the level of commitment in Sergius Paulus' response. Cf. *BDAG*, pp. 816-818. As well as potentially evidencing the first stage in the conversion process, Bruce also raises the possibility of courtesy being mistaken for conversion. See Bruce, *Acts*, pp. 249-250.

Sergius Paulus is not described as “blind” (τυφλός) by the author of Acts, who chooses not to highlight his lack of metaphorical sight on a linguistic level. It is Sergius Paulus’ magician who becomes “blind” and is thereby forced to move to the fringes of the community and inhabit the position of “the other”.

7.8 Acts’ Negation of Sight is not Blindness

What is commonly referred to as Paul’s “Damascus experience” and described as his being blinded on meeting Christ, appears in Acts 9.1-9, Acts 22.13-18 and Acts 26.13-18. ‘The parallel accounts contain a number of differences in detail’[1092] but they all have one particular thing in common: the description “blind” (τυφλός) is not used at any point. Though not specifically in relation to Acts, Hull comments that ‘[n]obody is more sensitive about not being blind than a partially-sighted person,’[1093] which could be a reason as to the absence of the description “blind” in all three accounts. The linguistic theory of negation provides another potential explanation.

In the initial Acts 9 account (Acts 9.1-19a), Paul reappears into the narrative somewhat abruptly.[1094] He is presented as someone who fights for the truth as he knows it, but, according to Hartsock, with the reader knowing he must actually be spiritually blind, given that he persecutes believers in Christ. Paul then encounters Christ, who exposes his error and ‘his physical condition is

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[1092] Conzelmann, *Acts*, p. 71.

[1093] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 86. Hull does make this comment as part of a discussion on Paul and his epistolary references to sight.

[1094] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 175.

made to mirror his now-exposed spiritual condition – he is blind on both counts.'[1095] Yet the Acts narrative does not use the word "blind" (τυφλός) and an absence of sight is instead described in Acts 9.8 as 'though his eyes were open, he could see nothing' (ἠγέρθη δὲ Σαῦλος ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς, ἀνεῳγμένων δὲ τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ οὐδὲν ἔβλεπεν). To quote Lisa Nahajec, the question of what negation does in communication is complex, but 'in effect, making sense of negation is as much about evoked presence as it is about actual absence.'[1096] Essentially, the negation of sight in Acts 9 places the focus of the text even more on sight itself, capitalising on presence versus absence through the 'interplay between the linguistic phenomenon, the mind and human communication.'[1097]

Where negation 'can construct the possibility of an event, entity or attribute where none currently exists and refer to that space as if it did,'[1098] in Acts 9.8 Paul seeing nothing does one of two things: it either suggests that Paul has some capacity for sight and is not completely blind, so the connotations of "blind" cannot be applied, or directs the textual focus to Paul's future spiritual and physical sight, foreshadowing future events. Although Acts 9.3-7 does not state that Paul actually saw Christ, in Acts 9.17 Ananias refers to Jesus as 'the one

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[1095] Hartsock, p. 185. The notion that Paul must be spiritually blind comes from the assumption that believing in Christ demonstrates spiritual sight.

[1096] Lisa Nahajec, *Negation, Expectation and Ideology in Written Texts: A Textual and Communicative Perspective* (Amsterdam - Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2021), p. 2-3. Nahajec's linguistic work does not mention Acts 9, but I have discussed with her the direct application of negation to Acts 9 and she confirms that it provides an interesting linguistic example of the phenomena.

[1097] Nahajec, p. 4.

[1098] Nahajec, p. 8.

who appeared to you' (ὁ ὀφθείς σοι) according to the NRSV translation, but the phrase could equally be rendered as 'the one who was seen by you,' given that ὀφθείς is the aorist participle passive of ὁράω. Ὁράω, as "to see", could indicate either physical or spiritual sight, but in either case Paul could not be described as "blind". Sight is negated in verse 8 to be reasserted in verse 17.

Moreover, in Acts 9.10 'The Lord' is depicted as speaking to the disciple Ananias 'in a vision' (ἐν ὁράματι) and in Acts 9.12 Ananias, as part of that vision, is told that Paul 'has seen in a vision' (εἶδεν ἄνδρα [ἐν ὁράματι]) what will take place. What is interesting about the language used is that, as well as "blindness" not being referred to, the narrative uses ὁράω and ἐν ὁράματι[1099] in relation to Paul, prior to him regaining his physical sight in verse 17. Both men have received communication, through spiritual sight, and only one of them is able to physically see. Although Hartsock states that physical blindness mirrors Paul's spiritual blindness, it is apparently when Paul is physically unable to see that he is spiritually given sight, suggesting that his physical blindness might not be as directly related to his spiritual understanding as Hartsock suggests. The expectation, from the narrative's physiognomic perspective, is there, but it is also challenged by the description of Paul's sight in Acts 9.12, prior to the restoration of his physical sight in Acts 9.17. Additionally, by both Paul and Ananias

[1099] Metzger, p. 319. The phrase ἐν ὁράματι does stand 'in several positions in the manuscripts' and, consequently, could be a gloss 'to complete the sense of "he has seen" in Acts 9.12, but it could equally have been omitted by scribes as redundant on account of the phrase's prior use in Acts 9.10, under the assumption that "The Lord" was communicating to both men through visions. In either case, the focus is on the sight that both Ananias and Paul have at that point in the narrative.

experiencing visions and displaying spiritual sight, despite their disparate corporeal states, the narrative also challenges the connection between physical and spiritual sight, even though it also uses the physiognomic expectation of the text's audience.

Paul must have some level of spiritual sight when he asks, 'Who are you Lord?' (Acts 9.5), although there is disagreement amongst scholars as to the level of that sight. Bruce, for example, advocates that 'Who are you, my lord?' is a better translation of τίς εἶ, κύριε than 'Who are you, sir?'[1100] Marshall suggests that the phrase does not necessarily indicate recognition of the speaker, instead being the reverential address expected of any heavenly figure.[1101] Although the reverence may or may not indicate understanding as to the person of Christ, it must at least indicate recognition of the divine authority of the person speaking. It could be argued that Bruce is "reading-in" Paul's future understanding, such as could be evidenced by including "my" in his translation, since Paul has not yet indicated becoming a follower of Jesus. That being said, by Paul's following of the instructions he is given, he could also be displaying spiritual sight and understanding as to the person of Christ, that which he is shown openly acknowledging through baptism in Acts 9.18.

In each of the accounts of Paul's "Damascus experience" there is 'a [great] light from heaven' (Acts 9.3; Acts 22.6; Acts 26.13) and whilst Acts is not explicit as to that light being the direct cause of Paul's blindness, the sequence of

[1100] Bruce, *Acts*, pp. 182-183.

[1101] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, p. 179.

that light prior to Paul's not seeing suggests a causal relationship. Dazzling light and temporary blindness were common in the imagination of the period[1102] and bright light was to be expected as a feature of divine revelation: 'since it is generally held that no man can see God, it is not surprising that the effect of the light was to cause blindness.'[1103] If, metaphorically, light simply represented understanding, with darkness being its complete opposite, then Paul would have been confronted by something or someone he couldn't possibly have understood. Yet, as evidenced by reverence of 'the Lord' and perceiving a vision whilst without physical sight, Paul was not in complete spiritual darkness and could not be described as "blind", with all the connotations associated with that description. Parsons describes the temporary blindness as a 'period of penance' which represents the previous 'darkness of [Paul's] soul'[1104] from his previous 'breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord' (Acts 9.1). Paul is apparently depicted as a monster, but there is no curse or punishment pronounced against him, unlike that against Elymas in Acts 13. Conzelmann highlights Acts 9.8 as Paul being made helpless, having been formerly powerful,[1105] alluding to the negative social position attributed to physical blindness. At the same time, this interpretation brings in its own negative

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[1102] Moshe Barasch, *Blindness - The History of a Mental Image in Western Thought* (New York - London: Routledge, 2001), p. 60.

[1103] I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, pp. 178-179.

[1104] Parsons, *Body and Character*, p. 80.

[1105] Conzelmann, *Acts*, p. 72.

interpretation of “blindness”, a metanarrative not explicitly attributed to Paul at any point.

In all three versions of the “Damascus experience” Paul is only without sight for three days. That the apparent blindness is temporary is an unusual feature in New Testament writings; the temporariness is, according to Moshe Barasch, witness to the particular nature of the blindness and ‘indicates the context in which it should be understood,’ as in the three days duration means the blindness cannot be a punishment for the persecution of believers.[1106] Brittany E. Wilson focuses on the idea that the heavenly light causes Paul’s loss of control, ‘culminating in his loss of sight.’ Where Jesus then commands Paul to stand, he can only follow that instruction with assistance; Wilson particularly notes the passive ‘was raised’ in Acts 9.8, after which Paul then discovers he cannot see.[1107] Paul has been forced into a position where he needs to consider and reason in a different way, perceive according to a new process from which physical sight has been removed. It would be wrong to assume that Paul cannot follow the instructions to enter the city which he receives (cf. Acts 9.6). The narrative indicates that on his initial loss of vision Paul received assistance in reaching Damascus, so there is nothing to suggest that he ‘neither ate nor drank’ (Acts 9.9) other than by choice, since the narrative also does not comment on

[1106] Barasch, pp. 57-58.

[1107] Brittany E Wilson, ‘The Blinding of Paul and the Power of God: Masculinity, Sight, and Self-Control in Acts 9’, in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 133.2 (2014), pp. 367-387: pp. 372-373 <https://doi.org/10.1353/jbl.2014.0022>. The NRSV reads ‘got up from the ground,’ but the NA28 contains ‘was raised’ (ἠγέρθη).

Paul being abandoned by his travelling companions. It is possible that Paul is choosing to fulfil some kind of penance whilst unable to see, as he waits for the realisation of his vision.

In Acts 9.17 Ananias announces that Paul will regain his physical sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit: the two events occur in conjunction, which Hartsock views as indicating Paul's spiritual blindness is cured at the same moment that he receives the Holy Spirit.[1108] Evidence given for this interpretation includes the narrative reference that immediately on regaining his vision (Acts 9.18), Paul 'got up and was baptised.' This denies any spiritual sight to Paul's reverence on encountering Jesus, following instructions to enter the city, receiving a vision and, possibly, choosing to be penitent by fasting. Each of these would indicate an unfolding transformation, following developments in Paul's reasoning process. The return of Paul's physical sight is immediate, when 'something like scales [fall] from his eyes' (Acts 9.18), but to directly state the 'return of bodily strength accompanied the influx of new spiritual power,'[1109] as Bruce does, does not take into account the sequential nature of events. The scales fall and physical sight returns, then Paul gets up to be baptised, following which he eats and regains strength.

