Reading Romans with Arthur Schopenhauer: Some First Steps toward a Theology of Mind

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INTRODUCTION

When I study the letters of Paul, I am not merely engaging in an investigation of ancient history and thought. My assumption is that this study will in some sense bring me in touch with “truth,” and failing to engage in a search such as this I believe fundamentally impoverishes Pauline research.1 Schooled in “evangelische Theologie,” my reading of Paul is a critical reading; but it is also accompanied by a “critical trust,” a belief that, as texts are respectfully studied, “truth” about God and the world is being uncovered and disclosed.2 And if the study of Paul is able in some measure to bring one to a knowledge of this truth, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that in some sense it will cohere with truth as “uncovered” and “disclosed” by other disciplines and pursuits: it will cohere with great science, with great philosophy, and with great art.3 But how is one to relate Pauline theology to microbiology and quantum physics, to psychiatry and psychotherapy, to fine art and music? In particular, how can one


2. Within the scope of this article, I cannot enter into a discussion of theories of “truth” in relation to a study of the New Testament. I refer the reader to Christof Landmesser, (Wahrheit als Grundbegriff neutestamentlicher Wissenschaft [WUNT 113; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999], 192–94), who, among many other things, discusses truth as “Erschlossenheit” (disclosure) and “Aufgedecktheit” (uncovering).

3. Note, however, that study of the Bible does not always easily cohere with other disciplines, especially in relation to natural sciences. Sometimes the tensions between the Bible and modern science are too quickly resolved by “reinterpreting” biblical text (e.g., in the case of Genesis in relation to Darwinism).
relate the theme of this article, what I have called Paul’s “theology of mind,” to these other areas? As a first step toward a “theology of mind,” I want to consider what Paul’s view of mind looks like in the light of a philosophical system that may have some sympathy with Paul and that may be able to form a bridge between Paul, the natural sciences, and art.

The philosophical system in question is the transcendental idealism of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860).4 I stumbled across Schopenhauer’s philosophy in 2005 and found that he was to some extent able to bring together a rather diverse range of my interests: first, to understand the role of myth in New Testament theology;5 second, to address some of the most difficult issues in the interpretation of quantum theory;6 third, to understand what happens when one experiences the music dramas of Richard Wagner.7 An indication that Schopenhauer could span such a wide range of disciplines is suggested by the fact that he influenced not only philosophers but also some of the greatest scientists and artists. For example, he dominated the intellectual landscape of the closing years of Habsburg Vienna (1890–1914). There, Mahler was conducting at the Imperial Opera (1897–1907). Schönberg was pushing post-Wagnerian romantic music to its limits and then entering a new world of atonality with his song cycle The Book of the Hanging Gardens (1908–9). In 1897, Klimt led 19 students in withdrawing from the Academy to form the “Secession.” Schrödinger, although he was not to make his revolution in wave mechanics until 1926, was studying physics (1906–10) and then teaching (from 1911) at the University of Vienna. Freud was lecturing in neuropathology as well as delving into the psyches of his patients (one of whom was Mahler). And Wittgenstein (born 1889) was being educated at home until he was 14 before being sent to school in Linz and to University in Berlin and Manchester. All of them were under Schopenhauer’s spell.8 It was therefore with some excitement that I discovered that

4. The term transcendental signifies something that is intended to make cognition of experience possible and is to be distinguished from transcendent, which signifies a realm that lies beyond the senses. Put “transcendental” with “idealism” and you arrive at the view that “objects” conform to “subjects.” So objects have certain properties (causal powers, spatial and temporal position) because the mind is structured so as to impose these on experience.

5. I employed a Kantian-Schopenhaurian framework in order to make sense of the exorcisms of Jesus (see my Deliver Us from Evil: Interpreting the Redemption from the Power of Satan in New Testament Theology [WUNT 216; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007]).

6. For several years, I have been grappling with some of these issues in my teaching on determinism and free will in theological and scientific perspectives.

7. I am at the moment writing a book about the theology of his final stage work, Parsifal.

8. The pervasive influence of Schopenhauer is well documented in Allan S. Janik and Stephen Toulmin, Wittgenstein’s Vienna (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973). See also the revised German edition, Allan S. Janik and Stephen Toulmin, Wittgensteins Wien: Aus dem Amerikanischen übersetzt und bearbeitet von Reinhard Merkel (2nd ed.; Munich: Hanser, 1985). Schopenhauer also had his staunch critics in Vienna, for example, the naive realist, Ludwig Boltzmann. To the list of Schopenhauersians beyond Vienna, one can add the follow-
the 64th general meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas was to be held in Vienna in 2009. And there, being surrounded by such a great a cloud of Schopenhauerians who had gone before me, I presented a short paper on what I called Paul’s “Theology of Mind,” in which I discussed texts from Romans and 1 Corinthians in the light of Schopenhauer and of Kant. This article is an extensive revision of the part of that paper dealing with Romans, and for the philosophical aspect I focus on Schopenhauer.

