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THE MIND AND THE HEART IN THE CHRISTIAN EAST AND WEST

David Bradshaw

One of the most intriguing features of Eastern Orthodoxy is its understanding of the mind and the heart. Orthodox authors such as St. Gregory Palamas speak of “drawing the mind into the heart” through prayer. What does this mean, and what does it indicate about the eastern Christian understanding of the human person? This essay attempts to answer such questions through a comparative study of the eastern and western views of the mind and the heart, beginning with their common origin in the Bible and continuing through their later divergence.

Pascal famously declared that “the heart has its reasons, which reason does not know.”¹ This statement gives voice to a sense, widely shared in our own time as in Pascal’s, that reason apart from the heart is somehow radically incomplete. Yet although such a view has long been a commonplace, most of us would be hard pressed to say precisely what is meant by either of the key terms, ‘reason’ or ‘the heart.’ We can begin to get some purchase on this question by asking what they meant for Pascal. Like many writing in the wake of the Scientific Revolution, Pascal understood reason primarily in terms of its opposition to authority and tradition, as a faculty for inferring truth that is responsible solely to the deliverances of individual sensation and reflection.² The suggestion made by his famous dictum is that, contrary to the enthusiasms of the new philosophy and science, the heart has a way of knowing that cannot be understood in such terms.

What did Pascal mean by the heart? At times he seems to think of it as the faculty of knowing *a priori* truths, such as that there are three spatial dimensions and an infinite series of numbers, as well as that the great majority of what we take to be our waking experience is not a dream. Like Hume after him, Pascal thinks that our inability to prove such beliefs should “serve only to humble reason, which would like to be the judge of

¹Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A. J. Krailsheimer (New York: Penguin, 1966), no. 423 (translation slightly altered).

²See particularly Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* IV.18.2: reason is “the discovery of the certainty or probability of such propositions or truths which the mind arrives at by deduction made from such ideas, which it has got by the use of its natural faculties; viz. by sensation or reflection.”



everything, but not to confute our certainty."³ However, Pascal also identifies the heart as the organ of religious faith, and here he seems to have in mind less *a priori* knowledge than an act of immediate perception. He defines faith as "God perceived by the heart, not by the reason," and he says that those who believe without first studying rational arguments "judge with their hearts as others judge with their minds."⁴ So in general the heart for Pascal would seem to be a faculty of immediate, intuitive perception. The trouble is that—as Pascal recognizes—this faculty is not infallible, for those who "judge with their hearts" sometimes judge wrongly. That raises a question which, so far as I can see, Pascal never adequately addresses. How can the "reasons" discerned by the heart be properly assessed, without surrendering the independence of the heart as a means of knowing? Or to put it another way, how can we give the heart its proper role without betraying the imperatives of reason?

Pascal's understanding of the heart is in some respects idiosyncratic, for Pascal does not associate the heart in any particular way with emotion. Far more typical is the view of his younger contemporary, the duc de la Rochefoucauld, who in his *Maxims* presents the heart as the seat of the passions. La Rochefoucauld's view is that "the head is always the dupe of the heart," a maxim he elaborates through hundreds of biting observations about human posturing, self-deception, and vainglory.⁵ Despite their differences, Pascal and La Rochefoucauld have in common an association of the heart with feeling, understood broadly as including both intuition and emotion, along with a suspicion that reason is systematically unwilling or unable to give such feeling its due. To judge from popular culture, this suspicion is still very much with us. The heart is ubiquitous in popular music, as it is also in a great deal of literature, poetry, and religious expression. Yet philosophers and scientists—whom we may take for present purposes as the spokesmen of reason—rarely even mention the heart, save in casual metaphors or when speaking strictly of the physical organ.

Of course, to observe that the split between the head and the heart which troubled Pascal is a characteristic feature of modern life is hardly a new discovery. What has been less widely noted is that within eastern Christianity there is also a dichotomy between the head and the heart, but one that takes a very different form. Byzantine authors such as St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) diagnose our current condition as one in which the mind has been "dissipated abroad by the senses" and needs to be led back into the heart. Far from representing feeling or emotion, the heart is here the locus of reason in its proper form, in which alone it is fully responsive to divine grace. As Palamas explains:

³Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 110.

⁴*Ibid.*, nos. 424 and 382; cf. discussion in Philippe Sellier, *Pascal et Saint Augustin* (Paris: A. Colin, 1970), pp. 128–136.

⁵See François duc de la Rochefoucauld, *Maxims*, trans. Leonard Tancock (New York: Penguin, 1959); the quoted maxim is no. 102.

Our heart is the place of the rational faculty, the first rational organ of the body. Consequently, when we seek to keep watch over and correct our reason by a rigorous sobriety, with what are we to keep watch, if we do not gather together our mind, which has been dissipated abroad by the senses, and lead it back again into the interior, to the selfsame heart which is the seat of the thoughts? This is why the justly named Macarius [i.e., “blessed one,” a patristic author] immediately goes on to say, “It is there one must look to see if grace has inscribed the laws of the Spirit.” Where but in the heart, the controlling organ, the throne of grace, where the mind and all the thoughts of the soul are to be found?⁶

There is much here that seems strange from a western standpoint, beginning with the assertion that the heart is “the first rational organ of the body.” The very notion of leading the mind *back into* the heart would make little sense for an author such as Pascal or La Rochefoucauld, for whom the division between mind and heart is a fixed feature of our nature rather than something potentially subject to transformation. Nonetheless, the notion that the mind has been “dissipated abroad by the senses” surely has some intuitive appeal, and the idea that grace has inscribed the laws of the Spirit on the heart is straightforwardly Biblical (II Cor. 3:3). Furthermore, Palamas does not speak for himself alone, but for a long tradition that remains vigorous up to the present day. There is thus good reason both to seek to understand his view of the mind and the heart and to take it seriously as an alternative to that of our own culture.

My aim in this paper is two-fold. First, I will seek to describe the development of these two different ways of understanding the mind and the heart, beginning with their origins in Biblical and classical antiquity. As we shall see, both originated in the attempt to synthesize Biblical and classical ways of thought, although the synthesis took quite different forms in each case. Second, I hope that an indirect result of my exposition will be, at least to some extent, to commend the eastern view. I believe that this view has two important advantages over its western counterpart: first, it is closer to the outlook of the Bible, and especially to the Bible’s psychosomatic holism; and second, it offers what are, so far as I can judge, legitimate and effective means, not only of diagnosing the split between the mind and the heart, but of overcoming it. Granted that the means are not easy, they nonetheless offer real hope in an area where constructive proposals have been notably lacking.

I

First let us review what the mind and the heart signify in the Bible. Of the two the heart is probably the more perplexing, so I will take it first.

The Hebrew word generally translated ‘heart’ (*lēb* and its cognates) occurs over eight hundred times in the Old Testament.⁷ In its broadest sense it

⁶Gregory Palamas, *Triads* I.2.3; trans. Nicholas Gendle, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), p. 43.

⁷For this statement and much of what follows I am indebted to Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), pp. 40–58. See also *Theological*

designates the hidden, inaccessible core of something; thus one finds “the heart of the sea” to indicate the depths of the sea, and “the heart of heaven” to indicate its unattainable heights.⁸ Far more frequently, of course, it indicates the deep and inaccessible core of the human person. Occasionally the reference is straightforwardly physical, as when Joab “took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom” (II Sam. 18:14).⁹ But more often it is to what we would call the psychic, emotional, or spiritual core, as when Absalom “stole the hearts of the men of Israel,” or David, having put down the rebellion, bowed down their hearts to himself (II Sam. 15:6, 19:14). Plainly in the latter sort of case there is no direct reference to anything physical, although an echo of the physical remains in the association of the heart with something deep, abiding, and decisive, rather than superficial or transitory.