Interestingly, although Ananias announces he has been sent so that Paul 'may regain [his] sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit' (Acts 9.17) and the narrative seems to assume that both actions have taken place, at no point does

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[1108] Hartsock, p. 191.

[1109] Bruce, *Acts*, p. 189.

the narrative specify when Paul has been filled and Ananias disappears from the narrative without comment. This is problematic in the sense that from a physiognomic perspective it could be understood that Paul being filled with the Holy Spirit corresponds with the return of his physical sight. However, if Paul already has an element of spiritual sight, as has been previously demonstrated, then physical and spiritual blindness are not intrinsically linked, meaning that questions need to be asked as to the relationship between becoming filled with the Holy Spirit and metaphorical sight, if the development of spiritual reasoning is going to be acknowledged. If being given, or accepting, the Holy Spirit is part of the metaphorical development of spiritual sight, then Paul's development should have been linear, from blindness to sight, unless blindness was a punishment or negative starting point. Paul possessed sight prior to not being able to see and, in Acts 22.11, he records he 'could not see because of the brightness of that light.' Considering how early audiences would have understood Paul's blindness, Barasch comments on the character of blindness in relation to the spiritual development of the apostle, in that it is functioning as a significant break between the two stages in his life: persecution of the new faith, followed by preaching and defending that same new faith.[1110]

Although visual aspects, particularly light, are emphasised in the Acts 26.13-20 account, the "blindness" of Paul, even referred to a not seeing, is not

[1110] Barasch, pp. 58-59. Importantly, Barasch highlights the significance of 'Paul's inner biography' instead on a singular point of change. However, his assertion that 'the revelation of Christ [remaining] without response from Paul before the three days of blindness have passed' is challenged by responses evidenced in the accounts.

mentioned. Emphasis is placed on what Paul has seen and will see, with "blindness" being 'transferred' from Paul 'to the recipients of his message,' people who are metaphorically blind and need to have their eyes opened.[1111] Any consideration of potential blindness for Paul is subsumed by the focus on the blindness of others (cf. Acts 26.18). Additionally, focus in Acts 26 is on Paul's sight, even prior to his encounter with Jesus, as evidenced by the addition of 'it is hard for you to kick against the goads'[1112] (σκληρόν σοι πρὸς κέντρα λακτίζειν) to suggest that his persecution of Christ followers was somehow uncomfortable. There is, though, no obvious discussion elsewhere, either in Acts or Paul's letters, regarding inner conflict prior to the "Damascus experience" and, as emphasised by Bruce in commenting on the addition, Acts 23.1 and 24.16 are but two repeated claims in apologetic speeches as to having 'maintained a clear conscience all his life.'[1113]

The affirmation of maintaining a clear conscience, despite apparent metaphorical blindness, is puzzling if Paul is meant to have been spiritually blind prior to losing physical sight, and if the narratives use the physiognomic expectations of darkness. Given evident use of the seeing-knowing blended domain, it would be difficult to conclude that a problematic reasoning process could be anything other than metaphorical blindness, particularly if it was chosen or voluntary. Paul must have been aware, to some extent, of the message of the

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[1111] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 55.

[1112]The NRSV renders this section of Acts 26.14 as 'It hurts you to kick against the goads.'

[1113] Bruce, *Acts*, p. 466.

Gospel as he was identifying followers of “the Way” in order to persecute them, yet he maintains a lack of “blindness”. Either Paul acknowledges his spiritual development and, therefore, doesn’t judge his conscience prior to that development, or he does not judge himself to be “blind” prior to his “Damascus experience”. The narrative focus on sight, through its negation and references to light, make it seem unlikely that there is not some form of change through whatever events took place, but at the same time, Paul is not judged to be “blind” or to have completely problematic reasoning.[1114]

7.9 Physical Blindness/Spiritual Sight Challenging Physical Sight/Spiritual Blindness

The physiognomic perspective of a first or second century audience was ocularnormative, adhering to the see-knowing metanarrative; blended metaphor domains mean that spiritual connotations would more than likely have been inferred for linguistic references to physical blindness. Whilst explicitly metaphorical references to blindness, specifically through the adjective “blind” (τυφλός), tend to be negative, those characters depicted as physically blind can figure as a challenge to those who purport to see or understand. In particular, so-called “healing narratives” are often understood from the ocularnormative perspective. These narratives are also New Testament writings where the narratological association of blindness with a lack of understanding or reason

[1114] Paul’s biography is part of his spiritual resumé, so “blindness” and its connotations could not be associated with divinely bestowed authority or understanding, as that authority would be challenged from a physiognomic perspective by Paul’s audience.

somewhat breaks down. Characters who are physically blind display evidence of understanding before they are given physical sight. Physical blindness is still depicted as an undesirable state, but those "afflicted" by it are shown to have more understanding than those around them who can "see".

Ancient cultures 'did not automatically identify blindness with begging and vice versa,'[1115] but blind characters in the New Testament healing narratives are generally beggars and amongst those on the lowest rungs of a social ladder. The healing stories do not focus on the person being healed, since they are Christological in orientation. Consequently, the person being healed is a secondary character: underdeveloped and usually without a name, they often do not speak and rarely make a second appearance once healed. Impairment, as narrative prosthesis, has elements of characterisation based on physiognomic expectations and metanarratives of disability, but these can be challenged by those same characters. Although, as previously argued, characters with impairments are more than just passive recipients of healing, blind characters in New Testament healing narratives, to use Hartsock's words, 'seem to be of a completely different sort.' They are often apparently 'more developed,' are given more attention in the narrative, and usually have speaking lines.[1116] Hartsock's evaluation might be considered something of a sweeping generalisation, but examining examples from the healing narratives does show evidence of a

[1115] Van den Abeele, p. 80. For those who were a member of wealthier classes, visual impairment would not have made politics impossible, for example, and a minor impairment would not have impeded daily life; more severe blindness could, though, have been different experience, particularly for those who did not have the necessary economic advantages.

[1116] Hartsock, p. 128.

particular challenge to the physiognomic metanarrative in depictions of blind characters.

As noted earlier, to be “blind” is considered to be a negative corporeal condition, one which, in the Synoptic Gospels, is mentioned in order that Jesus heals the blind person. Those who are blind can be mentioned as part of a larger group of those with apparently deviant bodies, but there are specific textual examples where the actions of blind characters are specifically described and their words recorded. Matthew 9.27-31 is a short pericope containing two blind men who are proactive in their approach for healing and display understanding as to the authority of Jesus, thereby not reflecting ignorance, as might be expected. The two anonymous[1117] men “followed” Jesus: the narrative does not indicate that they received any help in doing so, or how they found the house, or gained entry.[1118] In order to negotiate both the social structure and the journey involved in following Jesus, the two men ‘keep shouting out’ – they ‘are not just walking along’ and happening to encounter Jesus, they are finding their own way[1119] in order to seek and learn more from Jesus. Often these men are considered as only seeking physical healing, but they are doing more than that, if the blended metaphors of sight and understanding are taken into account.

[1117] Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 47. Luz makes the comment that the men having no names makes it ‘easier to identify with them.’ However, this seems a potentially ableist viewpoint which ignores the metanarrative of disability, since the writer would more likely than not have simply seen the two men as “less than” and a narrative device, rather than representative of the believing community.

[1118] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 34. Though the details are not technically in the passage itself, Hull describes how they probably helped each other practically, in order to follow Jesus.

[1119] John Hull, *In the* Beginning, p. 35.

France notes that the men ‘appeal noisily and insistently for help’ when they use the words “show mercy on us” as ‘an appropriate appeal to a powerful stranger.’[1120] At this point in the narrative, “Son of David” is ‘connected *only* with miracle stories and almost exclusively with healings of the blind.’[1121] Therefore, in their usage of the title in Matthew 9.27, the two blind men could be shown as demonstrating identification of Jesus’ messianic identity and pre-existing knowledge of Jesus as the Son of David, which has been illustrated in chapters 8 and 9.[1122] By addressing Jesus as Son of David, ‘the blind men indicate their hope that Jesus is this messianic figure’[1123] and so, whilst physically blind, cannot be so described metaphorically. This is more than a recognition of social power, as the men approach in expectation of divine physical healing: they have purposefully followed Jesus and he then asks them whether they believe he is ‘able to do this’ (Matthew 9.28). There is no mention in the narrative of the two blind men requesting their physical sight, just an assumption that they must want to see, since they had been described as ‘two blind men’ (δύο τυφλοὶ) in Matthew 9.27. What is often overlooked, on account of the Christological focus on the text, is the faith and understanding displayed by the two blind men in their response of ‘Yes, Lord’ (Matthew 9.28). The men have chosen to follow Jesus, asked for

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[1120] France, *Matthew*, p. 366.

[1121] Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 48.

[1122] Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 48.

[1123] Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p. 253.

mercy in recognition of his authority and then affirmed their faith, directly contradicting the connotations of their given identity, as ‘two blind men.’

Despite Jesus’ comment ‘According to your faith let it be done to you’ (Matthew 9.29), the two men are often portrayed negatively. Jesus gives the instruction ‘See that no one knows’[1124] (ὁρᾶτε μηδεὶς γινωσκέτω) in Matthew 9.30, but the following verse shows that the men did not adhere to that instruction, and it is this fact that is often discussed. Nolland, for example, writes that Matthew is more interested in the men’s disobedience by not keeping their healing to themselves.[1125] Davies and Allison cite the men’s disobedience as evidence ‘show[ing] that first-hand observation or experience of the supernatural scarcely guarantees faithful discipleship,’[1126] a perspective that emphasises the choice of response and the irony of physical sight being in direct opposition to spiritual sight and the obedience which is presumed to accompany it. Matthew 9.30b-31, considered as a command to silence and the consequent violation of it, is problematic, strange and impossible to follow, given that the healing would have been evident to anyone who encountered the men. If Jesus was not setting the men up to fail, but perhaps attempting to shield them from the attention of the authorities, the men’s response was conceivably not disobedience but exuberance. Instead of representing disobedience, Hagner proposes that the

[1124] The NRSV adds ‘about this’ to its translation of ὁρᾶτε μηδεὶς γινωσκέτω.

[1125] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 402.