The two philosophers who most influenced Schopenhauer were the “divine Plato” and the “marvellous Kant.” He managed to produce a philosophy that addressed just about every issue there is by combining these two philosophers. From Kant, he took over the phenomenal/noumenal distinction: the subject creates a world of “representation” (the phenomenal world) by imposing on experience space, time and causation. But there is a world existing independently of our experiencing it, the noumenal world, the Kantian “thing-in-itself,” which Schopenhauer called “will.” Whereas this was a totally unknown entity for Kant, Schopenhauer believed that it was possible to approach it in some sense through self-knowledge and indirectly through “art” and directly through music. So in great art there is the possibility of approaching this realm via the Platonic universals that are on the boundary between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds.

Schopenhauer was an atheist; but he was an admirer of Paul and two theologians for whom Paul was the overwhelming influence, Augustine and Luther. The themes that attracted him were their radical views of sin, the “bondage of the will” and their pessimistic view of the (fallen) human person. And it is not surprising that Schopenhauer was drawn to their thought because in his philosophical system he emphasized both “determinism” and “pessimism.” One has to read Schopenhauer critically (as Christian theologians must do of any

9. The work on 1 Corinthians 2 will be published separately as “But We Have the Mind of Christ: Some Theological and Anthropological Reflections on 1 Corinthians 2:16” (forthcoming).


11. He does not write extensively on these three, but when he does his admiration for them is clear. See idem, The World as Will and Representation (trans. E. F. J. Payne; 2 vols.; New York: Dover, 1958), 1:402–8, 2:603–4; see also the index entries for “Augsburg,” “Luther,” “Paulus,” and “Bibel, Neues Testament, Paulinische Briefe,” in idem, Parerga und Paralipomena: Kleine philosophische Schriften II (ASSW 5; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004).

philosopher). But a crucial service he can offer is to warn of the dangers of optimistic “Enlightenment” views of the human person, especially regarding the power of human reason. Some may have reservations about his “pessimism”; but as P. T. Forsyth wrote, although “[p]essimism is no true scheme of existence . . . it is, perhaps the truest system of godless existence.”13 This godless existence is depicted in Romans, and I start by looking at Rom 1:18–32.

THE FALL AND THE “CORRUPT MIND” (ROMANS 1:28)

In Rom 1:18–32, Paul speaks of the “fall” of human beings and the aspect of the human person that is emphasized above everything else is the mind. Paul sets out his thesis in v. 18 that the wrath of God will be revealed14 “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness.” This thesis is then developed in 1:19–2:16, and I now focus on the parts of the text that are related to “mind.” The truth that is suppressed is the “revealed reality of God,” and the suppression of this is seen by Paul as a deliberate as opposed to an unconscious act. Paul continues in 1:19–20a: “For God in his knowability (τὸ γνώστον τοῦ θεοῦ) is manifest to them, because God has revealed himself to them. For since the creation of the world God in his invisibility (τὰ . . . ἄνωτα ἄνωτος), namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived (νοούμενα καθορᾶται) through the things that have been made.”15 The crucial point to emphasize here is that God takes the initiative in making himself known. And it is in the reception of this that the root “mind” (νοῦς) appears in the participle νοούμενα, which modifies the verb καθορᾶται (καθ-οράω = “to discern clearly”). The sense is “to see with the understanding,” an oxymoron that receives some resolution through the instrumental dative τῶν ποιημάτων (“through the things that have been made”). Paul can then conclude that, because this knowledge of God is manifest in the world, humans are without excuse.

Before proceeding, it is worth emphasizing that this knowledge of God that is available to human beings is personal knowledge; it is not merely a knowledge of God’s attributes.16 Further, this knowledge does not come about by means of a process of logical deduction. Rather than seeing God “out of the things that have been made” (ἐκ τῶν ποιημάτων), he is seen “through the things that have

14. For the future understanding of this, see my No One Seeks for God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 1.18–3.20 (WUNT 106; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 12–18.
15. My translation (see my No One Seeks for God, 37).
16. In fact knowing God’s attributes yields no true knowledge of God. God cannot simply “identified” or “defined” by listing his attributes. One of the problems with much interreligious dialogue is that gods of different religions are identified with each other by comparing their attributes. See ibid., 90–118.
been made” (τοῖς πνεύμασιν). In comparison to much Hellenistic thought Paul says little in Rom 1:19–20 about the mechanism of coming to a knowledge of God.

