

PART 1

Prolegomena

To present-day readers, the stomach is a matter of much concern. It serves as a source of shame as well as pride; it is a part of the human body that is often made fun of. Modern cultures, particularly in the West, have developed means to cultivate this part of the body: corsets, exercises to develop a washboard stomach, fashions in which the navel is carefully, but deliberately revealed etc. It is hardly surprising that in a culture in which the body is given such an important role, the stomach receives attention as well. Does Paul in any way address a culture in which the stomach is similarly high on the agenda? To answer this question is the aim of this investigation.

The Pauline tradition quotes an old saying about Cretans which is worth mentioning here: ‘... they are γαστέρες’ (Tit. 1:12).¹ This plural of γαστήρ claims that the entire personality of Cretans is their stomachs. The Cretans are not considered to *have* bellies; they *are* bellies. The term has obviously picked up figurative elements. Hence most Bible translations render the text ‘gluttons’,² which means that the stomach sets the agenda for the life of the Cretans. In this text, then, the belly has become a codeword that might have both physical and figurative implications. The undisputed Pauline letters mention twice *in expressis verbis* people ‘whose god is their belly’ (Phil. 3:19), and who ‘serve their stomach’ (Rom. 16:18); in short they address the question of belly-worship. This investigation is especially interested in these enigmatic texts. Are they to be understood along the same lines as Tit. 1:12, and if so how are they placed within Paul’s theology and instruction on bodily matters? Since

¹ The same saying claims, as well, that they are liars, wild beasts and lazy. For the literary sources of this proverb see Reggie M. Kidd, ‘Titus as Apologia’, pp. 188–93.

² See e.g. Daniel C. Arrichea, Howard A. Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and Titus*, pp. 276–7. Cf. Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon* Vol. 1, p. 251: ‘a glutton is often spoken of idiomatically, for example “a large belly” or “a person who is only a stomach” or “a professional eater”’. In the songs which the shepherds taught Hesiod while he was shepherding, they call themselves γαστέρες. The LCL translator renders this ‘mere bellies’ (*Theogony* 26).

2 *Prolegomena*

a monograph on this aspect of the Pauline epistles is still awaiting its author, this investigation fills a gap in New Testament scholarship.

In order to answer the question of how Paul addresses a culture in which the belly holds a key position on the agenda, his ancient world must be addressed first. In antiquity the human body was subject to various ideas and perspectives. To physicians the body was the object of scientific investigation. For those whose concern was the moral and decent life, the body with all its needs and desires naturally came into focus. But the body was also – then as now – something to poke fun at. Bodily characteristics easily became targets of criticism, satire and polemics. These three ways of making the body an object all have their correspondences in the Graeco-Roman world.

Ancient medical doctors worked hard to explain how the body worked, and also to describe how to cure its afflictions.

Moral philosophers addressed the imperative to bring the body under control by mastering its desires, lest they turn into lust and greed. This became a favourite topic among philosophers whose concern was a proper lifestyle. They considered food to play a key role for bodily desires in general. Aristotle states this very briefly within a discussion on mating: ἐν πλησμονῇ γὰρ Κύπρις (*Problems* 896a).³ This saying is quoted approvingly by other ancient writers. Since Cypris is another name for Aphrodite, the sentence might be rendered in this way: ‘For sexual appetite accompanies satiety’ (LCL).

In her recent study on fasting and sexuality in Early Christianity, Teresa M. Shaw draws attention to the so-called Minnesota experiment conducted in 1944–45.⁴ This experiment demonstrated that daily calorific intake level plays a significant role in the sexual drive. Prolonged food deprivation causes a weakening or even disappearance of sexual activity. Shaw claims that this physical nexus between food and sexual desire sheds light on the teaching of the Patristic Fathers on fasting and abstaining from sex. It is beyond the scope of the present investigation to enter this discussion, but it is evident that the Minnesota experiment has put its finger on the key role played by food in matters of desire in general. This present-day experiment has an interesting correspondence in ancient moral philosophy: the question of how to master the desires focused on matters of food and sex. Eating and copulating were commonly given pride of place among the desires which were in need of control.