[1126] Davies and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, p. 138.

men found it impossible to stifle the ‘good news’ of the kingdom.[1127] The men were not metaphorically completely blind prior to their healing and, logically, would not have been made so once the identity of “blindness” had been removed from them. Metaphorical blindness in Matthew ‘means to lack understanding or to live in the darkness of the old eon,’[1128] which these men have already demonstrated does not apply to them. Jesus does not heal them immediately, thereby having the opportunity to ask about their faith and effectively gain their consent, with their faith and obedience being demonstrated. It is unlikely that the writer of Matthew would directly contradict that expression of faith and make the proclamation of the good news as a sinful act. From this perspective, it is possible to reinterpret the portrayal of the two blind men, not as noncompliant but as passionate and somewhat fanatical.

Matthew 20.29-34, Mark 10.46-52 and Luke 18.35-43 are acknowledged as referring to the same healing of blindness. The Markan account is distinctive in that it contains a named blind character, Bartimaeus, whereas the Lucan version has an anonymous blind man and the Matthean version two anonymous ‘blind people.’[1129] Matthew 20.29-34 does not state the two blind men are beggars and Luke 18.35-43 shows its blind man begging but does not explicitly identify him as a beggar,[1130] avoiding direct explication of his identity. In both the

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[1127] Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, p. 254.

[1128] Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, p. 47.

[1129] Nolland, *Matthew*, p. 828.

[1130] Nolland, *Luke 18.35-24.53*, p. 899.

Matthean and Lukan versions, the blind men/man are found sitting by the roadside and hear that Jesus, as well as the crowd surrounding him, is passing by (cf. Matthew 20.30; Luke 18.36). The crowd is not initially hostile to the blind men/man and only become so when the men/man attempt/s to move from his place in the social system. In each instance, the crowd views themselves as more important to Jesus, rebuking the men/man to be silent, but the blind men/man refuse to do so, displaying a determination to reach Jesus not associated with the supposed spiritual connotations of their blind identity. Commenting on Matthew 20.31, Hagner frames the refusal to be silent recognition of a 'unique opportunity,'[1131] one which must display understanding of where that opportunity comes from.

Jesus is addressed as "Son of David" with the source of knowledge for that term not explained. Each narrative is silent in that respect: the men/man may have learnt about Jesus' identity from reports of recent events, but it is equally possible that it comes from spiritual insight, if a negative metanarrative of blindness is not automatically assumed. If "Son of David" is meant to be understood as a messianic designation, it is ignored by the crowd, as they ignore the blind men/man. This positions the crowd as those who do not understand and are spiritually unable to see, spiritually "other" as opposed to physically "other". Both types of "other" are anonymous.

Mark 10.46-52 names the blind man as Bartimaeus, taking away anonymity and bestowing aspects of identity: his name 'witnesses ironically to his

[1131] Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, p. 587.

position as both “son of honour” and disenfranchised “blind beggar”.’ [1132] Bartimaeus is designated as a beggar, but also, importantly, as ‘son of Timaeus’ (Mark 10.46), acknowledging lineage and a link with existing society. His healing narrative is often described, such as by Craig A. Evans, as a transformation ‘from a helpless man who was going nowhere to a restored man who sets out on the road of discipleship.’[1133] It is true the position of a blind person within the society depicted by the Markan text was not especially prominent and Bartimaeus is a beggar, but the text does not say that he is helpless.[1134] As in the Matthean and Lukan versions of the narrative, Bartimaeus shouts out to Jesus but is prevented from approaching by the crowd, who judge him unworthy. In many ways the obstruction is a similar social comment as the prevention of access to healing as in John 5.1-15: Bartimaeus could have re-joined society previously, had society not prevented him gaining access.

Mark’s audience ‘would have been predisposed’ to a physiognomic understanding of sight in stories of blindness, so Bartimaeus seeming to break expectations both highlights the blindness of those who fail to see and understand Jesus for who he is’[1135] and the understanding that this identified

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[1132] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 46.

[1133] Evans, p. 134.

[1134] Morgan, p. 361. Morgan comments on Bartimaeus shouting for Jesus and recognising his own need. She also makes the more general comment that ‘Sight and hearing, Mark indicates, are all people should need to recognize Jesus. Sight are hearing…are widely counted among the soundest bases for trust/belief in both human and divine phenomena in the world of the first century.’ Bartimaeus, it should be noted, still possesses one of these two apparently essential senses for recognising Jesus. No one is mentioned in New Testament writings who possesses neither.

[1135] Hartsock, p. 156, 143.

character is apparently not supposed to have. Bartimaeus must have had more understanding and perception than the narrative gives him credit for, since he had to be 'an expert interpreter of crowd noises'[1136] in order to recognise the crowd going past and the presence of Jesus. Bartimaeus understands the society of which he is a part and how he needs to navigate it: there is no point getting up and pushing through crowd, since they will block his access, so he stays where he is and shouts, raising his voice when he recognises Jesus is near.[1137] It is difficult to understand Lane's comment that the crowd plays no role in events,[1138] when they block direct access to Jesus, rebuke Bartimaeus when he attempts to shout, and provide a sound barrier that necessitates him raising the volume of his 'Son of David, have mercy on me' (Mark 10.48). Without the crowd enforcing physical "otherness" on Bartimaeus, there would be no evidence of his determination, a determination based on spiritual understanding. It is through persistence that Bartimaeus is able to 'complete the process of full discipleship,' that is demonstrating commitment to following Jesus on "the way."[1139]

As a beggar, Bartimaeus is meant to be on the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy. Jesus hears him from that place outside of the crowd and, in Mark

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[1136] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 42.

[1137] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, pp. 42-43.

[1138] Lane, *Mark*, p. 386.

[1139] Simon Horne, '"Those Who Are Blind See": Some New Testament Uses of Impairment, Inability, and Paradox', in *Human Disability and the Service of God: Reassessing Religious Practice*, eds. Nancy L. Eiesland and Don E. Saliers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), pp. 88-101: p. 91.

10.49, gives an instruction to that crowd of 'Call him here' (φωνήσατε αὐτόν). Jesus responds similarly to Bartimaeus, using a call instead of asking for him to be brought, and respects his autonomy. The crowd changes from one which rebukes the blind man, to one which says 'Take courage. Get up – he called you' (θάρσει, ἔγειρε, φωνεῖ σε).[1140] The suddenness of the change shows an obedience to Jesus' instruction, but not an understanding of why Bartimaeus should have been respected previously. Neither does the narrative show real enthusiasm; against the backdrop of previous exclusion, it is difficult to interpret 'Take courage. Get up – he called you' as anything other than a hypocritical voyeurism. By comparison, Bartimaeus casts off his cloak and gets up (cf. Mark 10.50), adding not just a dramatic action[1141] but throwing away his economic means of survival, one of his few possessions, as well as any coins he had collected that day.

As a literary figure, Bartimaeus represents a preparedness to give up in order to follow.[1142] He enthusiastically comes to Jesus (Mark 10.50) and, although Jesus stops and waits for him, he is an active participant in events. The text clearly states 'having risen up, he came to Jesus' (ἀναπηδήσας ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν) with no mention of what Evans describes as 'people guiding him to Jesus.'[1143] Bartimaeus has clearly seen 'who Jesus is *before* his physical sight is

[1140] The NRSV translation reads as 'Take heart.'

[1141] Evans, p. 133.

[1142] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, pp. 510-511.

[1143] Evans, p. 133.

restored'[1144] and the text reflects his reasoning process, one independent of social expectations.

As mentioned in the Matthean and Lukan versions of the text, Bartimaeus addresses Jesus as 'Son of David' (Mark 10.48). Lane maintains that it is difficult to be certain of the significance since the title rarely appears in Mark and the problem, according to Lane, is that 'Bartimaeus' use of "Son of David" is confined to his period of blindness before he has gained Jesus' attention.'[1145] That Bartimaeus apparently displays insight whilst physically blind is only problematic if the text is meant to adhere to the seeing-knowing metaphor and promote a blindness metanarrative. Hartsock highlights this debate as to the significance of Bartimaeus' address, commenting that audiences of ancient literature would place importance on Bartimaeus' words, with his speaking independently being seen as prophetic utterance.[1146] Intriguingly, whilst Lane does not attribute 'Son of David' to Bartimaeus' insight, he does recognise that 'Son of David, have mercy upon me' reflects conviction as to Jesus' ability to restore sight,[1147] which in the context of the narrative has to show that Bartimaeus understood something of Jesus' identity.[1148] Importantly, the narrative shows Jesus respecting

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[1144] Hartsock, p. 158. Hartsock acknowledges that not all scholars agree with this point, despite Bartimaeus' prior demonstrations of understanding.

[1145] Lane, *Mark*, p. 387.

[1146] Hartsock, pp. 158-159.

[1147] Lane, *Mark*, p. 387.

[1148] Lane, *Mark*, p. 388. According to Lane, Bartimaeus' recognition of Jesus' messianic identity is not made explicit in the text, despite his use of the messianic title, which would seem to be an explicit reference to that identity and thereby demonstrate Bartimaeus' prophetic sight. See also Yarbro Collins, p. 510.

Bartimaeus' understanding by asking him 'What do you want me to do [for you]?' (Mark 10.51). He 'makes no assumptions' about what the blind man wants and does not take it for granted that the answer will be physical sight. In this way, not only is Bartimaeus offered dignity and independence in declaring his request,[1149] he is also given the narrative space for what is effectively a declaration of faith in Jesus' power and authority, despite having the assigned identity of "blindness". Even though commentators such as Evans might infer that through his question Jesus wished to ascertain Bartimaeus' faith before promising anything,[1150] the asking of a question on a basic level notes the importance of individual choice.

That Bartimaeus requests the ability to see reflects the corporeal standards of his culture, but the way he asks reflects his spiritual sight. 'Teacher, let me see again' (Mark 10.51) shows him addressing Jesus as ῥαββουνί, which is used only in Mark 10.51 and John 20.16, implying Bartimaeus' status both as a believer and as of lower social status.[1151] Evans asserts that Bartimaeus' request is a 'hope' based on the assumption of Solomonic tradition that the "Son of David" could heal,[1152] except that Bartimaeus has already demonstrated an understanding of Jesus' identity according to that tradition, so his request is not based on hope but on understanding. Bartimaeus would have to have

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[1149] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 44.

[1150] Evans, p. 133.

[1151] 'My master, let me see again' (ραββουνι, ἵνα ἀναβλέψω) is introduced by 'The blind man said to him' (ὁ τυφλὸς εἶπεν αὐτῷ) – Bartimaeus still carries the designation of τυφλός.

[1152] Evans, p. 134.

understood both Jesus' identity as 'Son of David' and the implications of Solomonic tradition to make the assumption that he could request and receive his physical eyesight.