There is also a third sort of case, one that falls between these two extremes. To remain for a moment with the story of David, after David sneaks up on Saul and cuts off the fringe of his robe, “David’s heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul’s skirt” (I Sam. 24:5). Plainly the heart is here an organ of understanding and feeling, but it is also something physical, whose guilt and contrition David feels as a physical blow. Again, when Abigail returns home after making an elaborate gift to David against the wishes of her husband Nabal, “Nabal’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken: wherefore she told him nothing . . . until the morning light. But it came to pass in the morning, when the wine was gone out of Nabal, and his wife had told him these things, that his heart died within him, and he became as a stone” (I Sam. 25:36–37). Here the heart is first the subject of merriment, an emotional state, and then undergoes a straightforwardly physical process, that of dying.¹⁰ The author does not seem to feel any tension between the two; for him it is the same heart which does both. More broadly, a wide range of Biblical idioms seem to indicate primarily an emotional or cognitive state or process, but to localize it within the physical organ. These include a heart that is hot (Deut. 19:6), a heart that is hard (Ex.

Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), “kardia,” vol. 3, pp. 605–613; *Encyclopedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), “Heart,” vol. 8, p. 7; *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), “lēb,” vol. 7, pp. 399–437.

⁸Deut. 4:11, Ps. 46:2, Ezek. 28:8, Jonah 2:3; cf. Wolff, *Anthropology*, p. 43.

⁹Biblical quotations are from the King James Version. There is a complication in that Absalom does not actually die until Joab’s henchmen finish him off (v. 15), so that *lēb* here would seem to refer to the breast rather than heart (see particularly the *Encyclopedia Judaica* article cited above). Nonetheless there are other verses where it almost certainly refers to the organ we call the heart, as when it is paired with the kidneys (e.g., Ps. 7:9, 26:2, 73:21). More importantly, both the Septuagint and the Vulgate translated *lēb* by terms (*kardia* and *cor*, respectively) whose anatomical reference is solely to the heart. Readers in both the Greek and Latin traditions accordingly understood the term in its physical references as having to do solely with that organ, and it is in that form that the concept has shaped Christian thought.

¹⁰I follow here the traditional interpretation that Nabal suffered a heart attack followed by some form of coma or paralysis. (According to the following verse, he died ten days later.) For an interesting alternative view, see Marjorie O’Rourke Boyle, “The Law of the Heart: The Death of a Fool (I Samuel 25),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001), pp. 401–427.

7:3, Josh. 11:20), a “broken heart” (Ps. 34:18, 51:17), a trembling heart (Deut. 28:65), a heart that is fat (Is. 6:10), “strength of the heart” (Jdg. 19:5, Ps. 73:26), “pouring forth” the heart (Ps. 62:8, Lam. 2:19), a heart that trembles (I Sam. 4:13, 28:5), and a heart that “bubbles up” from within (Ps. 45:1).

The heart, then, is the deepest part of our being, both physically and mentally. Because it is deep it is hard to know, and indeed can be known fully only by God. Jeremiah exclaims, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” He then answers his own question, “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 17:9–10).¹¹ The depth and unknowability of the heart mean not only that people often are a mystery to one another, but even that they can be a mystery to themselves. In the book of Isaiah, God complains of the Israelites that they “draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but they have removed their heart far from me” (29:13). His complaint is not precisely that the Israelites are hypocrites, for it is quite likely that they believe that they are serving Him as they ought; it is rather that, despite their words and their conscious thoughts, they are far removed from Him in the deepest core of what they are. Another striking example is when Daniel, in explaining to Nebuchadnezzar the meaning of a dream, states that God has revealed it to him (Daniel) “that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart” (Dan. 2:30); in other words, it is Daniel’s role as prophet to unfold to Nebuchadnezzar the content of his own heart. Jesus’ lapidary statement, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21) is, among other things, a warning that one can be damnably mistaken about the contents of one’s own heart.

The notion that the heart is deep and hard to know is still a familiar one today. In fact we tend to speak of the heart, rather than the mind or soul, precisely when we have in mind that which is deeply hidden within. However, in so doing we generally have in mind especially the realm of “feeling,” as in Pascal and La Rochefoucauld. In the Bible, by contrast, the heart has no particular connection with the emotions, but is also the seat of reason, will, and desire. In fact the Bible draws little distinction among these different functions. The book of Proverbs commands, “O ye simple, understand wisdom: and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart” (8:5). The context makes plain that to be of an “understanding heart” is not primarily a matter of mental acuity, but of the possession of rightly ordered intentions and desires. The reason that this is seen as a form of *understanding* is that for them to be rightly ordered requires that they be formed in light of the knowledge of God, so that knowledge and rightly ordered desire go hand in hand. Many other similar passages could be cited, such as the prayer of King Solomon, “Give therefore thy servant an

¹¹See also I Sam. 16:7, I Kings 8:39, II Chron. 6:30. In the New Testament the sense that God alone knows the human heart is so strong that it leads to the coinage of a new term, *kardiognōstēs*, “knower of hearts” (Acts 1:24, 15:8).

understanding [literally: listening] heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad" (I Kings 3:9).¹²

It is in light of both the depth of the heart, and its holistic integrity, that we can understand the supreme importance of a heart that is rightly ordered. When in Jeremiah God promises of the Israelites, "I will give them an heart to know me" (24:7), He means not primarily that they will know *about* God, but that they will know Him in a direct and personal way by obeying His commandments. Thus the heart can have a more or less receptive condition, insofar as it is or is not responsive to God. The psalmist prays that God will "enlarge my heart" and "incline my heart unto thy testimonies" (Ps. 119:32, 36). In Ezekiel the change between these two states is put in terms of an actual replacement of the heart: "I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God" (11:19–20).¹³ A "heart of flesh" is not only one that is healthy and functioning properly, but one that is readily moved rather than being cold and insensitive. Without such a heart any real communion between man and God is impossible.

Let us turn now to the mind, where there are again important differences between the Biblical and modern understandings. There is no term in ancient Hebrew with a semantic range similar to that of 'mind' in English, although *lēb* (heart), *nepesh* (soul), and *rūah* (spirit) all overlap it to some extent.¹⁴ More immediately relevant for our purposes is the Greek term *nous*, the most common term for mind in the New Testament, and one that is central to the later Greek tradition. It bears a range of meanings: mind, reason, understanding, thought, judgment, resolve, and disposition.¹⁵ The best way to get a handle on this variety is to think of its meaning as related in various ways to the act of understanding. Specifically, it ranges from: (a) the *faculty* of understanding, to (b) the *characteristic way* that faculty is exercised, to (c) a *particular act* of its exercise, to (d) the *virtue* of exercising it well. For example, when St. Paul quotes from the Greek translation of Isaiah, "Who has known the mind (*nous*) of the Lord?" (I Cor. 2:16), he would seem to be referring to (c), the specific content of the divine mind. When he then goes on to declare triumphantly, "But we have the mind of Christ," he probably refers instead to (b), a characteristic way of thinking. He may hint as well that we share

¹²Gerhard von Rad offers an interesting comment on this passage: "What he [Solomon], the paradigm of the wise man, wished for himself was not the authoritative reason which reigns supreme over dead natural matter, the reason of modern consciousness, but an 'understanding' reason, a feeling for the truth which emanates from the world and addresses man. He was totally receptive to that truth, but this was not passivity, but an intense activity, the object of which was response, prudent articulation. . . . The Solomon of I Kings 3 could—regarded objectively—have said that he would yield to Yahweh so that the world might not remain dumb for him but that it might be understood by him." Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1972), pp. 296–297.

¹³This promise is substantially repeated at 36:26–27.

¹⁴See Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, pp. 10–58.

