

## PERSONHOOD AND HABITUATION IN PAUL

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Susan's Eastman's compelling interdisciplinary book, *Paul and the Person*, has propelled the question of *personhood* in the apostle's letters to an overdue prominence. What did Paul think it meant *to be* a human person? What did he think it was about *being* a person that made it appropriate to talk about consequence-bearing human agency? Did Paul consider personhood something innate or acquired? Were there certain criteria in his mind that constituted a human being as a real person, in the absence of which their personhood might be considered *less than* real? As New Testament scholars, we rarely step back far enough from our text to ask such foundational questions but, as soon as we *do*, it becomes apparent that many of the key theological consequences of Paul's writings hang on the answers we give, not to mention vital applications of his theology to the life of the modern church.

In this paper, my goal is to briefly summarize Eastman's work, to bring it into conversation with Paul's surprisingly voluminous material on the subject of habituation, and to explore how the interaction not only expands the range of useful applications for Eastman's model but also goes some way to explaining why the model itself has remained hidden in plain sight for so long.

### II. PAUL AND THE PERSON

Eastman's project begins with the prescient contribution to the debate about personhood in Paul made by Ernst Käsemann who argued—over against the views of his teacher, Rudolph Bultmann—that human beings are “relationally constituted agents.”<sup>2</sup> Our concept of ourselves *as selves* does not, in fact, on Käsemann's view, begin with some kind of innate,

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<sup>2</sup> Susan Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017): 2. Eastman devotes a significant section of the book to summarising Bultmann and Käsemann's distinctive takes on *sōma* in Paul, see Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 96–102.

autonomous, self-determining consciousness. Rather we come to a sense of self as we relate to the outside world and to the other selves that inhabit it.<sup>3</sup>

### A. STOICISM

Stoicism is the first port of call on the whistle-stop intellectual tour that follows, facilitating the introduction of several key concepts. Does a human being need a functional abstract idea of themselves in order to be a person? Seneca says “no.” A baby has *experiential* awareness of themselves as a real person, rapidly learning that eyes are for looking and lungs are for screaming, long before they can clearly *articulate* what is going on when they choose to use them in these ways (*Ep.* 121.9–13).<sup>4</sup> As Eastman settles on Epictetus as her primary conversation partner, however, it becomes apparent that, in his view, abstract awareness of the self is necessary for personhood in the fullest sense. For Epictetus, the self is a citadel upon which the sunshine and the storms of external circumstances shine and break respectively, and personhood is that feature of human existence that allows us to choose how to respond in each case.<sup>5</sup> The impressions presented to us by our senses are beyond our control, but *it is within our control* to respond to them positively—to embrace them with equanimity whatever they may be as manifestations of the divine will framed in broadly pantheistic terms. “When you see someone weeping in sorrow,” says Epictetus somewhat chillingly, “keep before you this thought: ‘It is not what has happened that distresses this man . . . but his judgment about it’” (*Ench.* 16).

Personhood for Epictetus is consequently characterized by “self-talk.”<sup>6</sup> The wise person does not neglect their body, but neither are they ruled by its demands. Instead, they talk to themselves, detaching themselves from emotional reactions and physical reflexes, evaluating their experiences and choosing always to accept the role marked out for them in the larger drama. Epictetus doesn’t deny human *embeddedness* in the created world—there is none of the existential isolation we see in the later Enlightenment tradition. But it remains the case that, to truly live well, a person must impose *their will* on the impressions presented to it—*the citadel must not be breached*.<sup>7</sup>

### B. EMERGING CONCEPTS OF THE SELF

Risking a class action lawsuit from readers affected by philosophical whiplash, Eastman then whisks us away immediately to the cutting edge of twenty-first century neurological and psychological research where a very different vision of personhood is under construction. Observations of infants interacting with parents and studies of severely autistic adults bring

<sup>3</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM, 1971): 18–21, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 11–12, 40.

<sup>5</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 80.

<sup>6</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 46.