Many theologians in developing a “natural theology” from this passage make the mistake of stopping here. But the next stage in the argument, the fall of human kind, is crucial. Paul asserts in v. 21 that human beings “know God” but this knowledge has not been retained for they failed to acknowledge him: they failed to glorify God and failed to give thanks to him (διὰ τοῦ γνώντας τὸν θεόν οὐκ ὡς θεόν δοξάζον ἡ πνευμότητα). Hence, they “became empty in their thoughts” (ἐμπλαμβάνοντας ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν). Furthermore, “their senseless hearts became darkened” (καὶ ἐσκοτώθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδία). By speaking of the “thoughts” (διαλογισμοῖς), and to a lesser extent the “heart” (καρδία), Paul is emphasizing the “intellectual” dimension of the fall. So because there was no acknowledgement of God or giving thanks to God, knowledge of God was essentially lost.

In the following verses, Paul asserts that the consequences of this fall are that God gives up human kind to all forms of idolatry (vv. 22–23), immorality (vv. 24–27), and, above all, a corrupt mind (ἐκς ἀδόκιμον νὸὸν, v. 28). Then at the end of the chapter, Paul argues that, although knowledge of God is essentially lost, there remains some residual knowledge of God’s principle of...
retribution: Rom 1:32 says that human beings know of God’s decree, that those who practice immorality deserve to be condemned.23 The significance of this “residue” is that it points to one of the roles fallen reason can play, namely, some limited form of “practical reason.” But as far as knowledge of God is concerned, human beings fail miserably. They create images of God that are essentially human constructions.24

I now want to raise two issues concerning this text, Rom 1:18–32. First, how is one to understand Paul’s use of ψυχή? Second, how does this “fall” come about? What is the driving force? Regarding the first, there has been disagreement among New Testament scholars as to the meaning of this crucial word in the occurrences I am considering. The tendency has been to argue that Paul is speaking of a way of thinking rather than an organ of thought. In particular, Gutbrod understands ψυχή as thought processes (“das Denken”) that set the will in motion and guide it, the emphasis being on practical rather than theoretical reason.25 This may well be right for Eph 4:17, the first texts he discusses.26 But ψυχή in 1 Cor 2:16 (a text not discussed by Gutbrod) is not just concerned with a way of thinking but rather with an ontological view of mind.27 For the purposes of the present argument, I can leave open the question whether this ontological view of mind is found in Rom 1:28; 12:2. But of one thing I am fairly sure: Gutbrod’s view of ψυχή in these texts is rather too restricted.28 The fallen mind of which Paul speaks is concerned not just with practical reason but with something much broader: it has failed to recognize God through the created order and employs what I call “categories of idolatry,” a point to which I return.

Regarding the second question, the intellect, as we have seen, certainly “falls.” But is this the cause of the fall? This raises a crucial issue for Paul’s anthropology. Is the mind the crucial steering mechanism for Paul?29 Schlatter (and Gutbrod)
would seem to suggest this,\textsuperscript{30} taking the phrase \(\varepsilon\nu\ \tau\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\iota\alpha\lambda\omega\gamma\iota\sigma\iota\omicron\mu\omicron\zeta\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\nu\) to indicate the means by which human beings prepare their wretchedness, \(\varepsilon\nu\) having a causal force.\textsuperscript{31} But the phrase \(\varepsilon\mu\alpha\tau\omega\iota\varsigma\omicron\varsigma\ \varepsilon\nu\ \tau\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\iota\alpha\lambda\omega\gamma\iota\sigma\iota\omicron\mu\omicron\zeta\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\nu\) can simply mean “they became futile in their thoughts” or “they became futile with respect to their thoughts.” I suggest that it is not the thoughts that are the steering mechanism but something much more fundamental, and the term I use for this is soul.

My use of the term soul does not primarily derive from any study of the anthropological term \(\psi\nu\chi\eta\) but rather is an anthropological implication of participation in Christ and in Adam.\textsuperscript{32} The “soul” is the very essence of the human person which transcends space and time. One way of viewing it using Kantian-Schopenhauerian terms is the “thing-in-itself” (which Schopenhauer called “will,” a rather confusing term).\textsuperscript{33} The body in space-time can then be viewed as the manifestation of this supra-temporal "soul."\textsuperscript{34} The “soul” is the ultimate driving force of the human being and is not primarily a cognitive entity;\textsuperscript{35} rather, it is a supra-temporal entity and could be understood roughly as the “body-in-itself.”\textsuperscript{36} And it is out of this soul that the mind emerges.

If this is correct, it means that the ultimate cause of the fall is not simply a misuse of the intellectual faculties just as the cause of redemption is not a matter of simply changing one’s mind. Rather, the cause of the fall is Adam’s work and our participation in Adam; the cause of our redemption is Christ’s work and our participation in Christ. And the aspect of the human person that participates in their “histories” I call the “soul.”

I now turn to consider how Paul understands the participation in Adam and in Christ and how this affects the mind.

\textsuperscript{30} Adolf Schlatter, \textit{Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief} (5th ed.; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1975), 62: “Die von ihnen erfundenen Pläne, ihre \(\delta\iota\alpha\lambda\omega\gamma\iota\sigma\iota\omicron\mu\omicron\zeta\) mit denen sie ihren Willen formen und ihre Taten vorbereiten, sind ihr eigenes Erzeugnis, und durch dieses verscheuchen sie aus ihrem Inneren die Wahrheit, durch die sich ihren Gott bezeugt, und verfallen deshalb der Nichtigkeit.”