¹⁵See the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, "nous," vol. 4, pp. 951–960.

in (a), Christ's very faculty of understanding, since otherwise to share in his way of thinking could be merely a temporary or accidental fact.

For our purposes there are two important points to notice. The first is that, because of this range of meanings, *nous* does not stand in opposition to feeling or emotion in the same way as does 'mind' in English. Paul often attaches to it a moral character, speaking of a "fleshly mind" (Col. 2:18), a "corrupt mind" (I Tim. 6:5, II Tim. 3:8), a mind that is defiled (Titus 1:15), or a mind that has been tested and found unworthy (Rom. 1:28).¹⁶ He does not refer here merely to failings of intellect, but to a habitual tendency to think and feel in ways that are self-serving or debased. There is also at least one place where *nous* has a purely positive connotation, Romans 7:23, where Paul speaks of "the law of my mind" that opposes the law of sin in his members. Here *nous* would seem to mean the faculty of understanding specifically insofar as it is correct and true. This passage is particularly noteworthy, for it seems to echo the usage of *nous* among philosophical authors, for whom (as we shall see) *nous* is a faculty specifically fitted for communion with God. It thus offers a bridge between the Biblical and philosophical meanings of the term, one that would later be taken advantage of by the Greek Fathers.

Nonetheless—and this is the second point—in the New Testament the predominant emphasis remains that our current, fallen *nous* is in need of transformation. The same text which speaks of "the law of my mind" also includes the command, "be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind (*nous*)" (Rom. 12:2). The "renewing of the mind" is here not so much a new intellectual ability as a practical understanding of the will of God that is effective in the sphere of action. Elsewhere Paul directs his audience to "be renewed in the spirit of your mind (*nous*), and . . . [to] put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:23–24). Here, too, the renewal of the mind is a thoroughgoing transformation that brings one into conformity with the divine will.

This quick survey already makes it plain that the Biblical contrast between the heart and the mind is not at all that between feeling and thought. It is rather that between the core of what we are and our phenomenal consciousness, composed as it is of thoughts, emotions, feelings, and desires, whether habitual or transitory. One final point that needs clarifying is the different ways in which the heart and the mind respond to God. Both of them can be more or less pure, and both are in need of transformation; yet how this is true is different in each case, and the difference is important for their later history.

The fact that the heart is a physical organ which we do not see, but whose power wells up from within, not only makes it deep and hard to know; it also makes it capable of receiving mysteries in a way that the conscious mind is not. We have noted, for example, how the Psalmist prays

¹⁶That is the literal meaning of *adokimos*, translated in the K.J.V. as 'reprobate.'

for a heart that is inclined toward God, and Ezekiel prophesies that the Israelites will be given hearts of flesh. Perhaps the most striking instance of the heart as an organ of spiritual receptivity is an episode in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah has been placed in the stocks and publicly ridiculed for his prophecies. Since it was his attempt to obey God that brought him to this point, he places the blame for what has been done to him squarely on God: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived: thou art stronger than I, and hast prevailed: I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me" (20:7). He then adds that he had resolved to speak God's word no more, but *the word itself would not allow him*: "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay [i.e., refrain from speaking]" (20:9). *His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones*. The heart is here not only a metaphor for the deepest level of his being; it is also the physical organ itself, one that Jeremiah's conscious mind cannot escape or overrule, however much he might wish to do so.

The New Testament also gives prominence to the heart as an organ of spiritual receptivity. After the birth of Jesus, Mary "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). The word translated 'pondered' is *sumballousa*, "drawing together." Mary draws all that she has seen and heard into her heart, where its meaning will unfold, not so much intellectually, as by her continual act of living in light of it. Later in the same Gospel, after Jesus appears to his disciples on the road to Emmaus, they exclaim to one another, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way?" (24:32). Here too it is the heart that recognizes and receives the mysteries that Jesus reveals. The fact that as it does so it "burns" indicates that the heart is here still a unity which is at once physical, emotional, and cognitive.

St. Paul likewise presents the heart as the point of our being that is in most immediately open to God. He speaks of God as giving "the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (II Cor. 1:22), as having "shined in our hearts" (II Cor. 4:6), and as having "sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4:6), and he describes the Christians in Corinth as an epistle "written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart" (II Cor. 3:3). Like Luke, he understands the heart as capable of receiving and understanding mysteries in a way surpassing the mind. Thus he prays for the Ephesians that "the eyes of your heart be enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his [God's] calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18), and later he urges them not to be like those who are "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (4:18).¹⁷

¹⁷I have modified the translation of the first verse, where the K.J.V. renders *kardia* as "understanding."

In speaking of the heart as an *organ* of spiritual receptivity, I mean to emphasize its physical character. In this it contrasts with the mind, which is instead (as in Paul's teaching about the renewal of the mind) a *faculty* of spiritual receptivity. The difference is that, as an organ, the heart is part of our physical make-up, something that we did not choose and cannot readily change. Indeed it is so deep within us that we do not fully know its contents or understand what it utters. Only God, who "searches the heart," is capable of knowing it fully and reaching into the depths to transform it. The mind, as the level of conscious awareness, is more immediately subject to our control, but is also subject to self-deception. All of this means that if the heart has received the Spirit of God, as prophesied in the Old Testament and proclaimed by St. Paul, then if the mind is alienated from the heart, it will also be alienated from God.

II

Obviously much has intervened in the two thousand years between St. Paul and us to change this understanding. One might think that the decisive event was the discovery by William Harvey that the heart is a pump, along with the rise of a mechanistic approach to the body in authors such as Descartes and LaMettrie. In fact, however, decisive steps away from a Biblical psychology had already been taken long before, and the events of the seventeenth century, important though they were, merely crystalized an existing line of development. In brief, the story I shall tell is one in which the early Christian Fathers already were rather far from the Biblical categories, for they read the Bible through Hellenistic lenses. In the West this initial direction was never reversed, although there were a number of further twists and turns before arriving at the situation we find today. In the East there *was* a reversal, thanks to the influence of an anonymous Syrian monk known as Pseudo-Macarius. The East did not adopt a purely Biblical psychology, however, but interwove with it some further ideas drawn from Greek philosophy. Thus each tradition has a rather complex story. Although it will not be possible here to recount either in detail, I shall attempt to point out their important milestones.

First a word about the Hellenistic lenses. There were, broadly speaking, two views of the heart in the classical Greek tradition.¹⁸ Plato gives it a fairly minimal role. His most important dialogues about the soul, the *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic*, scarcely even mention it. There is more in the *Timaeus*, for there Plato maps the three parts of the soul onto the body, with reason being seated in the head, passion in the chest, and appetite in the region of the stomach. The role of the heart is to act as the agent of passion, which in turn is to be governed by reason, so that when things go correctly the heart communicates the dictates of reason throughout the

¹⁸For a more detailed account see Antoine Guillaumont, "Les sens des noms du Coeur dans l'antiquité," *Le Coeur* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1950), pp. 41–81, especially pp. 51–61; C. R. S. Harris, *The Heart and the Vascular System in Ancient Greek Medicine, from Alcmaeon to Galen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).

entire body (70b). Yet passion can also overheat the heart, and so the gods placed next to it the lungs to act as a cooling agent (70c–d). Plato's identification of the head as the seat of reason and the heart as the seat of the passions was followed by Galen, among others, and so found its way into the mainstream of medieval thought.