<sup>7</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 95, 118–19.

us crashing into the world of our own experience and broach the question of whether the self is really quite so self-contained as Epictetus imagined. Mimicking behavior begins in babies before they have any concept of their own faces—indeed it seems that the act of *being mimicked* is one of the very factors that triggers the development of their sense of self.<sup>8</sup> Patterns of neurological activity normally associated with particular physical actions fire even when the subject merely *observes* those actions being carried out by another agent.<sup>9</sup> Studies documenting the shocking neglect of children in Romanian orphanages denied ordinary human contact in infancy under the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu highlight the catastrophic psychological consequences endured by the victims in later life.<sup>10</sup> Mimicking and being mimicked by other selves actually *creates* our sense of significance as distinct agents. The act of smiling teaches the brain what smiling means, not the other way around. “A baby . . . learns what it is to see by being seen . . . her awareness of herself begins with the interaction rather than preceding or motivating it.”<sup>11</sup>

### C. FIRST-PERSON AND SECOND-PERSON PERSPECTIVES

To capture this paradigm shift in attitudes to the formation of the self, Eastman categorizes her observations using “first-” and “second-person” terminology. Epictetus, by and large, presents us with a “first-person” account of personhood.<sup>12</sup> The self stands apart from—and, indeed, in judgement over—external impressions. It is a continuous part of the created world—an expression of the larger good and complete divine will. But conformity to that will entails mastery over those impressions, obtained by a discrete and solitary “I.” The self must not be imposed upon, it must impose itself on the circumstances in which it is placed.

The self for the neurologists and experimental psychologists introduced in the second chapter of the book, however, is a “second-person” phenomenon—it begins with and grows under the stimulus of significant

<sup>8</sup> The insight here comes from the clinical psychologist Vasudevi Reddy: “The experience of *being* imitated communicates a sort of recognition of oneself as distinctive and worthy of attention . . . it is *being* imitated that is crucial for intimacy.” Vasudevi Reddy, *How Infants Know Minds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008): 64–65.

<sup>9</sup> Here, Eastman is launching into the controversial topic of “mirror neurons” following the published contributions of Shaun Gallagher and Vittorio Gallese. See Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Vittorio Gallese, “Being Like Me’: Self-Other Identity, Mirror Neurons, and Empathy,” in *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science*, ed. Susan Hurley and Nick Chater, vol. 1 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 101–18.

<sup>10</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 77. See also Susan Eastman, “The Shadow Side of Second-Person Engagement: Sin in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 5, no. 4 (2013): 125–44.

<sup>11</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 75.

<sup>12</sup> Eastman dialogues briefly with alternative interpretations which stress the connectedness of all things in Stoic thought, rejecting individualistic readings as retrojections from the post-Enlightenment world, noting especially Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 325–407.

“I-thou” relationships and “I-it” relationships (although, in the latter case, the grammatical sticklers among us will be frustrated by the absence of a “third-person” category in Eastman’s analysis). Eastman argues that in second-person models, the boundaries of the self are radically redrawn, widened to include our environment and the other significant actors within it.<sup>13</sup> My self is *not* just the inner citadel of my decision-making and impression-assessing faculties. It is distributed among the many others on whom I make impressions and who react to me, just as their selves are distributed and partly manifested in my reactions to them.

For Eastman, second-person models are not only more realistic but hold promise for more hopeful views of personhood than the first-person alternatives we have inherited from the Stoics, and which have been refined into even more individualistic schemes as the centuries have gone by. In a world where criteria like “intellectual capacity” are assumed all too easily to define true personhood and where personhood is summarily denied to those who lack them, second-person models point in a more inclusive direction.<sup>14</sup> Eastman briefly introduces the touching illustration of an elderly person severely affected by dementia whose personhood is preserved in the lingering impact of her life on others that is still evident in the way they treat her, even though her ability to manifest those fondly-remembered attributes is gone.<sup>15</sup>

#### D. SECOND-PERSON PERSPECTIVES IN PAUL

Despite these exciting glimpses of more expansive vistas (some of which Eastman identifies as possible subjects for future books), the real value of the contrast she draws out between first- and second-person concepts of the self in *Paul and the Person* lies in its application to the apostle’s letters. In two passages in particular, Eastman finds Paul engaged in what sound very much like second-person descriptions of personhood in the context of talking—or at least seeming to talk—about *himself*.

#### *Rom 7:7–25*

The first is the notoriously intractable second half of Rom 7 where, with conspicuous use of first-person pronouns and present tense verbs, Paul presents an agonized description of the relationship between the self and sin, coming to a climax in verses 15–20:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in

<sup>13</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 65–70.

<sup>14</sup> Eastman comments provocatively on the tendency to “criterialise” personhood, so that one only counts as a real person if one has the capacities required to conceive of oneself as an autonomous individual. Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 11–14, 171–72.

<sup>15</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 182.

me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Rom 7:15–20)

Scholarship is spectacularly divided on the exegesis of this disturbing text, and Eastman excuses herself upfront from any sense of obligation to “explain” it. What she does instead is explore how other people’s explanations handle the question of personhood and, in the process, draws out their overwhelming dependence on first-person models of the self.