Unlike in Matthew 20.34, Jesus does not touch Bartimaeus' eyes. In the Markan narrative, Jesus responds verbally to Bartimaeus' faith with 'Go, your faith has made you well' (Mark 10.52). The NRSV translation makes it seem as if Bartimaeus' healing is simply about physical health and whilst this is possible, the Greek text carries a layer of implied connotation, linked to expectations of blindness. Jesus' pronouncement uses the verb σῴζω ('your faith has saved you' - ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε) which can denote the restoration to physical health, but it can also denote saving from a more spiritual perspective. The linguistic double meaning could link to physiognomic expectation in that Bartimaeus already displays metaphorical sight and so his physical status is changed to reflect that spiritual understanding. In other texts, such as Acts 13.6-12, physical blindness reflects the internal darkness of a person's understanding: Bartimaeus is an example of that process happening in the opposite direction.

As an example of discipleship,[1153] someone located 'on the way' (παρὰ τὴν ὁδόν [Mark 10.46]) and who literally follows Jesus (cf. Mark 10.52), Bartimaeus is not the expected 'pathetic and helpless blind man.' He functions as someone who sees clearly, the apparent opposite of the explicitly identified disciples who, in the

[1153] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 507.

narrative, ‘see nothing of who Jesus is.’[1154] This symbolic depiction of a blind man who sees, yet must be physically healed, is still narrated from a sighted perspective, where ‘to be delivered from the restrictions of blindness…is one of the most desirable transformations,’[1155] even though key aspects of the depiction challenge the blended metaphor upon which that perspective relies.

7.10 ‘Born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.’

John 9.1-41 is a ‘complicated sequence of scenes’ which does not focus on blindness, yet blindness and seeing are ‘presented as dualistic categories’ allowing the ‘man blind from birth’ (John 9.1) to function as a metaphorical example of narrative prosthesis: his purpose is to ‘align Jesus with the divine light.’[1156] Although this text does explicitly sever the direct correlation between disability and sin, it also explains that the man was born blind ‘that God’s works might be revealed in him’ (John 9.3). Physiognomic expectation is challenged from the outset, but blindness is still an impairment with spiritual connotations and these metaphorical aspects are not denied in the same way that the connection between sin and blindness is. Socially, it is difficult for the man born blind to shed the identity of being “blind” (τυφλός) before the Jewish authorities, having been given his physical sight by Jesus, despite the narrative displaying his spiritual insight. It is this conflict which highlights the metaphorical blindness

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[1154] Hartsock, p. 158.

[1155] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 45.

[1156] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, pp. 64-65.

of those authorities,[1157] forming one of the central points of the text. The “man blind from birth” is the vehicle by which the narrative questions the Jewish authorities and it is for this purpose he is given elements of characterisation, though never a name or concrete identity.

The “man blind from birth” is encountered as Jesus walked along (John 9.1). He is known within the community as a beggar (John 9.8) and has a recognised position in society.[1158] His physical position is not mentioned: the “man blind from birth” is not described as sitting by the road, or travelling, just as noticed by Jesus and the catalyst for the disciples’ question, in John 9.2, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Koosed and Schumm argue that this question and ‘John’s use of double entendre binds two meanings of blindness together,’ [1159] but linguistically the two domains, physical blindness and spiritual blindness, were already metaphorically blended together prior to the Gospel’s writing and John uses both domains.

Whereas minor characters designated as “blind” (τυφλός) in Synoptic healing narratives directly challenge the connotations of their given identity by showing belief, John’s portrayal of the man born blind is different in that ‘Jesus

[1157] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 35. Physical blindness is ‘the metaphorical referent for the Pharisees’ inner blindness.’

[1158] Wynn, p. 65. Wynn does not portray the man born blind as someone desperate for healing, but as someone who doesn’t need to be restored to have meaning in their life; as a beneficiary of alms-giving, the man’s existence as a beggar gives him a role in the religious community, making him ‘necessary to the spiritual wellbeing of his people.’ Whilst this may be true, that role is a demeaning one, religiously subjugating him to those with enough ocular acuity to function within a prominent cultic or cultural role.

[1159] Koosed and Schumm, p. 77.

reduces the blindness to a morally neutral fact of birth that God will use for revelatory purposes.'[1160] Sandra M. Schneiders might exaggerate 'morally neutral,' since blindness still carries embedded expectations, but those expectations fade into the background of the narrative, since the removal of blindness is only the introduction to a narrative focusing on a failure to accept its removal by Jesus.

Given that the adjective "blind" (τυφλός) occurs on multiple occasions in New Testament writings, it is the additional specification of "from birth" that is theologically significant.[1161] The narrative does not specify what leads the disciples to ask their question in John 9.2, containing the assumption that both Jesus and the disciples would have known the man's "blind" identity and the default attribution of blame to the man or his parents.[1162] 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' is asked from the perspective of the blind *topos*, where blindness is divine punishment and so someone must have sinned, making Jesus' answer 'cryptic and difficult to understand.'[1163] George R. Beasley-Murray argues that in John 9.3 ('Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him') Jesus' response 'does not have in view human suffering generally but this particular

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[1160] Schneiders, p. 156.

[1161] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 66.

[1162] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, pp. 540-541. Ramsey Michaels refers to the man as a 'victim,' which contains a metanarrative in itself as to the man's position within events.

[1163] Hartsock, p. 147.

individual in relation to his mission.'[1164] This makes the narrative problematic if Jesus 'views the man's blindness from birth not as a tragedy but as opportunity'[1165] and the narrator does not consider the 'inhumanity' of imposing blindness so that the power of God might be made manifest, in the sense that blindness itself 'does not enter into the meaning of the story.'[1166] Jesus does not say that the "man blind from birth" did not sin, but that sin was not connected to his impairment. This stance would seem to link to John 5, where the man with impaired mobility is instructed to not sin, but his impairment is not linked to that sin.

Even if it were argued that Jesus only overturns the link between disability and sin solely in this case, he does change the focus of the discussion, directing the disciples to look past the cause of the blindness and towards the future purpose of revealing God's works.[1167] There may not be a direct association with sin, but this is only a partial break with the expected *topos*: the man's blindness is not divine punishment but there is a divine purpose. The Christological focus of the narrative is emphasised by the initial passivity of "the man blind from birth". He is noticed by Jesus, he does not shout or entreat Jesus to act. The "man blind from birth" is acted upon by Jesus' healing method and the narrative does not state whether he sits or stands. Additionally, this is not a healing story where that

[1164] Beasley-Murray, pp. 154-155.

[1165] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 541.

[1166] Haenchen, *John 2*, p. 37.

[1167] Grant, p. 80.

healing is accomplished by Jesus' words, instead John 9.6-7 outlines 'a rather complicated process involving mud, spittle, and washing in holy water,'[1168] the means that were expected to be employed at that time.[1169] The practical process itself could be analysed in detail, but key in the portrayal of the "man blind from birth" is that the man has not asked for healing and Jesus does not clarify the man's position in terms of faith. Grant interprets this as unconditionality, with no 'stated expectation either on the part of the one healed or the healer.'[1170] Hartsock echoes the interpretation of passivity, describing the man as saying nothing and being 'but a passive recipient of the healing…the only thing the blind man does is obey by going to the pool to wash the mud from his eyes.'[1171] This does not discuss, though, any agency or understanding that the "man blind from birth" may have had, by not acknowledging the possibility that he allowed Jesus to act upon him without protest, that he chose to follow Jesus' instructions, in itself an indication of faith and trust. It also does not give exegetical focus to the description that the "man blind from birth" 'went and washed and came back able to see' (John 9.7) when the narrative does not detail as to how the man accomplished any of what is narrated, other than Jesus did not accompany him.

Assumptions of passivity and a lack of independence fill the narrative gaps with a metanarrative of blindness, without recognising that it might not reflect the

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[1168] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 67.

[1169] Haenchen, *John 2*, p. 38.

[1170] Grant, p. 80.

[1171] Hartsock, p. 148.

reality of an independent blind man able to follow Jesus' instructions and 'demonstrate a particular aspect of discipleship: obedience.'[1172] In finding his own way to the pool at Siloam, 'the blind man becomes an independent narrative figure, and that is assumed in what follows.'[1173] Independent travel is not an insignificant element of the narrative, whether this be travel independent of Jesus or the "man blind from birth" 'know[ing] how to find his way about Jerusalem and to the pool of Siloam on his own.'[1174]

Independence and agency are characteristics subtly attributed to the "man blind from birth". Washing off of the spittle and mud demands, according to Dodd, the 'cooperation of the patient,' which displays the measure of faith necessary through participation in the cure.[1175] The cure involves washing in the waters at Siloam[1176] – the independent choice to go, wash and come back is an illustration of discipleship as choosing to participate in Christ. Schneiders makes the conclusion that the baptismal motif shows congenital blindness, through washing,

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[1172] Horne, p. 90.

[1173] Haenchen, *John 2*, p. 38. This is not to suggest that he was or was not independent previously, more that the narrative recognises him as such. 'The narrator is not interested in how the blind man finds his way to the pool of Siloam,' what is important is that he does.

[1174] Wynn, p. 68.

[1175] Dodd, p. 183. Dodd recognises in the "man blind from birth" a readiness to obey that he maintains is not present in the man with impaired mobility of John 5; the "man blind from birth" does not, though, have his mobility physically or socially restricted within the John 9 narrative.

[1176] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, pp. 68-69. The waters at Siloam are significant for their role in the Feast of Tabernacles, where water was brought from the pool to the altar of the temple; Siloam was the only *miqveh* in Jerusalem with free flowing, or "living," water and so the healing process is 'overlaid with symbolism that constructs Jesus as divine creator.'

'yielding to enlightenment,'[1177] taking for granted that transformation happens at a single point and concurrently involves physical and metaphorical blindness. Whilst Gosbell observes that 'the purity status of the blind as well as others with physical and sensory impairments in the first century CE is uncertain,'[1178] the "man blind from birth" has already evidenced disciple-like obedience prior to the restoration of his physical sight, so narratorially does not undergo a single-point transformation.