\textsuperscript{31} Schlatter, \textit{Gottes Gerechtigkeit}, 62: “\(\varepsilon\nu\ \tau\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\iota\alpha\lambda\omega\gamma\iota\sigma\iota\omicron\mu\omicron\zeta\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\nu\) nennt das Mittel, mit dem sich die Menschen ihre Armseligkeit bereiten müssen. \(\varepsilon\nu\) hat kausale Kraft.” So just as God subjected the creation to futility in Rom 8:20, so in 1:21 he speaks of human beings becoming empty \textit{through their thoughts} (\(\varepsilon\mu\alpha\tau\omega\iota\varsigma\omicron\varsigma\ \varepsilon\nu\ \tau\omicron\varsigma\ \delta\iota\alpha\lambda\omega\gamma\iota\sigma\iota\omicron\mu\omicron\zeta\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\omicron\nu\)).

\textsuperscript{32} See ch. 4 of my \textit{Deliver Us from Evil}, 189–229, entitled “Participation and Its Anthropological Implications.”

\textsuperscript{33} See ibid., 217–18, for a discussion of the term \textit{will} (\textit{Wille}) in Schopenhauer.

\textsuperscript{34} Sometimes in the OT, the body is seen as a manifestation of the soul. See J. Pedersen, \textit{Israel: Its Life and Culture} (4 vols.; London: Cumberlege / Copenhagen: Branner, 1926), 170–76; Bell, \textit{Deliver Us from Evil}, 206–7.

\textsuperscript{35} The idea of the soul as simply cognitive and equivalent to “mind” is a common assumption and can be traced back to Descartes.

\textsuperscript{36} I say “roughly” because the cells of the body are constantly being renewed.
Participation in Adam and Its Consequences

Although Adam is not mentioned explicitly in Rom 1, many commentators rightly see the narrative of Gen 3 as fundamental to Paul's argument. We have seen that the “fall” as narrated in Rom 1 emphasizes the fall of the human mind. Paul returns to the fall later in chs. 5 and 7. In these chapters, he relates the sin of Adam to the sin of all human beings living in his shadow, the relationship between the two being understood in terms of participation. The main reason Paul was drawn to participation in Adam was because he was convinced that the Christian participated in Christ, a view that was an integral part of his atonement theology. So just as participation in Christ is the key to redemption, so participation in Adam is the key to the fall.

As indicated above, the nearest term Schopenhauer used for soul was will. This is the fundamental driving force for the human being, and he applies it to the relation of the sinner to Adam. He argues that “the origin of [original sin] is to be inferred from the will of the sinner. This sinner was Adam, but we all existed in him; Adam became miserable, and in him we have all become miserable.” If “soul” is viewed in terms of Schopenhauer's “will,” one can appreciate anew Paul's devastating view of “fallen human nature.” The fallen human being has a drive for idolatry (see the previous discussion of Rom 1:18–32), which is rooted in the “will” or “soul” and means that our whole being, including our mind, is corrupted.

But if the mind is corrupted in Adam, how is one to understand Rom 7, which seems to speak of a mind that, as we will shortly see, is functioning rather well? The first thing to say about Rom 7:7-25 is that it does not conform to any philosophical or theological discourse before Paul and it hardly conforms to any after him! Further, in Rom 7:7-13 a “myth” is expressed in the “I” form. Myth has the power to effect an existential change, and this is related to the fact that it is both irreducible and inexchangeable. By extending Schopenhauer’s idea of “art,” in particular his view of tragedy, I have argued

37. Bell, No One Seeks for God, 24–26, 48, and the literature cited there.
40. For example, regarding the use of the “I” in this “analogielose[r] Text,” Otfried Hofius (“Der Mensch im Schatten Adams. Römer 7,7–25a,” in Paulusstudien [WUNT 143; vol. 2; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002], 113) writes: “Es gibt zu ihr keine formgeschichtliche Parallelle, und sie läßt sich auch nicht traditionsgeschichtlich aus einer bestimmten vorgegebenen Redeform herleiten.”
41. Hence, the fall of Adam in Gen 2–3 and God's sending his Son into the world as a sacrifice for sin (Rom 8:3) are both myths; they are all inexchangeable. By contrast, a metaphor is exchangeable in that one metaphor can be exchanged for another (e.g., Achilles is a lion can be exchanged for Achilles is an eagle or panther). On this crucial distinction between myth and metaphor, see my Deliver Us from Evil, 40–44.
elsewhere that through myth there is a possibility of approaching the noumenal realm. But this is only possible if there is a positive reception of that myth; this is precisely how Paul is receiving Gen 2–3 in Rom 7:7–13. Adam, the first human being, was placed in the Garden of Eden and given a commandment not to eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is the commandment that promised him life (ἳ ἐντολή ἴ ἐς ζωήν, v. 10), for if he kept it he could remain in the garden, eat of the fruit of the tree of life, and achieve immortality. However, sin deceived him (7:11), just as the serpent deceived Eve (Gen 3:13), and he died (7:11). As Käsemann comments, vv. 9–11 refer to Adam and to Adam only; but because Adam’s story is also my story, Paul can express it in the first person.