The other view was that of Aristotle and the Stoics. Aristotle, observing that the heart is the first organ to form in embryos, concluded that it directs the embryo's subsequent development. He also regarded it as the "primary sense organ," the place where impressions derived from all the senses converge and are unified into a coherent picture of the world. Finally, in at least some texts he made the heart the seat of the soul itself.¹⁹ The Stoics held a similar view, teaching that the heart generates the other bodily parts and that it is the seat of the *hēgemonikon*, the ruling part of the soul.²⁰ The identification of the heart as the seat of intelligence and of the ruling part of the soul was also adopted by the Epicureans and by the pseudo-Hippocratic treatise *On the Heart*, written in the third century B.C.²¹

Thus there were in the classical tradition two views of the heart, one associating it primarily with the passions and the other primarily with reason (although not to the exclusion of the passions). Importantly, however, neither view presents the heart as something deep or mysterious, nor as a person's true self, the place of an intimate communion with God. To the extent that Greek thought had any place for such notions, it assigned them instead to the intellect or soul. It is not surprising that early Christian authors, seeking to interpret the Biblical concept of the heart in a way that would be intelligible to the Greco-Roman world, did so in terms of these categories. Origen, for example, explicitly identifies the heart as it is spoken of in Scripture with intellect (*nous*).²² St. Gregory of Nyssa similarly identifies it with soul or intelligence (*dianoia*).²³ That is not to say that these authors had no use for the actual Biblical language regarding the heart, which they were happy to adopt as metaphor; in interpreting the metaphor, however, they found the heart as a physical organ to be irrelevant.

¹⁹Aristotle's references to the heart are scattered throughout his scientific works; see *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 137, 163, 187–188; or in more detail Harris, *The Heart and the Vascular System*, pp. 121–176. The texts locating the soul in the heart appear to be at odds with the *De Anima*, where the soul has no specific location because it is the form of the body.

²⁰See A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), vol. 1, sections 53D, G, and U, with further references in *TDNT*, vol. 3, pp. 608–609.

²¹See Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* X.66; Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* III.136–142; *Hippocratic Writings*, ed. G. E. R. Lloyd (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 351.

²²Origen, *On First Principles* I.1.9, *Against Celsus* VI.69; cf. Guillaumont, "Les sens," pp. 68–69.

²³Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Song of Songs* VII (PG 44 937d), VIII (949C), cited in Guillaumont, "Les sens," pp. 71–72. Note also the sixth of Gregory's *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, where to be "pure in heart" is to "remove evil from the very choice of the will"; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer, The Beatitudes* (New York: Newman Press, 1954), p. 151.

Broadly speaking, this pattern remained in place among the Latin Fathers. Perhaps no one has explored the poetic force of the Biblical language of the heart more powerfully than St. Augustine. The *Confessions* famously opens with the declaration, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee."²⁴ Much of the subsequent story is told in terms of the turmoil, humiliation, contrition, and exaltation of Augustine's heart. The heart is the "inner dwelling place" where Augustine stirs up tumult against his own soul; it is "what I am inwardly" and the place "where I am whatever I am."²⁵ As the inner self, it is also where God is most deeply active and where one's response to Him must be made. Augustine remarks of his gradual recovery of belief, "little by little, Lord, with a gentle and most merciful hand you were working upon and composing my heart."²⁶ Likewise, in the famous rapture at Ostia, Augustine and Monica attain their fleeting contact with divine Wisdom by straining "all the effort of our heart."²⁷ Nonetheless, when Augustine wishes to be literal he invariably glosses the meaning of 'heart' by a more philosophical term such as soul (*anima*), mind (*mens*), or will (*voluntas*).²⁸ His own extensive psychological investigations, both in his early works and the late *On the Trinity*, are almost exclusively in terms of such categories, with virtually no reference to the heart.

A perusal of the long entries for *cor* in the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* and the *Mittellateinisches Wörterbuch* reveals that these identifications were not unique to Augustine, but formed more or less the common assumption of Latin readers of the Bible. Among later theologians it appears that the identification of the heart with the will was particularly favored. St. Anselm, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, and St. Thomas Aquinas all make such an identification casually and without argument, in a way which suggests that they saw it as a commonplace.²⁹ Like Augustine, although they speak of the heart readily, they give it no place within their developed psychology.

The identification of the heart with the soul, mind, or will, however, does not yet explain how it came to have the predominant association with feeling that we find today. In part this reflects the continuing use of the term for the physical organ, which these various philosophical identifications certainly did not erase. The Platonic and Galenic view of the heart as the seat of the passions also played a role. However, the real turn-

²⁴Augustine, *Confessions* I.1.

²⁵Ibid., VIII.8, X.3; cf. further references in Guillaumont, "Les sens," pp. 72–74; and Gouven Madec, "Cor" in *Augustinus-Lexicon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer (Basel: Schwabe, 1986), vol. 2, col. 1–6.

²⁶Ibid., VI.5.

²⁷Ibid., IX.10.

²⁸See respectively *On the Trinity* X.7(9), Sermon 265C, and *Unfinished Work against Julian* II.220. Augustine does not attempt to harmonize these various suggestions; presumably he held that some Biblical texts refer to one of the three, and some to others.

²⁹Anselm, *On Truth* 12, *On the Concordance of God's Foreknowledge, Predestination, and Grace with Human Freedom* III.2; Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 42.4.7; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae Q. 24, art. 3, IIaIIae Q. 44, art. 5; cf. IIaIIae Q. 7, art. 2, obj. 1.

ing point appears to have occurred in the twelfth century, when western Europe saw a new preoccupation with intensity and vividness of feeling, both secular (as in the courtly love movement) and religious. Of particular importance for the latter was the “affective mysticism” pioneered by St. Bernard of Clairvaux. As Andrew Louth has observed, Bernard’s mysticism differs from that of Augustine in the sharp contrast it draws between knowledge and love, and its classification of love as an *affectio*, a feeling.³⁰ Since love is a feeling, and love for God is of paramount importance, the pursuit of feeling for its own sake took on a central role. What this implied for the heart can be seen in a passage from Bernard’s homilies on the Song of Songs. Adopting a traditional motif, Bernard sees the wound in Christ’s side as opening up a passage to the depths of his heart; more than earlier authors, however, he gives what is thus laid open a distinctly sentimental cast:

The iron pierced his soul, and his heart has drawn near to us, that no longer should he not know how to show compassion on my woes. The secrets of his heart lie open to me through the cloven body. . . . Why should not the heart lie open through the wounds? For what shines out more surely from Thy wounds but the truth that ‘the Lord is sweet and merciful and full of pity’?³¹

The new kind of emotional intimacy enabled by the passage to Christ’s heart is illustrated by the case of a martyr: “The martyr stands fearless and in triumph, though his body be torn. While iron pierces his side he watches, not only with strength but with joy, the blood that pours out from his flesh. Where then is the soul of the martyr? It is safe; it is on the rock; it is in the heart of Jesus, whose wounds were opened to let it in.”³²

In the decades following Bernard, the devotion to Christ’s heart took on increasingly vivid forms. A number of female saints, beginning with a Cistercian nun, St. Lutgarde of Aywières (1182–1246), experienced visions in which Christ literally removed their heart and replaced it with his own.³³ Others had other visions of comparable intensity, such as that of St.

³⁰For Augustine . . . the soul’s love of God and the soul’s knowledge of God go together: the soul wants to know God more and more because it loves him, and loves him because it knows that he is supreme Truth and Beauty. Love and knowledge of God are united in the kind of knowledge we have of God, namely, wisdom, *sapientia*. *Sapientia*, in contrast to *scientia*, ordinary knowledge, is concerned with eternal reality and contemplation of it. . . . With Bernard, however, there is a sharp contrast between knowledge and love, for love is not primarily a desire for possession and delight in possessing, as with Augustine, but a feeling. *Amor est affectio naturalis, una de quattuor*—‘Love is a feeling, one of four’ (the others being fear, joy, and sorrow). . . . When he contrasts *sapientia* and *scientia* he is not contrasting a higher intellectual activity with a lower, but a *feeling* which delights in the good and finds it sweet, with an intellectual activity.” Andrew Louth, “Bernard and Affective Mysticism” in *The Influence of Saint Bernard*, ed. Benedicta Ward (Oxford: SLG Press, 1976), pp. 2–10, at p. 3.