³ For similar dicta where gluttony and sex are seen in tandem, see Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, pp. 84–5.

⁴ See Teresa M. Shaw, *Burden of the Flesh*, pp. 124–8, with further references.

Prolegomena

3

Physiognomists developed theories about correspondences between bodily appearances and inner qualities. The surface of the body was seen as an index of the soul. Bodily characteristics were thus explained as signs. In some instances, these theories naturally became means of fighting adversaries.

In the title of this book, ‘belly’ refers to the focus of interest while ‘body’ indicates the Pauline framework in which the belly-dicta probably belong.

1

**INTRODUCTION, PREVIOUS SOLUTIONS,
 METHOD AND PAULINE CONTEXT**

1.0 Introduction

The commonest terms for stomach in ancient writings (κοιλία and γαστήρ)¹ occur in the following texts in the undisputed Pauline epistles: 1 Thess. 5:13; Gal. 1:15; Phil. 3:19; 1 Cor. 6:13; Rom. 16:18. The first instance refers to pregnancy. Gal. 1:15 is a related text. Κοιλία means ‘womb’, and refers to the point where life begins according to Biblical thought (cf. Jer. 1:15; *Jub.* 21:8; *Lib. Ant.* 9:2.5; 22:3). Paul’s reference to his mother’s womb is embedded in a *topos* of vocation, aimed at justifying his divine call.² A rather different meaning appears in Paul’s dicta on the stomach-devotees in Phil. 3:19: ‘Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things’ and Rom. 16:18: ‘For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites . . .’ In the last instance, *NRSV* renders κοιλία as ‘appetite’. The two references are either polemical or a warning against people who are devoted to their belly. In other words, they belong to a different rhetoric. This study claims that they are similar to the Greek saying of Tit. 1:12, about the Cretans whose entire personality is their stomachs.

It is the aim of the present study to substantiate there being a rhetoric of the belly in Paul’s letters, and also to see how it works. Since for obvious reasons 1 Cor. 6:13 has nothing to do with either pregnancy or vocation, it will be investigated as part of Paul’s rhetoric of the belly. Belly-servitude, or having the belly as god, seems on an intuitive reading to be related to gluttony and greed, appetite or selfishness. A spontaneous reading will always be subject to discussion. I here refer to what most of my friends, relatives and colleagues were thinking of when I mentioned the topic of belly-devotion to them.

¹ For other terms, see chap. 3.0.

² Karl Olav Sandnes, *Paul – One of the Prophets?* and Roy E. Ciampa, *Galatians*, pp. 111–14; 332–3.

But this spontaneous reading is far from confirmed in the scholarly literature. There is no consensus either on what Paul is thinking of when he mentions ‘belly-worship’ nor about the historical reference of his terminology. Gordon D. Fee says that ‘all in all, we must again beg a degree of ignorance in this matter’.³ So saying is a true act of honesty. On the other hand, a scholarly admission of ignorance triggers curiosity, and thus represents a challenge. This study is the result of this curiosity.

In Phil. 3:19 and Rom. 16:18, the references to the belly are synonymous with living a life contrary to the gospel. Some people act and live as though they were driven by their bellies.⁴ The stomach is the driving force or higher power in their life. But what does this actually mean, and why does Paul describe a lifestyle opposed to Christian behaviour in this way? How would his addressees understand this? What is the proper background for an adequate reading of the texts? The aim of this study is to answer these and related questions, and thus to elucidate the meaning and reference of the belly-texts. A major task will be to see how these dicta work within the literary and theological setting of Paul’s letters.

An investigation into Paul’s belly-dicta might to some appear as narrow and limited; after all Paul does not speak frequently about the stomach. If, however, the relevant texts are placed within the broader framework of how Paul conceived of the human body, the belly-texts will gain in interest. It is the conviction of the present writer that the belly-dicta are not simply rhetorical devices aimed at vilifying opponents. They are significant sources for how Paul instructed his recent converts, and attest his thought about bodily needs. This conviction roots belly-worship firmly in Pauline theology as well as in ancient moral exhortation. To argue this is the aim of this study.