And so Rom 7:14–24 tells us something of the human being living in the shadow of Adam’s sin (Rom 7:7–13). This is certainly a theology of pessimism. The person declares that “I am sold under sin” (v. 14) and “nothing good lives in me” (v. 18). He is overtaken by sin, which dwells in him (v. 20), and he cries in despair: “Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?” (v. 24). This wretched situation arises because of what happened to Adam. The interpretation of Rom 7:14–25 could be relatively straightforward if there were simply these negative pessimistic utterances of man living in Adam’s shadow. But they are interspersed with positive comments: we find a person who has good intentions (v. 15, 18b–19) and who has a “mind” that delights in the law of God (vv. 22–23) and serves it (v. 25b).

Because of these conflicting statements, one can understand why so many are drawn to the view that Rom 7 concerns a conflict within the person. Two recent interpretations of Rom 7 have taken this view, one applying it to the Christian, the other to the non-Christian, and they are of special interest because they focus on the role of the “mind.” First, van Kooten develops a detailed Christian anthropology on the basis of Rom 7. He writes:

By means of such specific terms as “inner man” and “mind”, Paul appears to sketch a very detailed anthropology which enables him to show how the

42. Ibid., 121–88.
43. Ibid., 35–36, 251–52.
44. Further, Paul can be said to “work” on this myth; cf. Hans Blumenberg, Arbeit am Mythos (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1979).
45. Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans (trans. G. W. Bromiley; London: SCM, 1980), 196: “In the full sense only Adam lived before the commandment was given. Only for him was the coming of the divine will in the commandment an occasion for sin as he yielded covetously to sin and therefore ‘died’. . . . There is nothing in the passage which does not fit Adam, and everything fits Adam alone.”
46. Hofius, ”Mensch im Schatten Adams,” 121: “Ich, der adamatische Mensch, bin, was Adam, der Protoplast, geworden ist. Deshalb kann Adams Geschichte als meine Geschichte erzählt werden,—deshalb ist auch der Bericht von Röm 7,7b-11,13 in die Form der ‘Ich’-Rede gefaßt” (Hofius’s emphasis).
strife between good and evil takes place in man, where evil comes from, how it can be resisted and how man’s assimilation to Christ’s death and resurrection in baptism (Rom. 6.5) and his continuing *summorphósis* with the image of God (Rom. 8.29) come about.47

He thinks that in Rom 7 the mind is functioning again (contrast 1:28).

It is clear that in Romans 7 Paul in fact draws a map of the proper functioning of the mind. The mind is no longer the ωδόκιμος νοός, the “unsatisfactory, discredited mind” . . . which—according to Rom 1—was the result of the degeneration of the original monotheistic aniconic religion into polytheism . . . The remarkable thing about Romans 7 is that the mind is no longer debased but functioning again. This must be the result of man’s assimilation to Christ in baptism (Rom 6.5).48

The second example is Emma Wasserman, who sees an inner personal conflict at work in Rom 7 but applies it to the “immoral Gentile.”49 She uses Hellenistic moral philosophy as the background and believes the chapter not only describes an “internal struggle and conflict” but also “explains the mind’s total defeat.”50 It concerns “the radical disempowerment of reason at the hands of the passions.”51 She suggests that “Platonic traditions make sense of the developing argument of Romans 7 and explain the language of mind, inner person, sin, passions, flesh, body, warfare, slavery, imprisonment, and death.”52

There is much one could say about both of these interesting and arresting approaches. But the issue I wish to focus on is whether Rom 7:14-25 can possibly refer to a contradiction within the human person, whether he be Christian or not. However much one may wish to distance oneself from Bultmann’s exegesis of Rom 7, I think that he is absolutely right to argue that the verses concern a transsubjective entity. On the basis of Rom 7, Bultmann does not argue that the human being is split.53 Rather, he argues that the human being is *is* the split.54 As


50. Ibid., 814.

51. Ibid., 794.

52. Ibid.

53. It is unfortunate that Emma Wasserman (*The Death of the Soul in Romans 7: Sin, Death, and the Law in Light of Hellenistic Moral Psychology* [WUNT 2/256; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008], 52; see also idem, “Death of the Soul,” 796) misquotes Bultmann as saying “Man is split.”