The passage begins with a rhetorical question that is answered—in the minds of some commentators at least—with logic that would not have been out of place in the works of Epictetus. “What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful?” asks Paul (Rom 7:7). And he responds with a solution that locates sinfulness *in the self*. Admittedly, it takes some interpretative ingenuity to *see* that—a lot of interpretative ingenuity, in fact, given that we have some breathtakingly dualistic language to rationalize along the way. But this doesn’t deter Mark Seifrid, for example, from declaring that Paul pronounces absolution for the law here on the basis that radical evil is ascribed “to the human being” considered as a discrete, autonomous whole.<sup>16</sup>

Others are not so easily persuaded. Stanley Stowers, who argues that Paul’s appeal to the role of sin as an external agent in this text (personified and invasive, overwhelming the self and bending it to its will) reworks Greek ideas about the fragmentation of the personality attributable less to Stoic influences than they are to Plato and his picture of conflict between the mind and rebellious passions and desires.<sup>17</sup> Stowers’ exploration of Greco-Roman paradigms for both the form and content of the passage is immensely illuminating, especially the possibility of an allusion to the Euripidean drama, *Medea*, whose eponymous heroine speaks in strikingly similar terms to the problematic “I” in Rom 7, and is imitated in a host of derivative classical representations of inner moral conflict (Euripides, *Med.* 1077–80; see also Ovid, *Met.* 7.17–21; Epictetus, *Diss.* 1.28.6–8).<sup>18</sup> With Eastman, I also find Stowers’ diagnosis of “speech-in-character” here broadly persuasive, seeing ample signs of dissonance between the “I” under discussion and the believer delivered from “[slavery] to sin” in Rom 6:6, and set free from “the law of sin and death” in Rom 8:2.<sup>19</sup> But his radical internalization of the interaction between the “I” and “sin living within” in Rom 7 jars awkwardly with his acceptance of the Spirit as a real *external*

<sup>16</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, “The Subject of Romans 7.14–25,” *NovT* 34 (1992): 313–33. See Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 112–13.

<sup>17</sup> Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994): 260–64, 271–72.

<sup>18</sup> Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 260–64.

<sup>19</sup> Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 16–21, 269–72.

agent in the balancing paragraphs of Rom 8, a problem which Eastman's second-person reading elegantly solves.<sup>20</sup>

Eastman, of course, is gracious enough to acknowledge Käsemann as the forerunner here, even though she doesn't accept his dated-sounding conclusion that the "I" is a pious Jew who remains bound to place their confidence in the law "so long as the Spirit of Christ is not given to them," or that such a person is so enslaved (even possessed) that they might not be worthy of denomination as an individual at all.<sup>21</sup> But her dialogue with contemporary authors like Vasudevi Reddy takes her further, beyond the realization that selfhood is a construction of internal and external factors called forth and shaped through interaction with external influences, to the conclusion here in Romans that the "I" Paul talks about—whoever he/she might be—has agency on the basis that *all human agency* emerges from intersubjective relationships with external others.

### Gal 2:20

The second text where Eastman detects an underlying second-person concept of personhood is Gal 2:20. Here, her realization that Paul deploys the same underlying logic that pervades Rom 7—"I no longer [verb] but [subject plus verb] in me"—is, I think, a profound insight that will require the attention of serious interpreters of *both* passages going forward.<sup>22</sup> Once again we have an external agent directing affairs within a self who nonetheless remains capable of description as the subject of active verbs. "I have been crucified with Christ," says Paul, "and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And yet, in the succeeding paragraphs, he attaches significance to the fact that he does not "set aside the grace of Christ" (Gal 2:21), that he wants to learn the origin of their new attitude to religious laws (Gal 3:2), that he has a distinctive personal view of covenant continuity either side of the "Christ Event" (Gal 3:15–18), and so on.

As in Rom 7, first-person models of selfhood struggle to account for these data. "Such mutual indwelling," says Eastman, "does not square well with an anthropology premised on the notion that human beings are essentially autonomous, discrete, and self-directing individuals."<sup>23</sup> With the second-person alternative, new possibilities emerge.

In Rom 7, Paul describes a situation where sin (or "the law of sin") has influence *within* the self (Rom 7:17, 20, 23), but this doesn't mean sin entirely *constitutes* the self (Rom 7:18–19, 22) or that *there is no self*. In second-person models, substantial dialogue with external entities *establishes* selfhood rather than undermining it, even if the external entity in question is

<sup>20</sup> Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 283.