Beginning as an unnamed "man blind from birth", the man's characterisation is developed in the narrative post-healing, once physical sight is demonstrably restored. Jesus does not return to the narrative until John 9.35, so is absent when the "man blind from birth" is called upon to defend his faith and understanding. Unusually within a gospel healing narrative, the account details what the man does, whilst Jesus is absent. Between returning with his sight (John 9.8) and being driven out of the synagogue (John 9.34), as well as by implication Jewish society, the "man blind from birth" navigates a process of repeatedly defending his changed identity, that of no longer being "blind" (τυφλός), to those who refuse to acknowledge the return of his sight. Some do not recognise him, presumably because he has visibly changed in terms of his posture and gait from the perspective of the narrative, but John 9.8-12 also shows neighbours and others who do not want to believe 'what their eyes tell

[1177] Schneiders, p. 150.

[1178] Gosbell, pp. 310-311.

them.'[1179] John 9.9 shows the discussion of the man's identity, with some saying 'It is he,' realising his identity is more than the label of "blind," and others saying 'No, but it is someone like him.' Those denying the man's identity notice familiar features but choose not to reason that the removal of his blindness is possible, therefore refusing to reason that divine intervention occurred.

The miracle itself is only briefly reported in John 9.6-7, with the following thirty-four verses concerned with the consequences of healing. John 9.8-41 could be read as 'a pre-trial hearing to assess the potential testimony'[1180] of the "man blind from birth," if the authorities were trying to disprove the healing and rebuke Jesus for breaking the Sabbath. The narrative does not explain 'where the man who was healed learned the name of Jesus,'[1181] which he uses to explain his process of healing in John 9.11. When the man responds that he does not know the current location of Jesus (John 9.12) the narrative establishes his honesty,[1182] recognising the "man born blind" as a reliable witness.[1183] He, as a sighted person, is now physiognomically positioned as someone with insight and understanding. However, in John 9.17 the narrative anachronistically refers to him as "blind" (τυφλός), without any caveat of it being a former identity. When the

[1179] Haenchen, *John 2*, p. 41.

[1180] Jeffrey M. Tripp, 'Claiming Ignorance and Intimidating Witnesses: Reading John 9 in Greco-Roman Forensic Context', in *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 80.3 (2018), pp. 470-490: p. 470. <https://doi.org/10.1353/cbq.2018.0093>

[1181] Haenchen, *John 2*, p. 39.

[1182] Tripp, p. 483.

[1183] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 560.

Jewish authorities interrogate him, they refuse to see him as anything but “blind” and, therefore, spiritually blind, in direct contradiction to the sighted, honest witness previously established. The man, deemed by the physically sighted Jewish authorities as still “blind”, provides a foil for those who are spiritually blind and interrogating him. [1184]

As the “man blind from birth” repeats his story, his understanding appears to develop. In John 9.17 the man is still giving incomplete answers as to Jesus’ identity: there is no clear indication whether his answers are from only partial insight, or whether the man remains coy in telling his story in order to protect Jesus.[1185] The choice to protect Jesus would imply spiritual insight into Jesus’ role, but during the second round of questions, Jesus becomes ‘a prophet’ in the man’s description. Although Jesus is not a prophet, so the “man blind from birth” technically lacks full understanding and insight, the man displays more than most, especially since from a Johannine perspective, ‘a *full* understanding of what happened *when* Jesus was on earth was not available *while* he was on earth.’[1186]

As recounted in John 9.18, ‘The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and received his sight,’ either literally or metaphorically, and consequently called his parents forward as additional witnesses. Recent scholarship has not

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[1184] Hartsock, p. 149. Using the title “the blind man” underlines the blindness of the Jewish authorities.

[1185] Hartsock, p. 150.

[1186] Chris Keith, *Jesus and John: The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for the Historical Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, Forthcoming).

adequately dealt with what the parents did or did not know,[1187] in response to the allegation that the “man blind from birth” was never actually blind and therefore not the recipient of a miracle. In John 9.20 the parents testify that the man is their son and that he was born blind. They are cautious in stipulating that they do not know how their son was healed or who ‘opened his eyes’ (John 9.21).[1188] Grant makes an interesting observation that where the parents say, in John 9.21, that they do not know ‘who opened his eyes,’ no reference had been made to them of anyone opening their son’s eyes: ‘it would seem that they know more than they are willing to admit,’[1189] indicating that they are aware their son is able to see because of a particular person. From a legal perspective, the parents assert what they know and no more, in what Jeffrey M. Tripp describes as a ‘loaded’ response which points out that the man is legally old enough to testify himself.[1190] It is possible that the parents speaking out of fear is meant to contrast with their son’s boldness,[1191] but it is also possible that the parents are reinforcing their son’s independence, agency and insight. If the focus of the trial or hearing is not blindness as such, but the capability of the “man blind from birth” to be a witness, the parents place his “blind” identity to the side, instead bringing forward his legal independence. They are asked to verify facts, but not as neutral witnesses; the

[1187] Hartsock, p. 151.

[1188] Haenchen, *John 2*, p. 39.

[1189] Grant, p. 82.

[1190] Tripp, p. 484.

[1191] Grant, p. 82.

authorities are trying to trap them into responding to their son's apparent confession of faith in order to gather evidence against Jesus, but 'they do not take the bait' and instead 'execute a pre-emptive strike.'[1192] This suggestion of calculation makes the parents seem stronger than they have been previously considered. They are not responding to questions out of fear, nor abandoning their son in the face of persecution.[1193] The parents also assert their son's own identity, do not subjugate him to their own, and recognise that he is no longer "blind". Moreover, he does not start being "of age" at the point of receiving physical sight and they are citing a quality independent of the identity of blindness.

In describing the supposed spiritual growth of the "man blind from birth", Hartsock cites John 9.25 as a point at which he has gained spiritual vision, when the man responds to the authorities calling Jesus a sinner by saying 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' Even though it is likely a physiognomically conscious audience might have read the now sighted man as growing in boldness, having been spiritually sighted all along,[1194] there are definitely elements of spiritual ignorance, such as the lack of understanding of Jesus' divine identity, if he does not know whether Jesus is a sinner or not. If spiritual sight was to "return" at the same time as physical sight, then the man would have that understanding of Jesus' divine status. Since

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[1192] Schneiders, p. 159.

[1193] Haenchen, *John 2*, p. 39. According to Haenchen, John 9.23 emphasises the parents' abandonment of their son in the face of threatened expulsion from the synagogue.

[1194] Hartsock, p. 151.

physical and spiritual sight do not seem to directly correlate timewise, the development of the man's spiritual sight must be somewhat gradual, even though it is likely he had some spiritual sight when designated "blind" prior to physical healing.

As the narrative progresses further and the "man blind from birth" continually asserts his identity apart from his previous blindness, his characterisation increases the contrast between himself and the sceptical authorities. Blindness is no longer his defining characteristic: Grant argues that, in fact, it never was.[1195] In John 9.27, the man responds to his second round of official questioning with 'Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' to which the Jewish authorities respond by stating their assumed identities as disciples of Moses (John 9.29). This provides evidence to the spiritual blindness of the authorities, since John 1.17 has already informed its audience that 'The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.'[1196] Voluntary ignorance is again highlighted in John 9.34 when, in stating that the man was 'born entirely in sins,' the authorities inadvertently confirm the man's previous blindness, the miracle of his healing and consequently Jesus' divine identity.[1197] In John 9.32 the Jewish authorities' declare 'Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind', meaning that, according to this logic, only someone

[1195] Grant, p. 81.

[1196] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 559. Ramsey Michaels interprets this as the law given to Moses coming into being through Jesus.

[1197] Cf. Beasley-Murray, p. 159.

present at the beginning of the world would be able to open the eyes of a person born blind. The disciples' earlier question highlighted the physiognomic social judgement placed on the "man blind from birth", one which John 9.34 shows the authorities adhered to, and the Johannine narrative, in John 1.1-17, has already established the presence of Jesus as "Word" (λόγος) at the beginning of the world. Considered together, the authorities have effectively admitted that they are wrong, that the "man blind from birth" was healed by Jesus and Jesus must be divine. Echoes of John 9.3, in that the man was not 'born entirely in sin' as stated by the authorities in John 9.34, add additional layers to the metaphorical blindness of those authorities.

John 9.22 mentions that the Jewish authorities 'had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue,' so John 9.34's 'And they drove him out' is not surprising. Established as metaphorically "blind", the audience of the Johannine Gospel would expect the authorities to do nothing less than reject truth. "Sight" has been cast out into the role of "other" by "blindness."

Jesus finds the man, no longer referred to as "blind" (τυφλός) in John 9.35, asking him whether he believes in 'the Son of Man.' It would be a mistake to assume the man does not recognise Jesus, since he heard Jesus' voice and would likely recognise it again, when he asks who 'the Son of Man' might be (John 9.36). Hartsock suggests 'Who is he, so I may believe?' is not a question

of theological explanation, more a simple request to put a face to a name,[1198] whereas Grant argues that 'before granting his devotion, he requests a direct statement of identity.'[1199] It would appear that two things are happening at this point in the narrative: the man knows that he is talking to the man who healed him, that Jesus is that man and he has divine authority, but he does not yet realise that Jesus' identity is also that of 'the Son of Man.' The narrative is also giving the character space to 'confess his developed faith.'[1200] Jesus complies with the man's request for information, even though it displays a gap in his spiritual insight, indicating that the man was not wrong to ask. He is not spiritually blind, despite not seeing everything, as he is using all the information available to him and choosing to reason correctly. If "Lord" (κύριε) in both John 9.36 and 9.38 carries 'Christological weight…for the man who now sees,'[1201] the man addressing Jesus as "Lord" could evidence appropriate spiritual sight not having to be omniscient.

Koosed and Schumm cite John 9.39, Jesus' concluding response to the man, as the point at which the link between literal and symbolic "seeing" is made explicit.[1202] The language by which this is done, though, warrants attention. There are two halves to the pronouncement of how Jesus 'came into this world'

[1198] Hartsock, p. 152.

[1199] Grant, p. 84.

[1200] Gosbell, p. 315.

[1201] Hartsock, p. 153. Hartsock also comments that some translations render κύριε in as "Sir" in 9.36, but as "Lord" in 9.38, but that this 'is to unfairly bias the interpretation.'

[1202] Koosed and Schumm, p. 81.

to judge: ‘so that those who do not see may see’ (οἱ μὴ βλέποντες βλέπωσιν) and ‘those who do see may become blind’ (οἱ βλέποντες τυφλοὶ γένωνται). Linguistic negation within the first reference identifies those people without sight, as neither physically or metaphorically “blind”, and this includes those who physically cannot see. Those who will be made “blind” (τυφλός) might technically be able to physically see, but spiritually they cannot; physiognomically their corporeal state will be made consistent. Gosbell explains this contrast as Jesus’ ‘ultimate role’ regarding healing those who are spiritually blind,[1203] but there has to be more than one layer of meaning in this pronouncement. If, as Gosbell acknowledges, the spiritual insight of the “man blind from birth” is a foil for those who claim to see, then he cannot be spiritually blind. If he is not spiritually blind and Jesus is making the pronouncement to him, there could be an element of physiognomic corporeal realignment also present in ‘so that those who do not see may see,’ signifying that those who are physically blind in fact have spiritual sight and challenging the very physiognomic assumptions relating to blindness which the narrative is actually using to communicate with its audience.