1.1 Bible translations

Since Paul’s references to the belly are often seen as marginal, mere rhetoric or random phenomena in his letters, they have not been at the centre of the Pauline debate. An in-depth monograph on the topic is still to be written. This is, of course, not to say that scholars have not grappled with

³ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, p. 372; similarly in Markus Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, p. 231 and Barclay M. Newman, Eugene A. Nida, *Romans*, p. 296; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, p. 803.

⁴ It is surprising that Silvia Schroer and Thomas Staubli, *Körpersymbolik*, mention neither Rom. 16:18 nor Phil. 3:19. Anthony Byatt, *Metaphors*, has a chapter on the human body and clothing (chap. 6), but the stomach is left unmentioned. Jerome H. Neyrey, *Paul*, pays attention to various parts of the body, but leaves out the stomach; see e.g. his index of topics p. 261 s.v. ‘body’.

6 *Prolegomena*

these texts. Relevant material is found in commentaries, related articles as well as dictionaries; not to mention Bible translations. However, in the light of the vast literature on most New Testament topics, the two stomach-dicta of Paul represent a neglected field of study. The aim of this section is to point out the diverse opinions about Paul's aims in warning his readers not to be servants of the stomach. This will, hopefully, prove the necessity of an investigation into this problem and these texts. I here restrict myself to mapping the terrain. The real involvement and argument will take place in the exegetical chapters themselves. We start with some examples from the Bible translations.

NEB 1961

- Phil. 3:19: 'They are heading for destruction, appetite is their god'
 Rom. 16:18: 'Avoid them, for such people are servants not of Christ our Lord, but of their own appetites'

The New Jerusalem Bible 1985

- Phil. 3:19: 'They are destined to be lost; their god is the stomach'⁵
 Rom. 16:18: 'People of that sort are servants not of our Lord Christ, but of their greed'

The Holy Bible Knox Version

- Phil. 3:19: 'Perdition is the end that awaits them, their hungry bellies are the god they worship'
 Rom. 16:18: 'Such men are not servants of Christ our Lord; their hungry bellies are their masters'

The New American Bible

- Phil. 3:19: 'Such as these will end in disaster. Their god is their belly'
 Rom. 16:18: 'Such men serve, not Christ our Lord, but their own bellies'

The Amplified Bible

- Phil. 3:19: 'They are doomed and their fate is eternal misery [perdition]; their god is their stomach [their appetites, their sensuality]'
 Rom. 16:18: 'For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ but their own appetites and base desires'

⁵ In a footnote this translation says that 'the dietary laws loomed large in the Jewish practice of religion'.

This list of Bible translations is limited to the particular part of the verses where κοιλία appears. Our investigation will, of course, have to deal with the texts in context. The translations exhibit uncertainty on how to render these texts; in particular this is evident in the instances where the translations are accompanied by notes and even parentheses. The uncertainty on how to translate κοιλία in these texts is seen, for instance, in Hans Conzelmann's commentary on 1 Corinthians. He says it refers to the 'organ of digestion, or – probably – of sex'.⁶ This is typical of the situation among scholars and Bible translators.

1.2 The scholarly debate

The uncertainty which is visible in the Bible translations is carried over into the scholarly debate as well, or *vice versa*. Even if we are talking about two Pauline passages, Phil. 3:19 and Rom. 16:18, it is justified – at this stage in our presentation – to look at the two together. Although we see them together here, it remains necessary in the exegetical part to treat them separately, since it is the aim of this study to elicit how Paul makes use of a common idiom in a particular literary and theological context. For the time being, it is, however, helpful to give an account of different views held on the two texts. This presentation is accompanied by some comments which lead to the next section on methodological considerations.