<sup>21</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: SCM, 1980), 203; Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 99–102, 113–14, 118.

<sup>22</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 6.

<sup>23</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 163.

inherently toxic. And similar logic—albeit working in an altogether different direction—seems to be at work in Gal 2. An external entity—this time, Christ—has influence *within* the self, and yet the self is not annihilated. In Romans, the relational connection Paul has in mind is one that the “I” seems unable to resist; in Galatians, he is bold enough to tell us the external agent is the source and basis of his life itself. But with a second-person account of personhood in our interpretative toolkit, all of this emerges as more of a condition of agency than a threat to it. Personhood requires and includes the influence of external agents; responses are always individual, but that doesn’t mean they have to be autonomous.<sup>24</sup>

### III. HABITUATION

In addition to these two surprisingly parallel texts, Eastman explores several other Pauline passages that emerge with fresh clarity when considered from a second-person perspective. Philippians 2 occupies a whole chapter, expounding the incarnation as a divine imitation of humanity—even to the very extremity of our guilt and weakness. And with it comes transformative power—a new “cradle of thought,” as Eastman describes it—re-forming the personhood of believers in much the same way our personhood was formed at first through the imitative interactions of infancy. The subsequent challenge to “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who works in [us] to will and to act in order to fulfil his good purpose” (Phil 2:12–13), emerges as less a detached philosophical conundrum than it is a consequence of the preceding narrative, expressing our fundamentally “intersubjective constitution.”<sup>25</sup> The reason there is an “us” with a salvation to work out in the first place is God’s work on our behalf through Christ, through *his* transformative, empathetic interest in our situation. Several other Pauline texts are given more glancing attention.

In this paper, however, I want to turn to some passages that Eastman does not consider but which I think may have something to contribute to her project, not just in relation to the *present* influences of sin and of Christ on our formation as persons, but in relation to the ongoing power of influences encountered *in our past*.

#### A. 1 COR 8

First Corinthians 8 affords no formal equivalent to the “I no longer [verb] but [subject plus verb] in me” logic of Rom 7 and Gal 2, but it does still conceal a profoundly important insight into the complex relationship that exists between what believers want to do and what they do in practice.<sup>26</sup> This is the part of the letter where Paul is beginning to engage with a list of

<sup>24</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 75.

<sup>25</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 181.

<sup>26</sup> This section follows the argument set out in Neil Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered: Jews, Gentiles and Justification in the First and the Twenty-First Centuries* (London: Apollos, 2022): 105–11.

specific questions his correspondents have raised with him—each signaled with the same characteristic transitional marker, “*Peri de.*” Paul deals, in chapter 7, with questions about marriage; in chapter 12, with gifts of the Spirit; in chapter 16, with the collection for the church in Jerusalem; and in the same chapter, with Apollos’ travel plans. In chapter 8, however, the topic is food sacrificed to idols, and this is where we begin to discover the present significance of the Corinthians’ past.

The question under discussion here is whether it is advisable for the Corinthian believers to continue to eat as they used to in the idol temples that formed such a noticeable feature of the city’s recreational infrastructure. Paul begins by affirming the staunch monotheism that seems to have been attested in the letter from Corinth to which he is now responding. “An idol is nothing at all in the world,” he repeats with an implied “Amen,” and “there is no God but one.” But this does not yield a straightforward affirmation of his correspondents’ apparent preference for eating wherever they like. Eating in idol temples may be acceptable *theologically*—it might even create opportunities to *affirm* the Corinthians’ new monotheistic faith. But that doesn’t make it sensible *pastorally*. Paul’s *readers* may know the idols they once worshipped are powerless to harm them now, but “not everyone possesses this knowledge.” In fact, he says, “Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled” (1 Cor 8:7).

Follow Paul’s logic here carefully: The people he is talking about are no less persuaded on the question of monotheism than their neighbors. But their years of exposure to idol worship have left such a deep impression on them—they have carved such a deep and enduring connection between the physical act of eating in the temple and the fear and reverence that used to go with it—that, *if they return to the same situation*, these same spiritual expectations will rise up again unbidden. They are victims of *habituation*. If they return to the same situation, whether they want to or not, they will be drawn back into “the whole symbolic world of idol worship” in which they used to live, unable to perceive what’s happening to them until after the damage is done.<sup>27</sup> And this is no trivial matter. Here, and when the same kinds of issues come up for discussion in Rom 14–15, the threat as Paul sees it is not just some mild inconvenience to the weaker brother or sister in question, but *spiritual destruction*. Something from outside the self seems to act within the self, and despite the self, in such a way that the self is fundamentally damaged.