On hearing Jesus’ pronouncement, the Pharisees say μὴ ἡμεῖς τυφλοί ἐσμεν (John 9.40), which the NRSV translates as ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ and, correspondingly, the NA28 punctuates as a question. If the Pharisees mentioned at this point are not part of the group previously interrogating the “man blind from birth”, then they might be curious and pose a genuine question of

[1203] Gosbell, p. 316.

Jesus. However, if they are those who denied Jesus' divine identity and drove the man from the synagogue, then an indignant statement 'We are not blind' might be a more appropriate rendition,[1204] since these Pharisees are 'insisting on their ability to see spiritual truths' and are 'unwilling to admit their blindness' regarding who Jesus is.[1205] John 9.41 contains Jesus' response to that indignance, a clarification as to the precise nature of their hypocrisy: 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see," your sin remains.' Jesus repeats the information that the Pharisees have just given, since in stating 'We are not blind' they have effectively said "We see". The "man blind from birth" could not physically see, but is given sight, physically, as well as further spiritual understanding; the Pharisees can physically see, claim they have divine understanding when they do not, and so will be shown to demonstrate the physiognomic connotations of the blind identity which they place as opposite from themselves and onto the man born physically blind. Taking Jesus' closing words more plainly, Grant argues that it is the sighted and more able-bodied who are, in this situation, more in need of healing than the man who is healed because of their 'sin of stereotyping and exclusion.'[1206]

In the Gospel of John there is 'language that equates blindness with those who are morally and spiritually deficient' to the extent that 'blindness is a

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[1204] The present indicative active of ἐσμεν does not appear to contain the uncertainty suggested by the NRSV translation.

[1205] Grant, p. 85.

[1206] Grant, p. 85.

metaphysical category of evil,'[1207] with true sin being the failure to see Jesus for who he is.[1208] From this perspective, Ramsey Michaels interprets 'the likely point' of John 9 as 'everyone [being] "born blind" in the sense of being unable to "see the kingdom of God" or enter it without a second birth,' with this in itself not being sin.[1209] Sinful ignorance is the hypocrisy of claiming metaphorical sight and choosing not to reason correctly. The physical state of blindness is bound with the metaphorical sense of ignorance in John 9, but the narrative 'plays' with the duality of meaning[1210] inherent in the blended metaphor domain so that 'the typical sin/sickness metaphor is reversed.' [1211] Physical blindness is not automatically a symbol of sin. Furthermore, there is potential within the narrative for literal blindness to be portrayed as providing 'the necessary ground for faith to grow and emerge,' even if the presence of the healing event shows the restoration of physical sight to be necessary.[1212]

7.11 Passivity Sent Away?

Whereas the examples of healing examined so far contain some element of challenging the blended metaphorical domain of sight and understanding, Mark 8.22-26 does not neatly fit this interpretative position. The anonymous blind

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[1207] Koosed and Schumm, p. 83.

[1208] Hartsock, p. 155.

[1209] Ramsey Michaels, *John*, p. 575.

[1210] Koosed and Schumm, p. 79.

[1211] Grant, p. 85.

[1212] Koosed and Schumm, p. 85.

man is more passive than Bartimaeus: he is 'brought' to Jesus by unspecified persons and it is they who beg Jesus to heal the blind man, whilst he himself says nothing to make that initial request. In Mark 8.23, Jesus leads the man by the hand, suggesting that he could not navigate out of the village independently.[1213] That being said, Hull views Jesus' gesture as 'surely one of the most beautiful and moving incidents in the entire Bible,' an action of support and intimacy, gentle leading and not manhandling.[1214] It could even be said to be the opposite of the man being 'brought' in the previous verse.

Discussions as to why Jesus leads the blind man 'out of the village' centres around moving towards privacy, either for himself or the blind man. Midway through the healing, when the man looks up in Mark 8.24, there are people mentioned, indicating they have not obtained privacy outside of the village and perhaps separation from the village is the actual reason for Jesus leading the man away.[1215] Hypothetically, given that there had to be an explanation for the man's removal from the people in the village, it is conceivable that the village represents a "blind" society and in order to "see" the man needs to move away from its influence. Jesus taking the man by the hand is not a healing touch, it is responding to the man's need for guidance, or taking charge, or a combination of both.[1216] Removing the man from the influence of the village would require

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[1213] Hartsock, p. 157. Hartsock interprets Jesus leading the man by the hand as an illustration of helplessness.

[1214] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, pp. 39-40.

[1215] Guelich, p. 432.

[1216] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 393.

guidance and leadership. The method of doing so, leading by the hand, is a relatively gentle gesture of support or indication of presence, respecting the blind man and considering how to communicate with him in a way which does not subsume his agency. The blind man could remove his hand from Jesus at any point, thereby displaying his choice in allowing himself to be led. Jesus' instruction to the man post-healing emphasises the necessity of separation from the influence of the village, with 'Do not even go into the village' (Mark 8.26) providing explicit instruction to not reinitiate contact. From the perspective of privacy, the instruction could be linked to preventing the interruption of Jesus' ministry through the attention inevitably attracted by a 'spectacular' healing.[1217] From the more likely perspective of avoiding influence, perhaps Jesus does not want the man to be forced back under the leadership or control of the village, forced into a passive role again. He is now able to see and in his previous social position, as "blind", he could not.

During the healing itself, Jesus 'enter[s] into the thought-world of the man,' through the parallels between the use of spittle and laying of hands, and 'establishe[s] significant contact with him.'[1218] Although most healings within New

[1217] Lane, *Mark*, p. 286.

[1218] Lane, *Mark*, p. 285. Eric Eve argues that Vespasian's healing of a blind man in Alexandria forms a cultural and literary context for the use of saliva to remove blindness in Mark; as Vespasian's ability to heal was seen as supporting his claim to the imperial throne, Jesus' healing of the blindman would have been seen as evidence of Messianic identity, given Peter states Jesus is 'the Messiah' in Mark 8.29. See Eric Eve, 'Spit in Your Eye: The Blind Man of Bethsaida and the Blind Man of Alexandria', in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 54 (2008), pp. 1-17: p. 17. For references to Vespasian, see Tacitus, *Histories*, trans. Kenneth Wellesley, IV.81 and Suetonius *Vespasian*, trans. J. C. Rolfe, VII.1-3. Additionally, Pliny the Elder discusses using saliva as eye ointment and to heal the upper eyelids, see *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, XXVIII.VII.37-38. As an alternative interpretation, Daniel Frayer-Griggs discusses how the use of saliva to make clay, at least according to Irenaeus, was more about alluding to Genesis or the breaking of Sabbath laws – Daniel Frayer-Griggs, 'Spittle, Clay, and Creation in John 9:6 and Some Dead

Testament writings are presented as instantaneous, the healing in Mark 8.22-26 occurs in stages, allowing for 'a more detailed description than an instant cure allows.'[1219] The two aspects particularly important to discussing sight and understanding are, firstly, that there were two stages to the process and, secondly, that the man recognises he can see people at the midway point (Mark 8.24). After the first laying on of hands, Jesus asks the man whether he can see anything and Hull suggests this could be because Jesus is not quite sure whether the initial attempt has been effective.[1220] Hartsock takes this further, by explaining that the man's blindness was so severe that it needed two attempts at healing, with the first allowing partial sight and the second full restoration.[1221] Interpreted in this way, Jesus' ability to heal, though not questioned, appears somewhat limited in the face of difficulty. Assuming that the writer of Mark's Gospel is not questioning Jesus' authority to heal in any way, given Jesus does not ask as to the success of healing elsewhere, it could be that the protracted healing is a narrative device, underscoring the magnitude of the healing and accentuating Jesus' role as the 'great physician.'[1222]

Sea Scrolls', in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 132.3 (2013), pp. 659-670: pp. 659-660. 662. Whether the author of Mark is alluding to Vespasian, Genesis, the Sabbath laws, or a combination of any of the three potential aspects, it is clear that the use of saliva is intended to raise questions for the audience.

[1219] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 391.

[1220] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 41.

[1221] Hartsock, p. 157.

[1222] Guelich, pp. 432-433.

‘Can you see anything?’ is a necessary question since ‘no one but the blind man himself could determine whether he could see.’[1223] It also engages him in the process and communicates information regarding his blindness. The man’s response in Mark 8.24, that he ‘can see people, but they look like trees, walking,’ shows that he was not born blind: the man can both recognise people walking, envision trees and make associations between both visualisations.[1224] Also, the man communicates his partial sight in an ocularnormative way. For the miracle to be difficult enough to necessitate the two processes, a physiognomic audience would have assumed the man to have been blind from birth, but his response demonstrates this not to be the case. Yarbro Collins indicates that the blind man, ‘besides being an individual in need of physical healing, also represents the “blind” disciples’[1225] and given Jesus uses the metaphor of blindness to rebuke the disciples for ‘their failure to grasp his meaning’ (cf. Mark 8.17-18),[1226] it is conceivable that the blind man’s presence in the narrative is only to function as comment on the disciples. This does not mean, though, that no conclusions on the literal use of the seeing-knowing blended domain, featured as blindness and ignorance, can be gleaned from the passage.

The man is asked whether he can see anything because his perception and therefore personhood is independent, so Jesus sees fit to pose the question.

[1223] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 394.

[1224] Lane, *Mark*, p. 285.

[1225] Yarbro Collins, *Mark*, p. 393.

[1226] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 99.

His agency in the form of evaluation is important. By acceding to Jesus' guiding him by the hand, the blind man accepts Jesus' leadership and follows him. In being 'sent…away to his home' (Mark 8.26) the man follows Jesus' instruction to not go near the village, separating himself from negative influence and, potentially, spiritual blindness. If blindness in Mark 8.22-26 connotes lack of reasoning in any way, the man's partial sight reflects incomplete spiritual awareness or understanding, at least in terms of how he is portrayed in the narrative. He does not address Jesus in messianic terms, but he follows his instructions. The man is anonymous and relatively passive; he is not allowed to join the ranks of those literally following Jesus, as Bartimaeus does in chapter 10, so perhaps his reasoning process and understanding is not developed far enough. Physiognomically this is problematic, as Mark 8.25 explicitly states 'he saw everything clearly.' If we are to take the man's "blind" identity both literally and physically, then Mark 8.22-26 asks more questions than it answers.