³¹Bernard of Clairvaux, *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 61 (PL 184 1070), translated in Margaret Williams, *The Sacred Heart in the Life of the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1957), p. 34 (translation adapted).

³²*Ibid.*, Williams, *The Sacred Heart*, p. 35.

³³See Williams, *The Sacred Heart*, pp. 47–50, 59, 115–116; Andre Cabassut, “Changement des Coeurs,” *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1953), vol. 2, col. 1046–1051.

Gertrude of Helfta (1256–1302), who saw “a stream of honey coming forth from the heart of Jesus, and distilling itself into hers.”³⁴ I will not discuss these visions in detail, but it is likely that such stories, and the growing devotion to the Sacred Heart which they exemplify, did much to fix in the popular mind the association of the heart with feeling. When the discovery that the heart is a pump was made in the seventeenth century, the stage was set for the bifurcation between the objective and scientific heart, which is nothing more than a physical organ, and the heart of popular imagination, which is the seat of sentiment, emotion, and intuition.

III

Now let us turn to the Christian East. Undoubtedly the two most important sources for the eastern view of the mind and heart were two authors of the late fourth century, Pseudo-Macarius and Evagrius.

Pseudo-Macarius was an anonymous Syrian monk whose homilies circulated in antiquity under the name of St. Macarius the Egyptian, one of the Desert Fathers.³⁵ Since they are still known as the *Macarian Homilies*, I shall refer to him as “Macarius” for short. Macarius has a vivid Biblical sense of the heart as the center of the human person and the place where divine grace is imparted. Alluding to II Corinthians 3, he writes:

Divine grace writes on the ‘tables of the heart’ the laws of the Spirit and the heavenly mysteries. For the heart directs all the organs of the body, and when grace gains possession of the heart, it rules over all the members [of the body] and the thoughts. For there, in the heart, the mind (*nous*) abides as well as all the thoughts of the soul and all its hopes. This is how grace penetrates throughout all parts of the body.³⁶

Macarius adopts here the Aristotelian-Stoic view of the heart as the seat of the soul and organ of thought. He reasons that, since the heart is the ruling organ of the body, it communicates to the entire body the grace that it receives. Of course this is true only insofar as grace is present, for Macarius is well aware that the heart is capable of evil as well as good. For the heart to be governed by grace depends on both our own effort and the free gift of God. Macarius illustrates by likening the heart to a garden: just as a gardener must work hard while at the same time looking to heaven for rain, we too must “work the soil of the heart by free deliberation and hard work,” while recognizing that without grace our labors can bring

³⁴*Life and Revelations of Saint Gertrude* (London: Burns, 1870), 414, cited in Williams, *The Sacred Heart*, p. 51. Another closely related development was that of the literary motif in which one person eats the heart of another, sometimes as punishment for adultery, and sometimes intentionally as an indication of deep emotional exchange; Dante, for example, reports in *La Vita Nuova* a vision wherein a figure whom Dante identifies as Love compels Beatrice to eat Dante’s flaming heart. See Milad Doueïhi, *A Perverse History of the Human Heart* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 19–62.

³⁵See the Introduction to *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, ed. and trans. George Maloney (New York: Paulist Press, 1992).

³⁶*Homilies* 15.20; tr. Maloney, p. 116, modified. For the Greek text see *Die 50 Geistlichen Homilien Des Makarios*, ed. H. Dörries, E. Klostermann, and M. Kroeger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1964).

nothing.³⁷ Later he again uses the metaphor of a garden, but this time with an emphasis on vigilance against evil thoughts. The heart, he says, is like an enclosed garden outside of which is a fast-moving river. If the river eats away the foundations of the wall, the wall will be destroyed and the garden flooded. "So it is also with man's heart. It has good thoughts, but the rivers of evil are always flowing near the heart, seeking to bring it down and draw it to its own side. If the mind should be turned ever so little toward frivolity and yield to unclean thoughts, look out—the spirits of error have roamed the pastureland and have entered and have overturned there the beautiful things."³⁸ We note here that the mind's natural home is within the heart, but it can also be drawn astray and dissipated by evil thoughts, thereby overthrowing the heart's natural integrity.

Evagrius is not as directly Biblical as Macarius. Although he was a friend of St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory Nazianzen, the greatest influence on his thought was Origen. Like Origen, he thinks of our embodied condition as a fall from an earlier state of unity with God, and accordingly he gives the body little positive role in prayer. Prayer is "communion of the intellect (*nous*) with God."³⁹ To attain it one must first seek dispassion (*apatheia*) through traditional monastic and ascetic practices, regarding which Evagrius offers a great deal of practical direction. Even so, "one who has attained dispassion has not necessarily achieved pure prayer. For he may still be occupied with thoughts which, although dispassionate, distract him and keep him far from God."⁴⁰ Hence one must also seek the aid of God, "who gives prayer to him who prays."⁴¹ Evagrius explains:

While all else produces thoughts, ideas and speculations in the intellect through changes in the body, the Lord does the opposite: by entering the intellect, He fills it with whatever knowledge He wishes; and through the intellect He calms the uncontrolled impulses of the body.⁴²

Thus, although Evagrius sometimes speaks of pure prayer as a movement beyond all thoughts (*noēmata*), what he actually seems to have in mind is a state in which the intellect possesses only thoughts imparted directly by God. *Nous* when it is thus in direct communion with God becomes the "place of God" and the "throne of God." It is occupied by no specific form or image, but has a direct awareness (*aisthēsis*) of God, accompanied by a passionate desire (*erōs*) for Him.⁴³

³⁷*Homilies* 26.10; tr. Maloney, p. 167.

³⁸*Homilies* 43.6; tr. Maloney, p. 221, slightly modified.

³⁹Evagrius, *On Prayer* 3; translation in *The Philokalia*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979–), vol. 1, p. 57. For the Greek text see PG 79, 1165–1199 (where, however, the numbering of chapters is slightly different).

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 56; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 62.

⁴¹I Samuel 2:9 LXX, cited in *On Prayer* 59.

⁴²Evagrius, *On Prayer* 64; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 63.

⁴³See the texts cited and discussed in Columba Stewart, "Imageless Prayer and the Theological Vision of Evagrius Ponticus," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9 (2001), pp. 173–204, especially pp. 189–201.

It is plain that the role Evagrius assigns to *nous* goes well beyond anything in the New Testament. Its lineage is philosophical, with roots in texts such as the Divided Line passage of the *Republic*, where *nous* is the faculty that apprehends the Forms, and the Charioteer myth in the *Phaedrus*, where the charioteer of the soul (who leads the soul toward intelligible reality) is *nous*.⁴⁴ Likewise in Aristotle, one thinks of the special role assigned to *nous* in apprehending first principles, as well as the observation in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that a person's *nous* is his true self, and the identification in *Metaphysics* Lambda of *nous* with God.⁴⁵ For both authors, *nous* is both a person's true self and the element within the person that has the greatest innate affinity to God. Although this is not the predominant Biblical meaning of the term (apart from Romans 7:23), nonetheless it was embraced by many of the Greek Fathers, including the Greek Apologists, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Athanasius, and Gregory Nazianzen.⁴⁶ Of course a Christian also has to be mindful of the Pauline teaching regarding the fallenness of the *nous* and the need to be "transformed by the renewing of your mind." Hence these authors frequently add that it is only when the *nous* is purified and restored to its natural condition that it can apprehend God. Evagrius is solidly within this tradition in teaching that prayer is an act of the *nous*, but that pure prayer requires the *nous* to be purified of the passions and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Macarius and Evagrius together bequeathed a rich legacy to the later tradition. It was not long before their ideas were synthesized into a comprehensive view incorporating both the heart and the intellect. (I shall use 'intellect' to translate *nous* in the sense given it by Evagrius.) The primary author of this synthesis was St. Diadochus of Photike, a bishop who wrote around the mid-fifth century.⁴⁷ Diadochus's teaching can be approached most readily through his understanding of the consequences of the Fall. According to Diadochus, the Fall divided the perceptive faculty originally planted within Adam into two, one part directed toward sensual and bodily pleasures, the other responsive to the guidance of intellect. The trouble is that intellect has also been corrupted, so it now habitually produces evil thoughts as well as good.⁴⁸ This calls for a response that can be summarized

⁴⁴Plato, *Republic* VI 511d; *Phaedrus* 247c.