## B. GAL 4:8–11

In my doctoral thesis and in my subsequent book, *Galatians Reconsidered*, I have argued that the same relationship between habituated expectations and present religious practice provides a solution to one of the most

<sup>27</sup> Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 140.

troublesome interpretative problems in the letter to the Galatians.<sup>28</sup> Why does Paul accuse his readers—who show every sign of being recently converted Gentiles now coming under pressure to keep the Jewish law—of going back *to something they have done before*? Taken at face value, the allegation makes no sense at all. Augustine throws up his hands in horror in his commentary on Gal 4:8–11: “When [Paul] says *turn back* he is certainly not saying that they are turning back to circumcision—they *had never been circumcised*” (*Com. Gal.* 33.3, emphasis mine). And yet the charge of regression punctuates the entire letter.

In chapter 5, the familiarity of Paul’s well-known exhortation to freedom masks the underlying oddness of his argument: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). Why “*again*”? In what possible sense can Jewish law be imposing a burden the Galatians have experienced *before*? In the famous Hagar and Sarah allegory in chapter 4, the very heart of the argument depends on the idea that the Galatians have been “sons of the slave woman” *in the past*. In chapter 3, the same thing can be said about the transition from life under a guardian to life as a mature adult or, a little later, from life as an heir to life as the master of the estate.

But the whole issue stands out with clanging clarity in Gal 4:8–11 where, four times in the space of just fourteen words in the Greek original, Paul drives home the danger that his Gentile readers are about to return to something they have done *before*. They are not just turning back. They are turning back *again* to the weak and miserable *stoicheia* (elements). They wish to be enslaved by them “all over again”—the underlying phrase here being used by extrabiblical writers to describe making things according to previously-used patterns, performing calculations according to previously-used formulae, and assessing medical cases according to previously-used diagnostic procedures.<sup>29</sup> Paul is willing to describe his own religious past as one of enslavement to the same *stoicheia* (Gal 4:3) but he is surely not so irreverent as to claim that life under the Jewish law was functionally indistinguishable from life under the pagan gods (Gal 4:8). Remember, in Gal 4:4 he implies that even Jesus was willing to live “under” the Jewish law.

The resolution of all this confusion, however, lies in the same observation about the power of habituated expectations we identified in 1 Corinthians. Galatian Gentiles, steeped from the earliest age in the idea that their chances of being blessed by the gods could be maximized (and their chances of being cursed minimized) by participating in religious festivals, who pledged thanks to the gods when asking for favors and scrupulously fulfilled their vows with costly offerings when blessings were received, would not have responded to Jewish rites in the way the Jews

<sup>28</sup> This section follows the argument set out in Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered*, 43–54, 118–58.

<sup>29</sup> See *Wis. Sol.* 19.6–7; Nichomachus of Gerasa, *Int. Arit.* 1.22.2.24; Galen, *Plac. Hip. Plat.* 2.4.1.1–7; *Sem.* 4.566.8–9; and especially *Hip. Aph. Comm.* 17b.794.8. We use a similar phrase in English in musical contexts when we say, “take it from the top.”

who propagated them imagined. Whatever it was that motivated Paul's opponents to insist on circumcision and observance of the Jewish calendar in Galatia, it was not the hope that these rites would be appropriated with the same expectations the Galatians had invested in their former religious observances. But that, it seems, is exactly what was happening, at least according to Paul's reading of the situation.

When Galatian Gentiles got circumcised they did not think "Here, at last, is a wonderful way to show my thanks to the God who took the initiative to draw Abraham and his children into relationship with himself out of sheer, unmerited love." They thought "Here, at last, is a way to incentivize my new God to bless me just like I did with my old gods." They may not have *set out* to think like that. But neither were the weak believers in Corinth *setting out* to resurrect their former attitude to idols. And in both cases, Paul was smart enough to know that the result was potentially catastrophic.

"Mark my words!" he tells them, "If you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all" (Gal 5:2). He does not say that because circumcision itself had become fundamentally evil after Jesus' remarkable advent (Gal 5:6; 6:15). He says it because the practice of making costly offerings was so strongly linked to pagan ways of thinking in the minds of his readers that anything even notionally similar risked a return to the same *expectations*. The problem was not that the Galatians wanted to persuade the God of Israel that they were worthy of his favor. The problem was that they had invested their entire religious past in toxic "I-thou" relationships with gods who *did* expect that kind of persuasion and in *similar* circumstances—even when the similarities were merely superficial—they could not help returning to the same underlying patterns.