Hofius writes, Rom 7 concerns not a contradiction within the Adamic human being; rather he is himself the contradiction.55

Bultmann has been criticized for his abstract view of the human person.56 But the alternatives seem impossible to hold to. In my judgement, there is no way that Rom 7:14–25 can refer to the empirical person, Christian or non-Christian. The problems with referring these verses to the Christian have been well rehearsed.57 The problems with applying them to the empirical non-Christian are perhaps not so well rehearsed, but the fundamental issue is this: never does Paul speak in positive terms about the will and mind of the empirical human being in relation to the law.58 On the contrary, "the mind that is set on the flesh (τὸ φρόνημα τῆς σαρκός) is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law" (Rom 8:7).

This brings me to one of the most striking aspects of the "mind" statements of Paul in Rom 1–8. The positive comments on the mind of the person in Adam cannot describe the empirical human being. There are not only such statements in Rom 7; they are also in Rom 1:19–20 (God's invisible nature being clearly perceived in the things that have been made) and in Rom 2:14–16 (conflicting thoughts accusing or excusing). One of the most dangerous theological pursuits


57. Briefly, the antithesis in Rom 7:5–6 makes clear that Christians were in the flesh (ἡμεν ἐν τῇ σαρκί, v. 5) but now (νῦν δὲ, v. 6) are no longer. Rom 7:5 is then taken up in Rom 7:7–25 and Rom 7:6 in Rom 8:1–17. The crucial verse that demonstrates that vv. 7–25 cannot refer to the Christian is v. 14b: ἐγὼ δὲ σάρκων ἔμι πεπραμένως ὑπὸ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν. Being "fleshly" and "sold under sin" characterizes the human being without Christ.

is to read off from these verses a “natural theology” (as in Rom 1:19–20), a salvation by works (Rom 2:14–16) or the existence of people whose “mind” wills the good yet are “sold under sin” (as in Rom 7:14–25). All these verses have a rhetorical function and refer to human beings who simply do not exist. So Rom 1:19–20 is used to highlight the fall of human beings (any such knowledge belongs to an unfallen state). Rom 2:14–16 highlights that there are no pious Gentiles who do the good (something made absolutely clear in Rom 3:9–20). And Rom 7:14–24 demonstrates that the human being himself is a contradiction: on the one hand, he is a creation of God made to delight in the good and in the law of God; but on the other hand, he is living in the shadow of Adam and as such can only displease God and his redemption can only lie in Christ.

The precise nature of this contradiction can be seen clearly in relation to what Paul writes about “mind” in Rom 7:21–13:

Then I find with respect to myself,

I who want to do the good,

the rule (νόμος) that determines me, that with me (only) the evil is there.

For I have joy in the law of God (συνήδομαι γὰρ τὸ νόμο τοῦ θεοῦ)

according to the inner human being (κατὰ τὸν ἔσος ἀνθρώπον).

But I see another law in my members,

which contradicts the law of my mind (ἀντιστρατευόμενον τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ νοῦς μου)

and imprisons me under the law of sin (καὶ αἷμα αὐτοτιτιζόντα με ἐν τῷ νόμῳ τῆς ἁμαρτίας),

which is in my members.

In 7:22 Paul speaks of ὁ ἔσω ἀνθρώπος which, unlike the occurrence in 2 Cor 4:16, is an abstractly conceived entity. “The ‘inner person’ is what the individual should be, in distinction from what he actually is.” It is a transsubjective entity that acts as a subject, and the νοῦς of 7:23 is a particular aspect of ὁ ἔσω ἀνθρώπος, namely, thinking, judging, willing and deciding. For Bultmann, the full meaning of νοῦς is shown by Rom 7:23. The νοῦς “is an understanding self that hears God’s will speaking through the Law, agrees with it, and adopts it as its own. The nous is that self which is the subject of the ‘willing’ in v. 15f. and

59. For the analysis and translation I am very much indebted to ibid., 141–42 (although I sometimes understand these verses differently). Rom 7:21–23 resumes vv. 14–20 and consists of a thesis (v. 21) and a two-membered establishment (vv. 22–23), whose first part (v. 22) refers back to the positive idea of v. 21b (τῷ θέλοντι ἔμοι ποιῶ τὸ καλόν) and whose second part (v. 23) refers back to the negative idea of v. 21a, c (ἐφησκό ἄνθρωπον ἄνθρώπων ὁ ἔμοι τὸ κακόν παράκειται). In the translation, positive sentiments are italic.

60. See my Deliver Us from Evil, 223–26, where I argue that it refers to the heavenly person as opposed to the earthly person (ὁ ἔσω ἀνθρώπος).


19–21, its aim is 'the good' or 'what is right,' but its doing is frustrated by sin, which dwells 'in the members.'”

I think the key point about vv. 21–23 is that the “I” has two states that correspond to the two states of the law. There are two completely different sets of correlations. The law can appear as the “law of God” if the “I” is in a certain state (the “I” as ἐστὶ άνθρωπος with the νοῦς as the subject of willing). But it can also appear as the “law of sin” if the “I” is as σάρξ. This could also illumine the verse that has caused so much consternation that many have had to conclude it is a gloss, v. 25b: “So then I myself serve the law of God with my mind but the law of sin with my flesh.”