⁴⁵Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* II.19 100b5–17; *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.6 1141a3–8, IX.8 1168b28–1169a18, X.7 1177b26–1178a7; *Metaphysics* XII.7 1072b14–30.

⁴⁶See, for example, Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 4.1; Origen, *Against Celsus* VI.69, *On First Principles* II.8.3, II.11.7 (assuming that *mens* here translates *nous*); Athanasius, *Against the Heathen* 2.3–4, 30.3; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 28.17, Epistle 51, with further references in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), s.v. *nous* I.C.1a, 5a–c.

⁴⁷A fuller history would have to include several other authors also represented in volume 1 of the *Philokalia*, especially Mark the Monk (early fifth century), who may have been a source for Diadochus's teaching on baptism; see Kallistos Ware, "The Sacrament of Baptism and the Ascetic Life in the Teaching of Mark the Monk," *Studia Patristica* 10 (1972), pp. 441–452.

⁴⁸See Diadochus of Photike, *On Spiritual Knowledge* pp. 24–25, 29, 88, translated in *Philokalia*, vol. 1. For the Greek text see Diadoque de Photicé, *Oeuvres Spirituelles* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1955).

under three headings. In the first place, the perceptive faculty must be unified by learning “persistently to be detached from the good things of this world,” so that it becomes wholly responsive to intellect.⁴⁹ This requires disciplining the senses through fasting and other forms of self-denial; struggling to endure suffering patiently and with joy; learning not to judge others or return evil for evil; and, if possible, selling one’s goods to give to the poor.⁵⁰ Yet such labors will be of no value if the intellect remains divided. Hence, in the second place, there is also need for divine grace, for only the Holy Spirit can purify the intellect of its evil inclinations.⁵¹ The grace that is needed is in a sense already given at baptism; however, it remains “hidden in the depths of the intellect, concealing its presence even from the perception of the intellect itself.”⁵² It hides in this way because God wishes to honor our free will and so He is “waiting to see which way the soul inclines.”⁵³ Only when there is human effort does the hidden grace become active, so that “in a mysterious way, by means of intellectual perception, grace communicates something of its riches to his soul.”⁵⁴

That brings us to the third aspect of Diadochus’s teaching. Although grace is given at baptism and becomes fully active through the love of God, God does not impel us without our free cooperation. Thus one must continuously and ardently seek grace, and do everything in one’s power to cooperate with its working. For Diadochus this means especially guarding the intellect through the constant invocation of “the glorious and holy name of the Lord Jesus.”⁵⁵ The intellect has a need for activity which leads it to “dissipate” itself abroad, whether through the beguilements of the senses, or excessive talking, or even—paradoxically enough—through listlessness and despair.⁵⁶ According to Diadochus:

When we have blocked all its outlets by means of the remembrance of God, the intellect requires of us imperatively some task which will satisfy its need for activity. For the complete fulfillment of its purpose we should give it nothing but the prayer “Lord Jesus.” “No one,” it is written, “can say ‘Lord Jesus’ except in the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 12:3). Let the intellect continually concentrate on these words within its inner shrine with such intensity that it is not turned aside to any mental images For when the mind (*dianoia*) is closely concentrated upon this name, then we grow fully conscious that the name is burning up all the filth which covers the surface of the soul; for it is written, “Our God is a consuming fire” (Deut. 4:24).⁵⁷

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 29; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 261.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 42–43, 54, 63–66.

⁵¹See Ibid., p. 28.

⁵²Ibid., p. 77; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 279.

⁵³Ibid., p. 85; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 285.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 77; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 279.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 31; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, p. 261.

⁵⁶See Ibid., pp. 55–58, 68, 70, 96.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 59; tr. *Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 270.

One whose intellect is thus recollected and unified through the constant invocation of Jesus comes to “dwell continually within his own heart.”⁵⁸ The heart is, as it were, the home of the intellect, and the intellect is the deepest center of the heart. Diadochus illustrates their relationship through an analogy:

When a man stands out of doors in winter at the break of day, facing the east, the front of his body is warmed by the sun, while his back is still cold because the sun is not on it. Similarly, the heart of those who are beginning to experience the energy of the Spirit is only partially warmed by God’s grace. The result is that, while their intellect begins to produce spiritual thoughts, the outer parts of the heart continue to produce thoughts after the flesh, since the members of the heart have not yet all become fully conscious of the light of God’s grace shining upon them. . . . But when we begin wholeheartedly to carry out the commandments of God, all our organs of perception will become fully conscious of the light of grace; grace will consume our thoughts with its flames, sweetening our hearts in the peace of uninterrupted love.⁵⁹

Although Diadochus does not speak explicitly of “drawing the mind into the heart,” plainly the idea is already present. By thus returning the intellect to its home within the heart, what I referred to earlier as the *faculty* of spiritual receptivity comes again to be centered in the *organ* of spiritual receptivity, where God especially imparts the gift of grace.

Macarius, Evagrius, and Diadochus together present most of the elements of what later came to be known as the “hesychast” tradition (from *hēsychia*, silence). These include the identification of the heart as the ruling organ of the body; the belief that the intellect is naturally centered in the heart, but has been dissipated through the senses and the passions; the emphasis on overcoming this dissipation by guarding one’s thoughts and constantly invoking the Lord Jesus; and, not least, a recognition of the continuous subtle interplay of human effort and divine grace. Two other elements were later added which crystallized the tradition into its final and mature form. One was the expansion of the simple invocation, “Lord Jesus,” into the more expansive “Lord Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me,” found from around the sixth century onward.⁶⁰ This fuller form and its variants—sometimes without “son of God,” sometimes with the addition of the final words, “a sinner”—are known as the Jesus Prayer.

The other new element was the use of physical techniques in accompaniment with the Jesus Prayer to aid the intellect in returning to the heart. Although the Jesus Prayer was from an early date synchronized with the act of breathing, with the aim that the name of Jesus would accompany every breath, the association of such techniques with the movement of the

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 58; tr. *Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 270, slightly modified.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 88; tr. *Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 287.