#### IV. SECOND PERSON PERSPECTIVES AND HABITUATION

##### A. MIRRORS, SPONGES, AND PATHWAYS

How then should we approach these peculiar interactions between the present self and the legacy of past selves? Certainly, scholars and pastors alike are unfamiliar with thinking this way. Our vision of the Christian life is based far more typically on the idea that conversion constitutes a "reformatting" of the self—that new believers are *tabulae rasae* on which new things can be built without regard for residual features of their past personal topography lurking beneath the surface.<sup>30</sup>

For all her sophistication, this assumption is reflected even in Eastman's account of the self. Eastman tells us, almost as a throwaway comment, that "human personhood, as intersubjectively constituted in relationship with Christ, belongs to the future, not to the past," and that Paul's letters are "completely forward looking."<sup>31</sup> There is little engagement with the

<sup>30</sup> Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered*, 191–201.

<sup>31</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 175.

possibility that personhood remains in dialogue with past “I-thou” and “I-it” relationships as well as being actively shaped by present relationships or any discussion of how that might work.<sup>32</sup> Epictetus’ interesting reflections on the power of habits make a brief appearance in Eastman’s text, but much more space could have been allotted, given Paul’s interest in the same question, which occupies three chapters in 1 Corinthians, one and a half chapters in Romans, and an entire letter in Galatians, if I am right to expound it as a case study in what happens when the power of habituation is neglected.<sup>33</sup>

For Epictetus, responding positively to challenging external stimuli becomes easier when we do so repeatedly, but more difficult if we allow negative patterns to become entrenched:

For when once you conceive a [self-destructive] desire . . . if reason be applied to bring you to a realization of the evil, both the passion is stilled and [your] governing principle is restored to its original authority, but if you do not apply a remedy, your governing principle does not revert to its previous condition, but, on being aroused again by the corresponding external impressions, it bursts into the flame of desire more quickly than it did before. (*Disc.* 2.18.9)

Though he might have quibbled with Epictetus’ language about a “governing principle” here, Paul, I think, would have agreed wholeheartedly with the underlying sentiment, and second-person models of the self hold considerable promise as we seek to flesh it out.

The self, according to the second-person account, is constituted relationally; it emerges and continues to be formed under the influence of relationships with external entities. But it is not, for all that, a mere mirror of the external world. It is the product (to revert to a pop-psychological trope) of nature *and* nurture. Even if selfhood is awakened through relationship with others, the relationship is always bidirectional and never a matter of mere control. Our genetic inheritance affects our responses to the external world contributing—along with a host of other factors—to our emerging (and developing) sense of vocation. Epictetus spoke famously about his vocation as a distinctive “purple thread” in the otherwise white fabric of Greek society (*Disc.* 1.2.17–18). He didn’t think he had “chosen” this path. It was innate and his task was simply to follow, or not to follow, where it led. But the point—as Eastman herself concedes—is that there is more to the self than a mere reflection of our external influences.<sup>34</sup> We are formed by *interactions* with external others that disclose and constitute our identity as unique *interactors*. No two people reflect or refract the same interactions in the same way. And neither do these interactions produce the same legacy.

<sup>32</sup> The possibility, mentioned earlier, that the past self of a person with dementia is preserved in the kindness of the family members and friends who care for them in the present is one of the few places in Eastman’s book where the temporal aspect of second-person intersubjective relationships is explored. Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 182.

<sup>33</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 54–55.

<sup>34</sup> Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 75.

Selves are formed through intersubjective interactions *sequenced in time*. And the interplay between present interactions and our memories of past interactions is just as important for identity formation as the interaction between subjects considered only in the present.

The self is less like a mirror than it is like a sponge (if you will allow a crass but helpful analogy). Immersed constantly in intersubjective interactions, it absorbs them and “rebroadcasts” them by osmosis (and when squeezed). It has *memory*—not only reflecting the world but assembling it into a hybrid with the worlds it has been immersed in in the past, receiving influences from its environment (including all the other selves—or sponges—that surround it) and influencing its environment with traces of environments it has previously absorbed. It has its own distinct internal structure, affecting its capacity to absorb and retain information of different kinds in unique and unpredictable ways. And all of this affects its character, informing its stability and flexibility, according to the norms and anomalies of the moment.