7.12 Concluding Remarks on the New Testament Metanarrative of Blindness

As a negative corporeal state, reflecting a lack in visual ocuity, blindness is not portrayed as a desirable physical attribute in New Testament writings. As exemplified above, the explicit description "blind" (τυφλὸς) in New Testament writings represents a specific negative condition, with the accompanying metanarrative relating to physiognomic rhetoric. "Blind" is used both literally, to refer to physical ocular impairment, and metaphorically, to refer to a distorted or non-existent reasoning process. Additionally, as in Acts 9, the negation of sight

essentially places positive emphasis on sight itself, thereby reinforcing the seeing-knowing domain and the negative metanarrative of blindness.

The blended seeing-knowing metaphorical domain necessitates a multi-layered perspective on texts which reference blindness, whether as “blind” (τυφλός) or “not seeing”, especially as those depicted as physically blind are not necessarily spiritually blind and do not necessarily have an impaired reasoning process. Whilst metaphorically “blind” assumes a lack of understanding, “not seeing” does not automatically carry the same assumption. Blindness, therefore, becomes a problematic point of interaction between both aspects of seeing-knowing.

“Problematic” is a description that has been used frequently throughout this thesis, especially within this chapter. This is because the interrelation between “blindness” and “understanding” within New Testament writings is not a simple issue and the description “problematic” is the most appropriate way to represent that relationship. The interpretative stance taken in this chapter is that examples of the healing of physical blindness contain some element of challenging the blended metaphorical domain of sight and understanding. Not all texts fit this interpretative position neatly, but even Mark 8.22-26, with its presentation of a passive recipient of healing, questions the responsibility of society or culture as a negative influence, rather than having deviant corporeality be the primary concern.

New Testament writings presume a correspondence between blindness and a lack of understanding, with a physiognomic perspective embedded in the

means of communication, including the blended metaphor domain and language used. These "values" are challenged, but through narratives which contain those same "values". For example, impairment of vision is used in Matthew 7.3-5 and Luke 6.41 to illustrate the relationship between hypocrisy and sin, but the imagery of impaired ocular vision concurrently suggests that since every person is intellectually blinded in some way, no one should judge anyone else.

As has already been outlined, it is the normate, sighted subject position of New Testament writings that proposes and uses the metanarrative of blindness. Figurative references to blindness, specifically through the adjective "blind" (τυφλός), tend to be negative. Those characters depicted as "blind" often function as some level of challenge to those who purport to see or understand. Whilst assumptions of passivity and a lack of independence can be read into gaps in narratives, there are alternative possibilities as to interpretations of those characters. The "man blind from birth" in John 9 could be interpreted as independent on the basis of finding his own way to the pool at Siloam, since the Johannine narrative provides no information as to whether he was taken there; he could equally have made his way without assistance. Bartimaeus also seems to 'break' expectations. He highlights the blindness of those 'who fail to see and understand Jesus for who he is,'[1227] through the understanding that he is apparently not supposed to have. This symbolic depiction of a blind man who sees, yet must be physically healed, is still narrated from a sighted perspective, where 'to be delivered from the restrictions of blindness…is one of the most

[1227] Hartsock, p. 143.

desirable transformations,'[1228] even though key aspects of the depiction challenge the blended metaphor upon which that perspective relies.

Those who are "blind" in terms of their reasoning process being corrupted, often by their own choice, are deemed to be a dangerous influence. As such they are described as 'fools and blind' (Matthew 23.17). "Fool" is a serious insult when connected with "blind", as it is in Matthew 5.22, making those who are 'fools and blind,' yet leading others astray also 'liable to the hell of fire.' The absurdity of a blind person guiding anyone is an obvious part of the metaphorical narrative position, even when New Testament writings also include challenges to the metanarrative of physical blindness. Physical blindness, whilst negative, potentially appears to not be as serious as a corrupted reasoning process, yet, as has also been shown, the serious nature of ocular impairment is used to describe the eschatological dangers of hypocrisy and corrupted reasoning.

Sightless characters can be more than simply examples of narrative prosthesis and a lot of damage has been done by biblical scholars who have 'rendered sightless characters as nothing more than metaphors in indirect portrayals of sighted characters' dispositions, variously representing spiritual darkness and sin.' [1229] Agency and identity outside of the metaphor can be mistakenly removed if a text is solely examined from a metaphorical perspective, as this automatically takes the physiognomic perspective as the central value and point of interpretation. A disability perspective is necessary in order to

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[1228] John Hull, *In the Beginning*, p. 45.

[1229] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 31.

suggest alternative readings that pay attention to embedded bias in the language but attempt to read in less of a modern ableist viewpoint of a right/wrong body binary.

Ambiguity in the usage of the metanarrative of blindness also provides the opportunity to question what sightedness means, even though that questioning still uses the physiognomically tainted language of seeing-knowing. Acknowledging the potential duality, or multiple layers of meaning, in the linguistic reference to both seeing-knowing and blindness makes it possible to destabilize the binary division between sight and blindness in certain writings, developing what Lawrence would regard as more inclusive refigurations of those narratives.[1230] Even though this might not be possible or appropriate in all writings, it is necessary to attempt the task. As this chapter has shown, the very act of questioning assumed interpretations can provide at least elements of new perspectives.

[1230] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 56.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

As has been examined, impairments are constructed as “disability” within New Testament writings, where “otherness” is constructed as a consequence of not meeting corporeal expectations. Negative judgements are measured against an ideal standard, one assumed or present in the background of texts that mention corporeality, whether literally or figuratively. Language inherently contains cultural biases regarding expected corporeality, even if it is not being used to express those biases, meaning that New Testament writings need to be examined on multiple levels. These metanarratives create portrayals of disability that are inherently negative, but which contain gaps where those same disabilities do not mention the potential for agency as focus is directed elsewhere. Agency displayed by depicted disabled people can be suggested within New Testament writings, thereby challenging an automatically negative interpretation of the narrative prosthesis taking place.

Boundaries of Inclusion and Exclusion

This thesis has shown that standards of ideal corporeality are embedded within New Testament writings, even if the criteria is not explicitly outlined. It has shown that culturally constructed corporeality boundaries are present within these narratives, building on Solevåg’s assertion regarding a historical background where corporeality was measured according to how conspicuously

individuals did not meet corporeal ideals.[1231] As has been demonstrated, it is possible to textually prove the presence of a corporeal ideal and thereby provide a hermeneutical basis for the analysis of disability in a contextually appropriate way, particularly when considering corporeal judgement as a cultural construction and even where disability is not named as such.

By considering "mind" more appropriately, in terms of New Testament writings, as reasoning process, this thesis has shown how it can be considered as a corporeal function. Focus on how this works within the Synoptic gospels, complements arguments made by Gooder in relation to Pauline literature.[1232] As a physical function, there are corresponding expectations for the reasoning process in terms of acceptable distance from an ideal, in the same way as there are for bodily corporeality and other physical functions. Individuals can be judged as corporeally "other" based on an evaluation of their reasoning process.

"Deviant" corporeality creates boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. "Otherness", then, becomes a mode of comparative identity construction for a community. "Included" and "excluded" as categories must be treated with care, as there is a risk of oversimplifying; "other" can be constructed differently 'across the canvas of ancient societies and their texts.'[1233] It is also important to remember that whilst a modern reader might position "other" as the opposite of

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[1231] Solevåg, *Negotiating the Disabled Body*, p. 1.

[1232] Gooder, pp. 74-82.

[1233] Andrew J. Byers, *John and the Others: Jewish Relations, Christian Origins, and the Sectarian Hermeneutic* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2021), p. 8.

any ”ideal”, within first and second century societies no one met the corporeal ideal, making “other” in New Testament writings a judgement of distance away from instead of whether or not a standard was completely adhered to.

The Importance of Metanarratives

Analysis of how bodies are curated has shown that metanarratives are used, challenged and/or manipulated for the purpose of promoting the Gospel message. Boundaries are demonstrated to be upheld *and* contested, sometimes within the same text. Dehumanising references to groups, such as “the blind” or “the lame”, judge people by the metanarrative attached to their impairment, without giving them any kind of personal identity. Even the enlarging of the boundaries to inclusion within texts, such as the feast imagery in Luke 14, rests on cultural constructions of acceptable and unacceptable corporeality. Where impairment is included and given an honoured place, impairment in and of itself is culturally judged negatively in order to argue for its inclusion.

This thesis has also identified gaps where we simply are not given information about the impairment mentioned, since the narrative is describing something or someone else. Agency may or may not fill narrative gaps, but this thesis has demonstrated it *could*, which is a possibility needing recognition. If a character comes to Jesus when they are called, instead of being brought, for example, it is likely they were not reliant on others to get to Jesus. A disability perspective affects interpretation because a metanarrative assuming passivity is not accepted without question. Consequently, it has been possible to follow

Lawrence's aim in attempting to refigure narratives,[1234] but by using a different process and method, introducing the alternative perspective of metanarratives of disability. In particular, deconstructing references to impaired mobility or paralysis in New Testament writings has shown that there is the potential for the agency of disabled characters, despite this not being mentioned in the text.

Healing stories are problematic, their words and symbolism reflecting, and often sustaining, ableist assumptions.[1235] They are dangerous because of the apparent presented perspective that every disabled person wants healing, instead of social transformation.[1236] Disability activists like Julia Watts Belser and Melanie S. Morrison 'have fought hard against the assumptions in these narratives: that [their] bodies are broken; that [they] are insufficient and in need of fixing; that [they] are waiting around for a cure.'[1237] Erasure of disability is depicted as a positive outcome, but through the erasure of an impairment an individual often disappears from the narrative, particularly where their identity is solely derived from their impairment.

The erasure of impairment is not an issue that can be resolved. We need to accept the tension within New Testament writings, between inherently negative contextual attitudes and the simultaneous constructive aspects of

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[1234] Lawrence, *Sense and Stigma*, p. 56.

[1235] Watts Belser and Morrison, p. 159.

[1236] Watts Belser and Morrison, p. 160.