⁶⁰See Kallistos Ware, “The Jesus Prayer in St. Gregory of Sinai,” *Eastern Churches Review* 4 (1972), pp. 3–22, at pp. 12–13.

mind into the heart appears to have been made first only toward the end of the thirteenth century, among the monks of Mount Athos in Greece.⁶¹ As an example we may quote this instruction from St. Gregory of Sinai:

Sitting from dawn on a seat about nine inches high, compel your intellect to descend from your head into your heart, and retain it there. Keeping your head forcibly bent downwards, and suffering acute pain in your chest, shoulders, and neck, persevere in repeating noetically or in your soul "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy." . . . Restrain your breathing, so as not to breathe unimpededly; for when you exhale, the air, rising from the heart, beclouds the air and ruffles your thinking, keeping the intellect away from the heart. . . . But restraining your breathing as much as possible, and enclosing your intellect in your heart, invoke the Lord Jesus continuously and diligently, and you will swiftly consume and subdue them [i.e., evil thoughts and other distractions], flaying them invisibly with the divine name.⁶²

The purpose of coordinating prayer, posture, and breathing in this way is not only that the intellect come to dwell in the heart; it is also that the prayer become "self-acting," so much a part of one's being that it continues even in the midst of other activities. Perhaps the most vivid description of such a state is that in *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the memoir of an anonymous Russian peasant who devoted his life to the practice of the Jesus Prayer. The author writes, "I had the feeling that the prayer had, so to speak, by its own action passed from my lips to my heart. That is to say, it seemed as though my heart in its ordinary beating began to say the words of the prayer within at each beat. Thus for example, *one*, 'Lord,' *two*, 'Jesus,' *three*, 'Christ,' and so on. I gave up saying the prayer with my lips. I simply listened carefully to what my heart was saying. . . . Further there came into my heart a gracious warmth which spread through my whole breast."⁶³

Since *The Way of a Pilgrim* is anonymous one cannot be sure to what extent it may be fictionalized or embellished (although it has been widely accepted as truthful). Let me complement it by a more recent account by a person of some prominence, the Elder Cleopa Elie (1912–1998) of Sihastria Monastery in Romania. This remarkable man was for many years a shepherd and simple monk before his unexpected elevation as abbot. He soon was recognized by the Communist government as a highly effective, and therefore dangerous, spiritual leader. After many years of persecution, ultimately, with the fall of the Ceausescu government, he came to be widely regarded throughout Romania as a modern-day *starets*.⁶⁴ The following is from an account of his imprisonment in 1948:

⁶¹See Kallistos Ware, "Praying with the Body: The Hesychast Method and Non-Christian Parallels," *Sobornost* 14 (1992), pp. 6–35, especially pp. 9–10.

⁶²Gregory of Sinai, "On Stillness: Fifteen Texts," 2, tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 264; cf. the discussions of this passage in Ware, "Jesus Prayer," pp. 14–15, and "Praying with the Body," p. 16.

⁶³*The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, trans. R. M. French (New York: Harper), pp. 19–20.

⁶⁴See Archimandrite Ioanichie Balan, *Elder Cleopa of Sihastria* (Lake George, Colorado: New Varatec Publishing, 2001).

For five days he sat in a cement basement and was continuously questioned, while the Securitate shined bright electrical lights into his eyes. There was no bed and he was not allowed food or water. Fr. Cleopa would later recall this method of interrogation: "Later, I asked Fr. Marcu [who also was imprisoned] why they put so many lights in my eyes. I'd put my hands over my eyes so the light would no longer beat down. . . . It seemed as if it entered my brain! My brain hurt! They wanted me to lose my memory so that I'd no longer speak." He would also later reveal to his close disciples how he was able to endure this torture: "Whoever would enter there would depart nearly crazy. They also put me there so that I would lose my mind. I could no longer see with my eyes and could not bear the heat. Then I descended with my mind into my heart with the Prayer of Jesus. After an hour they took me out and were all amazed that I could still speak and move without anyone holding me."⁶⁵

Extraordinary although this story may be, it is in a sense emblematic of the role that hesychast spirituality has played within the Orthodox church. The great flowering of hesychasm on Mount Athos occurred just as Byzantium was entering its final military and political decline. If one asks how Orthodoxy was able to survive, first in Greece, Serbia, and Bulgaria under the Turks, and later in Russia and the Slavic lands under successive waves of the Mongol conquest, westernization, and Communism, a large part of the answer must be the role played by hesychasm in keeping alive a simple and direct form of personal sanctity.⁶⁶

Nonetheless, the intense concentration involved in such techniques, and exceptional claims made on their behalf, have raised in some the suspicion that they are no more than a form of self-hypnosis.⁶⁷ Although a full examination of this question is beyond our scope here, it is surely relevant to note that such techniques are normally not practiced in isolation, but are part of a comprehensive way of life. Every teacher of hesychast prayer emphasizes that physical techniques are of value only when they are accompanied by fasting, vigils, frequent confession, strict obedience to a monastic elder or other experienced guide, and careful watchfulness over one's thoughts, as well as an attitude of deep contrition and devotion to Christ.⁶⁸ Such teachers also emphasize that for the prayer to become self-acting is not an automatic consequence, but a gift given only when God wills. Often, as for the Russian pilgrim, it is not so much the summit of spiritual progress as a stage along the way, one that may be followed by many further struggles.

⁶⁵Archimandrite Ioanichie Balan, "Shepherd of Souls: Elder Cleopa the New Hesychast of Romania," *Orthodox Word* 36.2 (March 2000), pp. 60–79, at p. 69.

⁶⁶For a survey of this history see John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), pp. 127–72.

⁶⁷For this charge see Dom Cuthbert Butler, *Western Mysticism* (New York: Harper, 1966), p. 127.

⁶⁸For contemporary examples see *Monastic Wisdom: The Letters of Elder Joseph the Hesychast* (Florence, Arizona: St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1998); *Counsels from the Holy Mountain Selected from the Letters and Homilies of Elder Ephraim* (Florence, Arizona: St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Monastery, 1999).

All of these are points that would have to be carefully developed in any full discussion of hesychasm. I merely touch on them here because our interest is less in the hesychast tradition itself than in what such practices reveal about the eastern Christian view of the mind and the heart. If nothing else, quotations such as those just offered make it plain that in speaking of the heart as “the first rational organ of the body,” the hesychasts really do mean the heart as a bodily organ. However, they find in this organ levels of spiritual potential that are quite foreign to the heart as it is understood in the West. Likewise, they find in the mind a capacity for return to the heart that, from a western standpoint, seems equally foreign.

IV

What are we to make of these two quite different ways of viewing the mind and the heart? It is probably best to begin by recognizing that, in light of the enormously varied histories and associations of both terms, any global understanding of what they mean must necessarily be an interpretation. By this I mean not only that it is a particular way of construing the facts, but that it involves a choice regarding which facts to regard as relevant. In the present case, the modern western view is that, if one is interested in the *literal* meaning of the mind and the heart, then the relevant facts are those accessible to scientific observation as well as, in the case of the mind, introspection. This view certainly recognizes that there are other aspects to the heart’s cultural meaning, but it sees them as irrelevant to the heart as a bodily organ. The East, by contrast, takes the relevant range of facts to consist in the phenomenological reality of our emotional, cognitive, and spiritual lives, particularly as they are described within Biblical and patristic sources. Science has a role to play, but it is the subordinate one of identifying the material structures that underlie our lived experience.⁶⁹ One advantage of approaching both views historically, as we have done here, is that it highlights the extent to which both are the products of complex and largely contingent factors. The West’s sharp distinction between the literal and the metaphorical heart is hardly self-evident, but came about only because of the way a certain type of Biblical exegesis and literary and spiritual development dovetailed with early modern science. Likewise the East’s particular understanding of the mind and the heart does not simply fall out from the Bible, nor even from the Bible plus the early Church Fathers, but has been formed by many centuries of spiritual and ascetic struggle.

Despite their differences, both views are attempts to recognize what truly exists—to “divide reality at the joints,” in Plato’s phrase—and they overlap sufficiently so that fruitful dialogue between them ought to be possible. In this final section I would like to consider two objections that might be raised against the eastern view. One is that the hesychasts wrongly conceive of the mind as a quasi-material entity, one that cannot exist without material

⁶⁹So, for example, no hesychast today would speak of air “rising from the heart” in quite the same way as does Gregory of Sinai, inasmuch as it seems to be predicated on Galenic physiology, but this is a minor point that in no way affects the essentials of hesychast teaching.

localization, whether it be in the head or the heart.⁷⁰ Another—and probably the one that most readily occurs from a modern western standpoint—is that their view is based on an outmoded physiology, including an ignorance of the crucial role played by the brain and the nervous system in serving as a basis for thought.⁷¹ Addressing these concerns will take us some distance toward seeing to what extent, if at all, the eastern view remains viable today.