Or perhaps the self (to recycle another well-worn trope) is like a field across which paths are continually being established and re-established by the passage of many feet. Unlike one-time travelers who leave few traces of their presence, travelers walking repeatedly to and from specific destinations form clear, broad tracks through the grass that are easy to follow and to which other travelers are forced to conform, unless they are persistent enough to break new paths, leaving old ones to fall into disuse. The same thing is obviously true of our own external “I-thou” and “I-it” interactions, the legacy of which depends on factors like duration, repetition, and intensity such that an external influence that generates a mirror image in one person may have no noticeable effect on another at all.

Neither analogy is complete nor completely satisfying, but each, I think, sheds light on the significance of the second-person relationships *in time* that seem so significant in Paul’s pastoral practice. In Corinth, his instructions are based not only on the fact that selfhood is formed under the influence of external interactions, but on the durability of past influences and their capacity to co-opt and reinterpret present influences in unhelpful ways. In Galatia, the situation is even more interesting. Here, past *pagan* influences have so thoroughly contextualized and co-opted common religious practices (sacred days, ritual purity, memorialisations of devotion, costly offerings—these practices, in my view, *are* the “elements” or *stoicheia* that Paul mentions in Gal 4:3 and 4:9) that participation in Jewish “versions” of the same behaviors is reawakening the pagan expectations that used to accompany their pagan predecessors.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> On *stoicheia* as elements of religious practice, see Neil Martin, “Returning to the *stoicheia tou kosmou*: Enslavement to the Physical Elements in Galatians 4.3 and 9:,” *JSNT* 40, no. 4 (2018): 434–52. See also Martin, *Galatians Reconsidered*, 124–31.

## B. HABITUATION IN ROMANS 7 AND GALATIANS 2

All this holds potential, perhaps, for a modest extension of the progress Eastman has already made in the familiar debates about Rom 7 and Gal 2.

In Rom 7, Eastman's second-person reading allows Paul to speak about sin as a power existing *outside* the person without eviscerating its power *inside* the person, or negating the reality of its ongoing identification *with* the person. If we interpret Rom 7:7–25 with Stowers as an example of speech-in-character (as I think we should), I believe Paul's intention is to confer embodiment—in the edgiest possible way—on the comprehensive anthropological portrait he developed in chapters 1–3. The fallen human state thus personified provides a “drum roll” for the spectacular summary of God's gracious response to our predicament that he goes on to unveil in chapter 8 (a two-part structure foreshadowed by the compact “contents page” statement at Rom 7:5–6) showing, in the process, how sin is constitutive of the self for all human beings in Adam. The “I” “sold under sin” in Rom 7:14 is humanity “handed over” to the “sinful desires,” “shameful lusts,” and “depraved mind” of Rom 1:24, 26, 28.<sup>36</sup> The sin-awakening command “do not covet” (Rom 7:7, lit. “do not *desire*”) alludes back to the same passage.<sup>37</sup> The reference to “[delighting] in God's law” in Rom 7:22 maps to the inner appetite for “glory, honor and immortality” described in Rom 2:7 (see also Rom 2:10), reminding us of the chilling catena of quotes from the Psalms and Isaiah with which that section of Paul's argument concludes (Rom 3:11–18), anticipating the same hopelessness the “I” expresses in Rom 7:24, just before Paul himself interjects with hope in Rom 7:25.

Add in the element of habituation, however, and we begin to see that sin personified as an external presence provides more than a mere recapitulating backswing for chapter 8. Though speech-in-character is, I think, the most plausible reading of Rom 7 *exegetically*, the alternative present, autobiographical reading remains attractive *experientially*, despite the fact that Paul seems to associate it with a life as yet unawakened to the transformative potency of the gospel. And habituation may provide the reason. If Paul conceived the person less as a mirror in relationship with external realities and more as a sponge, or as a pathway bearing the enduring impressions of past usage, it is possible for us to affirm that the “I” is unregenerate humanity and that the “I” is still a Christian *at the same time*.

The self of the believer, says Paul, is no longer enslaved to sin (Rom 6:6–7)—it is no longer immersed in sin, it no longer “squeezes” sin out only to be filled with sin again from its external influences. But even having died to sin's power and living in radical, liberating relationship with the Spirit, it is still influenced by sin in the external world and by the habits sin has formed—and continues to reinforce wherever it is accommodated—within. Sinful attitudes drawn deep into the self by repeated “squeezing” and “unsqueezing” over the years continue to seep out even

<sup>36</sup> Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 273.