Developing this further, one could argue that the one law of God is manifest in various ways depending on the recipients and their condition. So for Gentiles, it is manifest as τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου γραπτὸν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν. On the basis of this, Gentiles are condemned by the law (just as Jews are); furthermore, the issues of “law” raised in Rom 7:7–25 are relevant for Gentiles as well as Jews (and these verses must be relevant for Gentiles because they concern the human being in the shadow of Adam). The law and its reception can therefore be considered in terms of this subject-object correlation, an idea that Schopenhauer applied to our perception of “objects.”

What then can one say about the empirical human being on the basis of these texts that concern our participation in Adam (Rom 1:18–32; 5:12–21; 7:7–25)? Taken together, one can say this: the fallen person is in a state of absolute despair. He is driven by his essential nature, the “soul,” which is bound to Adam; he is a helpless servant (what Paul says about the mind in Rom 7:21–25 does not refer to the empirical human being). A view such as this is rather similar to that put forward by Schopenhauer. For Schopenhauer, the principal faculty (corresponding to the Stoic Ἡγεμονικόν) is not the intellect but the “will.” The will is the master; the intellect is the servant. The will is the “strong blind man” who carries on his shoulders the “sighted lame man,” the intellect.

Participation in Christ and the Renewal of the Mind

Just as the mind becomes corrupt by participation in Adam, so the mind is renewed by participation in Christ. Here, participation entails a dying and a rising with Christ. I understand this in an ontological sense: through faith, the

64. See Hofius, “Mensch im Schatten Adams,” 151–52, and the literature cited there.
66. See, e.g., Schopenhauer, Fourfold Root, 209.
67. Schopenhauer, World as Will, 2:208–9. Another image he uses is that of a plant, the root being the will and the corona the intellect: “The root is what is essential, original, perennial, whose death entails the death of the corona; it is therefore primary. The corona, on the other hand, is the ostensible, that which has sprouted forth, that which passes away without the root dying; it is therefore secondary” (ibid., 203).
Christian has died with Christ on calvary and risen to new life. This I understand in terms of the supratemporal "soul": the totally corrupt soul of the human person participates in the "soul" of Christ. Paul never speaks about a ψυχή of Christ and neither does he speak of his "will" in this sense. But he speaks of the ἀνθρωπός Jesus Christ (Rom 5:15–19); he speaks of Christ being sent in the form of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3); he speaks of the blood of Christ (cf. Lev 17:11). This humanity of Christ is not to be set against his divinity. Likewise, his "human soul" is not to be set against his divinity. Therefore, by participating in Christ via his soul, the human being is participating in his essential being, in both his humanity and his divinity. And hence the mind is restored.

I now give two examples of this restoration of the mind in Romans that can be viewed in terms of participation. The first concerns faith itself. The renewal of the human person and the human mind can only take place through faith in Christ. This faith has a dual aspect in Paul. First, it is a means of achieving union with Christ as suggested above. This is a crucial aspect of faith that has been neglected by those who emphasize the cognitive aspect of faith. This faith is to be understood as God's work (and exclusively God's work) in bringing our soul together with that of Christ. Thereby, the person participates in Christ's humanity and divinity. The second aspect of faith is the conscious understanding that comes about as a result of this union with Christ. When Paul speaks about faith in Christ, he certainly includes this rational aspect of faith in that the Christian believes certain things to be true.

A second example of the renewed mind is to be found in Rom 12:1–2. The wording of these verses points to a clear reversal of the situation found in Rom 1:19–32. So whereas 1:28 speaks of the corrupt mind, 12:2 speaks of the renewed mind. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds (τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τού νοός), so that you may discern what is the will of God (εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ)—what is good and acceptable and perfect." By employing δοκιμάζειν ("to discern") it is

68. Note the significant use of ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἀκμαία in Rom 3:25 (Bell, "Sacrifice and Christology," 19).

69. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, vol. 3: The Doctrine of Creation, Part 2 (trans. G. W. Bromiley; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), 46: "In Paul... Christ is man not in contrast to the fact that elsewhere He is termed the Son of God, but because He is Son of God, and expresses and demonstrates Himself as such in the fact that He is man."

70. However, the renewal of the mind can also be seen in terms of the creative "word of God" and in terms of the work of the Holy Spirit. See Bell, "But we have the mind of Christ."

71. So when Paul speaks of being united with the form of Christ's death in Rom 6:5 (ἐλ γάρ σώματοι γεγόναμεν τῷ ὕμνῳ τοῦ θανάτου αὐτοῦ), the presupposition is that this is only possible through faith in Christ.