In an important passage, Gregory Palamas explains that properly speaking the mind is incorporeal, so that it is present in the heart, “not confined . . . as in a container,” but instead “as in an instrument.”⁷² He almost certainly means to allude here to the long discussion of this point in St. Gregory of Nyssa’s *On the Making of Man*.⁷³ Chapter 12 of that work considers in detail the opposing views which placed the rational part of the soul in the head and the heart. It sees some merit in both, since the former has in its support the fact that thinking is impeded when the brain is damaged, and the latter the fact that the passions are felt especially in the heart. Yet, Gregory argues, neither view is correct, for since the mind is incorporeal it is equally in contact with *all* the parts of the body. The sensation of passion in the heart can be explained as due to various bodily mechanisms (for example, the heating of the blood accompanying anger), and the fact that damage to the brain impedes thinking can be explained as due to the brain’s diminished capacity to receive the influence of the mind. It is to illustrate the latter point that Gregory introduces the analogy with an instrument:

since the whole body is made like some musical instrument, just as often happens in the case of those who know how to play but are unable because of the unfitness of their instrument . . . so too the mind, passing over the whole instrument and touching each of the parts in a mode corresponding to its intellectual activities . . . produces its proper effect on those parts which are in a natural condition, but remains inoperative and ineffective upon those which are unable to admit the movement of its art.⁷⁴

Something similar also happens in sleep, when the mind is “hidden by the inactivity of the senses” and so is not able to operate through them fully, but instead has only a “smouldering activity.”⁷⁵

⁷⁰This is an objection raised by Guillaumont, “Les sens des noms du Coeur,” pp. 79–80.

⁷¹I wish to thank H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. and Mark Cherry for particularly pressing this objection.

⁷²Gregory Palamas, *Triads* I.2.3; tr. Gendle, pp. 42–43. This section of the *Triads* (I.2) is also available in the *Philokalia*, vol. 4, pp. 331–342.

⁷³See *Triads* II.2.27–29 and section 3 of the so-called *Hagioritic Tome* (tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 421), where Palamas cites this text explicitly. The view that the soul uses the body as an instrument can also be found in *On the Making of Man* by Nemesius of Emesa, another patristic work (dating probably from a few decades after that of Gregory of Nyssa) that would have been known to Palamas; see the translation by William Tefler, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, Library of Christian Classics, vol. 4 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955), p. 274; Greek text in Nemesius of Emesa, *De Natura Hominis*, ed. Moreno Morani (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987), pp. 25–26.

⁷⁴Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XII.8; tr. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982 [reprint]), Second Series, vol. 5, p. 398.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, XIII.8; tr. *NPNE*, vol. 5, p. 401.

The view of Palamas is not quite identical to this, for he does think that there is a clear sense in which the mind's natural and proper home is the heart. Nonetheless, he agrees that the mind is incorporeal and is present in the body only as in an instrument.⁷⁶ In what sense, then, is the heart its natural home, and what does it mean to speak of the mind as "gathered together" and "led back" into the heart? The answer is that in such a process the mind learns to use its bodily instrument differently, focusing its activities within the heart rather than dissipating them abroad through the senses, and that in so doing the two achieve—or rather, return to—their natural relationship. As an analogy we might consider the different ways in which a beginner and an expert horseman are related to the horse on which they ride. The actions of the beginner are dispersed, erratic, and ineffectual, leaving the horse more in control than the rider; those of the expert are measured and precise, conveying exactly the direction needed in light of the rider's knowledge both of his own goal and of the horse's innate abilities and tendencies. In a sense the beginner and the expert are both equally present to the horse, but in another sense the expert is far more present, for he is *effectually* present in a way that the beginner is not. Likewise the experienced rider sits more "naturally" upon the horse, the two having achieved through long practice a unity of feeling and response, whereas the beginner seems by contrast like so much dead weight. In a similar way, the mind can come to be *effectually* present to the heart, enabling the two to act as a unity in their natural and proper relationship, even while in another sense it remains equally present throughout the entire body.

This clarification enables us to see how the two objections can be answered. Since Palamas (the most authoritative spokesman for the hesychasts) explicitly affirms that the mind is immaterial, the charge that the hesychasts conceive of the mind as quasi-material is simply misinformed. As for the claim that their view cannot withstand modern discoveries about the neural basis of the mind, everything depends on what is meant by "basis." If it could be shown that neural activity *produces* thought, then Palamas's view, along with most other forms of mind-body dualism, would be discredited. But it is hard to see how this could be shown, since empirical evidence furnishes only correlations between mental and neural events, and the interpretation of these correlations always remains a further question. Palamas's view is that the mind uses the brain and nervous system as instruments; that there would be correlations between brain states and mental states is therefore hardly surprising. He also believes that the mind uses the heart (and, for that matter, other organs) as instruments, but in a different way. The heart is the deepest center of personality and the place most intimately

⁷⁶In another work written toward the end of the hesychast controversy, Palamas reaffirms dualism even more strongly: "The soul . . . possesses a spiritual and noetic life that is evidently different from the body's and from what is actuated by the body. Hence when the body dissolves the human soul does not perish with it; and not only does it not perish but it continues to exist immortally, since it is not manifest only in relation to something else, but possesses its own life as its essence." "Topics of Natural and Theological Science" 32; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, p. 359.

touched by divine grace, yet the mind's presence to it is tenuous and clumsy. The hesychasts' goal is to overcome this inner dislocation. There is no reason why such a change need affect the mind's way of using other organs such as the brain, any more than someone's learning to ride a horse must affect his way of using other tools such as a lasso or a gun.

We thus come to the perhaps surprising conclusion that the psychosomatic holism of the eastern view depends upon mind-body dualism. It remains legitimately a form of holism, however, in at least two key respects. One is that it takes seriously the phenomenology of the heart as it is articulated within the Bible and patristic tradition. It thus retains the holistic outlook of the Bible itself, although within a framework in which key elements are also drawn from Greek philosophy. The second is that it sees the return of the mind into the heart as a way in which grace comes to be present, not to the mind alone, but to the entire body. This idea is present already in Macarius and the other Desert Fathers, and is fully articulated by Palamas:

Just as those who abandon themselves to sensual and corruptible pleasures fix all the desires of their soul upon the flesh, and indeed become entirely "flesh," so that (as Scripture says) "the Spirit of God cannot dwell in them," so too in the case of those who have elevated their minds to God and exalted their souls with divine longing, their flesh also is being transformed and elevated, participating together with the soul in the divine communion, and becoming itself a dwelling and possession of God.⁷⁷

The deification of the flesh is a central theme in Greek patristic theology, one that we cannot enter into fully here.⁷⁸ Suffice to say that it adds to the phenomenological holism of the East a further ethical or teleological holism, in that the goal of earthly life is to begin here and now the process by which the whole person, body and soul, comes to be deified.

In sum, the eastern tradition presents a holistic practical stance toward our bodily condition that is made possible, in part, by an ontological dualism. Such a combination is surprising from the standpoint of traditional western philosophy. Nonetheless it seems both coherent and plausible, at least given Christian presuppositions; and it offers real hope that the mind and the heart need not always stand apart, but can in fact be reunified.⁷⁹

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⁷⁷Gregory Palamas, *Triads* I.2.9; tr. Gendle, pp. 47–48.

⁷⁸See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), or more briefly my *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 196–204, 211–213.

⁷⁹I wish to thank the Earhart Foundation for its financial support during the writing of this essay, as well as Andrei Pleșu, Fr. Andrew Louth, Clark Carlton, Frederica Mathewes-Green, Fr. Damascene Christensen, H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr., Mark Cherry, Bruce Foltz, and the participants in the Baylor conference for their helpful comments and suggestions.