<sup>37</sup> Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 278–79.

when the composition of our spiritual environment has been fundamentally renewed. Sinful trajectories worn into the very fabric of our personhood through habitual use (as well as through the simple fact of our constitution as human persons in Adam—as I think Paul would also want to add) remain paths of least resistance long after the beginning of the decisive, concerted, Spirit-enabled redrawing of our internal moral maps that Paul associates so relentlessly with faith in Christ and his death and resurrection on our behalf. Indwelling sin, as the Reformers called it—configured as the coalition of original sin and our habitual consent to it ingrained through years of practice—cannot help but continue to “construct” us even after the dawn of new spiritual life for as long as we remain exposed to the enduring impressions it has made on us within and to a world of external reinforcements without.

Something similar might be said about Gal 2. “I no longer live but Christ lives in me” serves as the rallying cry for this painful letter, a picture of the transformation the apostle longs to see accomplished in the lives of his immature readers through deliberate (Spirit-empowered) alignment with the Spirit’s priorities (Gal 4:19; 5:16–6:10). But it is *the absence* of this transformation that drives Paul to address it. In Galatia, the power of the past is in the ascendent. His readers are being “squeezed,” and the norms of the environment they formerly inhabited (and that *still* surrounds them) are reasserting themselves. The pathway marked “religious actions” in the Galatians’ minds is so wide and so familiar and so deeply associated with the idea that divine-human relations can be promoted by toeing its well-trodden lines that their tentative efforts to establish a different spiritual sensibility have provided no defense at all against its (probably unintentional) reinstatement under the influence of law-observant Jewish Christians.

Personhood considered in dialogue with the past, then, is the key that opens the lock of Paul’s pastoral argument. And that, I think, is the trajectory along which Paul enters the passage that Eastman seeks to expound. In Gal 2:15–16, in his response to Peter’s withdrawal from mixed table fellowship in Antioch, Paul appeals to their common *identity* as Jews for a solution: “*We who are Jews by birth* and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ” (emphasis mine). Immersion in a life-long, life-giving “I-it” relationship with the story of God’s dealings with his people in the past has constructed a form of personhood in both these men that is pre-attuned to this single distinctive fact: acceptance with God is not contingent on acceptability, blessing requires no incentives to bless. Like Abraham their father, Jews knew from long immersion what it meant to believe in God and to have it “credited to [them] as righteousness” (Gal 3:6–9). And it is the *absence* of this immersion (not its presence) that creates and explains the problem the letter was written to address. The problem in Galatia was that “sinful Gentiles” lacked this element in their self-formation. The “sponge” of their personhood had never absorbed it, the “field” of their interior life had never been transected by its repeated steps. When Jewish laws were proffered to

them, they lacked the Jewish expectations needed to receive them safely. In Galatia, Jewish laws were being received with pagan expectations, because pagan expectations had shaped the underlying contours of their very selves.

## V. CONCLUSION

Why has it taken us so long to realize that our sense of self is not entirely innate and autonomous and to apply this lesson to our understanding of Paul? Certainly, Paul says nothing explicit about the nature and origins of human personhood; he provides no standalone philosophical excursus on the question of what it means to be a choice making self, or how selfhood should be viewed in the light of the gospel. But there are clues, as we have seen, and our insistence on anointing Paul as the apostle of individualism seems peculiar, to say the least, in the light of their testimony, as Eastman capably shows.

But perhaps our tentative exploration into the realm of habituation offers a partial solution to this problem too? Adding influences from the past to the range of present influences that constitute and shape the self has led us to a surprisingly rich seam in Pauline thought. Pastoring the impact of significant former “I-it” relationships in his readers’ backgrounds shapes Paul’s comments about idol food in Corinth and about “special days” and circumcision in Galatia. Attending to the crosstalk between past and present, between the “now” and the “not-yet,” has refined our reading of Rom 7:7–25 and may completely revolutionize our perspective on the Galatian crisis. But it also reminds us that our own dedication to first-person perspectives is a matter of habituation. We see individualism in Paul—we see the person as “an island, entire of itself”<sup>38</sup>—in part because we ourselves have absorbed it for so long and have followed its path so consistently and obediently that we are unable to register contrary data even when we see it. Paul promotes an individualistic concept of the self today, in part, because his readers have been conditioned to embrace individualism, and are unable to hear him saying anything else.

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<sup>38</sup> John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* (Oxford: 1841), Meditation 17.