72. See Otfried Hofius, "Wort Gottes und Glaube bei Paulus," in Paulusstudien, (WUNT 51; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989), 155–57. However, he perhaps overemphasizes the rational element: "Der Glaube ist für Paulus ganz elementar ein Für-wahr-Halten dieser... assertorischen Sätze und Aussagen" (p. 156, Hofius's emphasis).
emphasized by means of a word play (δοκιμάζειν / δοκίμασιν) that the corruption of the mind of Rom 1:28 (παρέδωκεν αὐτοῖς ὁ θεός εἰς δοκίμασιν τοὺς) is being reversed. In Rom 12:1–2, there are many echoes of the “mind” vocabulary used in Rom 1:18–32. On the basis of Rom 12:2, some have argued that the renewed mind is intrinsically related to “practical reason.” This, however, gives too limited a view to Paul’s view of a renewed mind. For if there is a reversal of the idolatry of Rom 1:19–32 in 12:1–2 (note the use of “intelligent worship,” λογική λατρεία, in place of the foolish worship of creatures in Rom 1:21–23, 25), then the renewed mind is of a larger scope than that of “practical reason.”

Reading Romans in the Light of Schopenhauer

As indicated at the outset, one reason I am reading Paul on the mind in the light of Schopenhauer is to build bridges to other disciplines. How I build those bridges will be seen in future publications. But for now I point to three insights Schopenhauer can offer the student of Paul.

1. His phenomenal/noumenal distinction emphasizes that what one sees in space-time is not ultimate reality. The essence of the human person I call the “soul” (which corresponds to Schopenhauer’s “will”); this transcends space and time and can be related to the noumenal realm. The “outer human being” can be tortured and destroyed, but the “inner human being” will remain (cf. 2 Cor 4:16). Perhaps it is only God who can truly perceive the human “soul” (only he can know the “thing-in-itself”); and it is only he who has power to destroy both body and soul (Matt 10:28).

2. It is this “soul,” not the mind, that acts as the crucial steering mechanism of the human being. Using Schopenhauer’s image, the “soul” is like the root out of which the corona (the mind) grows. Applying this to Paul, the mind is corrupted because the soul participates in Adam; it is renewed because the soul participates in Christ.

3. Schopenhauer’s view (which he took from Kant) that one forms “representations” (“Vorstellungen”) of the world is of fundamental importance for a Christian theology of mind. We are not passive receivers of sense data; using Kant’s terminology, the mind (“Gemüt”) can be understood as the “power of representation” (“Vorstellungsfähigkeit”), and representations of this sort are dependent on the categories we employ. The human being in Adam perceives

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74. This point becomes even clearer in 1 Cor 2:16.

the world in the way fallen Adam (and Eve) perceive it, using “categories” of idolatry and forming representations of the world that lead to idolatry and immorality. But the human being in Christ uses the “categories” of Christ and forms representations that Christ forms. As participants in the Trinity, they form these distinctive representations. The Christian, having a renewed mind (Rom 12:2) or the “mind of Christ” (2 Cor 2:16), is thus able to form these distinctive representations of the world.

4. Schopenhauer’s understanding of the subject-object correlation can help in regard to the way the “law” can be received as either the “law of God” or the “law of sin” (Rom 7:21–23). There is one law but it is manifest in different ways.

Schopenhauer has nudged me in helpful directions when trying to develop a “theology of mind” using Romans. He certainly has to be read critically, and I mention just two points where I have distanced myself from him in the light of Paul. The first is that for Schopenhauer there is no principle of individuation in the “noumenon” (hence his use of the singular term); however, as far as the human “soul” is concerned, I have insisted on a principle of this sort in the light of biblical anthropology. Second, although Schopenhauer’s pessimism fits very well into Paul’s view of the empirical human being whose mind is corrupt, he misses one of the crucial points regarding the mind in Rom 7:14–25. Yes, the human person is a corrupt being in Adam; but he is also a good creation of God with a mind that delights in the law and wills the good. Although this good aspect has no empirical foundation or correlate, it is a theological truth that in some quarters perhaps deserves to be given more emphasis.

Every exegete employs some sort of philosophical system, usually unconsciously. The advantage of a conscious use of a philosophical system (in my case, the transcendental idealism of Schopenhauer) is that one is more aware of the possible problems. And, of course, you do not have to read Romans with Schopenhauer at your side; but I think he can certainly help.

76. I think the wording of perceptions in Gen 3:6a is significant: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate” (καί ἠδεύ ή γυνὴ ἃς καλὼν τὸ ζύλον εἰς βρῶσιν καί ὅτι ἀρετῶν τῶν ὀφθαλμοὺς ἴδειν καί ὁραῖον ἔστιν τοῦ κατανοῆσαι, καί λαβοῦσα τοῦ κῆρπον αὐτοῦ ἐφαγεν).

77. Cf. Schopenhauer, Fourfold Root, 209: “In precisely the same manner, with an object determined in any way, the subject also is at once assumed as knowing in just such a way” (his emphasis).