[1237] Watts Belser and Morrison, p. 160.

potential interpretation.[1238] Unnamed bodies are deprived of personal identity and, in many cases, a voice in a society that valued speech. Lack of voice in a rhetorical society symbolically points to a lack of cultural value, with New Testament writings not necessarily overtly examining social barriers, but social comment exists below the surface of the narrative whose focus is elsewhere. By highlighting metanarratives and also the tension they create within texts, this thesis has contributed to the wider protect outlined by Moss, proving that New Testament writings '[do] not unequivocally endorse ableism.'[1239]

The "mind" is part of the corporeal ideal, considered by virtue of its anticipated functionality: as a corporeal process, reasoning is expected to adhere to a standard implicitly understood in a given text, that standard being socially and culturally constructed. Correct reasoning is assumed and usually unexpressed, defined by deviations and what is problematic. The physiognomic consciousness embedded throughout New Testament writings creates the scenario where a person is unable to act in a particular way due to an impairment, so they cannot exhibit evidence of correct reasoning and are judged negatively on multiple levels of their corporeality.

Reasoning processes become problematic through a person's choice, either to pay attention to false teaching or to not reason correctly. They do not

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[1238] It is not that positive interpretations are always possible in biblical texts, more that the potential that they are possible needs to be acknowledged and not automatically excluded. Similarly, it should also be acknowledged that New Testament writings do not automatically have a positive interpretation and that perspectives on impairment can be negative, even when impairment is being used as a linguistic tool to communicate a positive message.

[1239] Moss, 'Mark and Matthew', p. 277.

evidence the correct reasoning associated with faith.[1240] Problematic reasoning is considered differently in various texts, showing that it is another aspect of corporeality that is contextually defined.

Incorrect reasoning is an insult, as is its evidence, because not only can it indicate heresy resulting from choice (2 Timothy), it can also be used to deny a person their humanity through the vilification of those who, effectively, do not agree with a narrative's standard of expected reasoning (Jude). Texts may define and react to problematic reasoning in different ways, but the one consistency is that it is used to create elements of social order and organisation, forming a boundary of some form of inclusion and exclusion, a means to define an "other".

Metanarratives relating to reasoning are not simple to deconstruct, as is demonstrated by how the metanarrative of blindness relates to the seeing-knowing blended metaphor domain. The description "blind" connotes particular qualities, both in terms of a person's visual ocuity and their capacity to reason, hence why Paul is referred to as losing his sight and not "blind" (τυφλός). Elymas becomes blind on account of his misunderstanding and Bartimaeus has his blindness removed to match his recognition of Jesus, but both have their sight changed to represent their reasoning process. New Testament writings show characters described as "blind" (τυφλός) do not neatly fit into the accompanying metanarrative.

[1240] The exact nature of "faith" is too large a discussion to have here, suffice to say that the choice of correct reasoning process plays a role in "faith" and each effectively becomes evidence of the other.

Continuing Questions

We can never totally remove our own preconceptions, or even understand ancient texts on their own terms, but by raising our consciousness of alternative perspectives we can begin to engage in a more honest way with ancient literature. The analysis of how distance from an ideal creates boundaries and how metanarratives of disability contribute to the depiction of those judged to be "other" raises many questions and, in a sense, an awareness of the uncertain nature of portrayals of disability within New Testament writings is essential. In acknowledging that uncertainty, more research needs to be done in relation to how ideals embedded within New Testament writings compare with other depictions in antiquity, specifically regarding where the boundaries for acceptability are positioned.

By necessity, this thesis has considered individual texts and boundaries separately. Yet the nature of corporeal boundaries within New Testament writings is that they can be somewhat elusive. Additionally, any person is subject to multiple boundaries concurrently, meaning that corporeality needs to be considered as a subject that transcends dichotomies, with identity being multidirectional and intersectional.[1241] This awareness needs to be applied to New Testament portrayals of disability.

As an example, there is a scarcity of reference to women and to disability in New Testament writings, meaning that it is difficult to find direct points of

[1241] Henning, p. 20. Henning examines the interaction between the boundaries of gender and disability in early Christian tours of hell.

comparison where the boundaries of gender and disability overlap. The intersection of corporal boundaries can be considered in the comparative treatment of the “Bent Over Woman”, in Luke 13, and Zacchaeus, in Luke 19. Both are disabled characters, specifically in relation to their ability to stand tall and both are called a child of Abraham. Zacchaeus is allowed the honour of hosting and interacting socially with Jesus, despite not having his impairment removed, whereas the “Bent Over Woman” is erased from the narrative once she is no longer disabled.[1242] The intersectionality of disability is a difficult question in relation to New Testament writings,[1243] but this comparison demonstrates that it is possible for the questions to be asked.

This thesis provides alternative interpretations of disability texts, using the concept of metanarratives of disability. Some of these are texts that regularly feature in liturgies and acts of worship within ecclesiastical communities. This raises the question of whether the metanarratives of disability within the New Testament texts are transferred to these mediated objects, thereby potentially setting up cultural identity boundaries in relation to corporeality, akin to those in the first or second century contexts of New Testament writings. Mediating objects

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[1242] Similarly, Zacchaeus’ function is to facilitate discussion with Jesus, a discussion in which he plays a part, yet the Bent-Over Woman is spoken to or about and exists solely as a signpost to Jesus’ healing ability. On a very basic level, although “disability” is by no means portrayed positively, Zacchaeus has an identity beyond his perceived corporeal limitations, whereas the Bent-Over Woman does not. In theory, whilst it might not be possible to identify the extent to which gender amplifies the negative treatment of disability, the “Bent-Over Woman” is both controlled and subjugated by the narrative on multiple levels, more so than her Abrahamic sibling.

[1243] Henning, p. 16. Early Christian texts were written by men with a relatively high degree of social power, so ‘we have difficulty accessing what it might have been like to inhabit a body that was wounded, disabled, female, or of low socioeconomic status.’

within ecclesiastical communities can become linguistic mechanisms of marginalisation because it is not just New Testament authors who 'use disabilities to promote broader theological or social agendas.'[1244] Christian traditions use 'ableist language and metaphors, without examining the values at the heart of the oft-repeated hymns and stories.'[1245] It would be interesting to analyse how New Testament metanarratives of disability feature within those hymns and interpretations of stories. Popular theology and ecclesial expressions of belief, as a consequence of this repetition, marginalise disabled people. Metanarratives of disability, through normate reductionism and narrative prosthesis, are used as a means to understand, organise and interpret human experience, from a nondisabled perspective,[1246] within New Testament writings and potentially their mediating objects. It is the effect of these mediating objects that creates a necessity to examine if/how New Testament metanarratives of disability might transfer to modern ecclesiastical contexts.

A Cultural Perspective Troubled by a Disabled Ideal?

It is uncomfortable to analyse New Testament writings through the lens of disability studies because, to borrow from Fiona Kumari Campbell's work on ableism, it 'tells us about the production, operation and maintenance'[1247] of a prejudice that modern ecclesiastical communities rarely want to acknowledge,

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[1244] Avalos, 'Disability Studies and Biblical Studies', p. 346.

[1245] Lawson Jacobs and Richardson, pp. 14-15.

[1246] Gosbell, p. 22.

[1247] Fiona Kumari Campbell, *Contours of Ableism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 4.

much less confront. Popular theology marginalises propagates the ideas that '(1) disability is caused by sin, and (2) if one has enough faith one will be healed,' based on normate approaches to New Testament writings[1248] where healing narratives are simply understood as transformations from "wrong" bodies to "right" bodies, without any consideration of the inherent layers in relevant narratives and a lack of sensitivity in interpretation of negative biblical stereotypes.[1249] This thesis hopes to play a part in highlighting areas where unconscious ableism has prompted misinterpretations of Scripture, in particular by encouraging receptiveness to interpretations acknowledging stereotypes and metanarratives of disability.

In modern church communities, disabled people are often excluded because of their impairments, 'failed by a Christian tradition that uses ableist language and metaphors, without examining the values at the heart of oft-repeated hymns and stories.'[1250] If ableism is an issue within churches that needs to be understood in order to be addressed,[1251] the texts used by churches that discuss disability need to be re-evaluated from a disability perspective which questions the physiognomic consciousness embedded in New Testament language, challenging the assumption that those values are automatically the values of the narratives themselves.

[1248] Wynn, p. 61.

[1249] John M Hull, 'Difficult Texts', p. 35.

[1250] Lawson Jacobs and Richardson, pp. 14-15.

[1251] Lawson Jacobs and Richardson, p. 17.

Eiesland highlights, throughout her seminal work *The Disabled God*, that Jesus' body as corporeally "perfect" is a cultural construction.[1252] The resurrected body, of John 20 for example, has the potential to be powerful and redemptive, but it is still a marginal story in Christian tradition, rejected by those who, from the vantage point of ableism, do not believe a disabled God could be a powerful God. That ableism, disability as a deficit needing to be fixed, being read into gaps in New Testament writings is dangerous because it helps to maintain 'stigmatising beliefs' through the use of unsubstantiated biblical "evidence".[1253] Negative judgements of "deviant" corporeality are present in New Testament writings, but not in every gap into which they are inserted, neither is there a singular attitude to or judgement of those deemed to be "other".

Interactions between disability studies and theology are 'sparse' – disability theology 'requires a deep and extended engagement with the lived experiences'[1254] and New Testament writings need to be evaluated from a disability perspective, not an ableist one.[1255] As demonstrated, consciousness of

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[1252] For example, Eiesland discusses the 'dissonance' between nonacceptance of disabled people and acceptance of 'grace through Christ's broken body' (p. 23), how disciples saw 'the resurrected Jesus Christ' as embodying both impairment and the imago Dei (p. 99) and the necessary rejection of manipulating the image of Christ by those in positions of privilege (p. 102).

[1253] Lawson Jacobs and Richardson, pp. 21-24. Lawson Jacobs and Richardson correctly state that modern Christianity, in particular, 'has always struggled to make sense of different bodies and minds,' instead constructing a 'fiction of perfection' that maintains corporeal prejudice, the main example being the ideal body of Jesus.

[1254] Sarah Jean Barton, 'Theologising Disability: Intersections of Critique and Collaboration', in *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Disability - Looking Towards the Future: Volume 2*, eds. Katie Ellis et al. (London - New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 173-184: pp. 173-174.

[1255] Theologians such as John Swinton, Brian Brock and Grant Macaskill at the University of Aberdeen, for example, are some of those opening the field of disability theology to a wider audience.

metanarratives of disability can facilitate the analysis of New Testament writings through a disability lens. These writings can be viewed as an inventory of cultural values regarding corporeality. Therefore, it is important to recognise them as such in order to prevent the automatic propagation of contextually specific assumptions about the body and “mind” as universal truth, when these texts are interpreted within our own, largely ableist culture.

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