Observance of Jewish dietary laws

The references to the belly are very concrete; they address the question of Jewish food laws. Paul says that believers who continue to observe the dietary laws are devoted to their bellies. Probably he has in mind Jewish-Christian opponents. According to Helmut Koester, the people under attack are 'Law-perfectionists of Jewish origin'.⁷ Paul is attacking 'Torah-centric Jewish Christians' in a way which resembles the Galatian conflict.⁸ This view is often supported by reference to commentators of

⁶ Hans Conzelmann, *Corinthians*, p. 110 n. 16.

⁷ Helmut Koester, 'Polemic', p. 326.

⁸ See also Ben Witherington III, *Friendship*, p. 29: '... a euphemistic way to refer to the fact that the opponents are ruled by and tout Jewish food laws and a concern for circumcision (see Phil. 3:2–3) (cf. pp. 89–90)'. Similarly Johannes Behm, 'κοιλία', p. 788; Karl P. Donfried, I. Howard Marshall, *Theology of the Shorter Pauline Letters*, p. 124. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, p. 166. Johannes P. Louw, Eugene A. Nida, *Lexicon* Vol. 2, p. 292 says on Rom. 16:18 that 'it is also possible that *koilia* in Rom. 16:18 refers to Jewish dietary laws and regulations'.

8 *Prolegomena*

the ancient church who supposedly, in general, took the phrase as a piece of polemic against food laws.⁹

Comments

The phrases ‘serving the belly’ or ‘having the stomach as god’ are interpreted primarily on the basis of Pauline polemics against Judaizers. The phrase itself is not given the attention it deserves. Extra-Pauline analogies are therefore of minor interest to these scholars. Furthermore, we need to ask to what extent the predicate of ‘having the belly as god’, or ‘serving the stomach’ are to be taken as a descriptive of the opponents. Is it likely that Paul would denounce the Jewish food laws in this strong way, equating them with idolatry?

Flesh

In these texts ‘the stomach’ is a circuitous way of referring to ‘the flesh’. Phil. 3 and Rom. 16 are two related examples of a lifestyle associated with ‘flesh’. According to Moisés Silva ‘... this term is a strong expression roughly equivalent to *sarx* (flesh). If so, the reference is not to a specific kind of misconduct – whether licentiousness or legalism – but to a frame of mind that is opposed to the *pneuma* (Spirit) and that may manifest itself in a variety of ways’.¹⁰ Gal. 5:19–21 lists the works of the flesh, among which are sexual immorality, jealousy, drunkenness etc. Belly-worship belongs within this framework of Pauline theology.¹¹

Comments

Interpreting the belly-phrases in the light of the role played by the flesh in Paul’s theology is certainly relevant, and there is a lot to recommend this perspective, but this view is none the less unable to catch all the cultural associations with which these dicta are so replete. The rhetorical strategy of Romans may be related to the contrast Spirit versus flesh in Galatians. But this contrast is not very prominent in the strategy of Philippians. Since analogous references are found in ancient literature, Paul’s texts

⁹ References in Johannes Behm, ‘κοιλία’, p. 788 n. 14. This will be discussed separately in chap. 11.

¹⁰ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, p. 210. For Phil. 3:19, see Joachim Gnilka, *Philippenerbrief*, pp. 205–6; Peter O’Brien, *Philippians*, p. 456; Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, p. 144. For Romans 16:18, see Ernst Käsemann, *Römer*, p. 398; Heinrich Schlier, *Römerbrief*, p. 448; C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* Vol. 2, p. 800; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, p. 903.

¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, p. 372 takes ‘stomach’ in Phil. 3 to refer to ‘bodily desires of all kind’, which brings him close to this category of interpretation although on p. 371 n. 36 he says that the flesh-interpretation ‘lacks linguistic and textual support’.

should be seen in the light of that material. This gives the belly-phrases a different ring. Understanding these terms only in the light of Paul's theology runs the risk of losing the allusive element in his language. We can only be alerted to the allusiveness of Paul's language if we see the texts in the light of the broader material available in antiquity. It is my conviction that Paul's texts on the belly communicate on a wider basis, which is not sufficiently described by mere reference to his own theology.

Sex or genitals

The stomach is a euphemism for the sexual organ, similar to the use of σκεῦος in 1 Thess. 4:4.¹² This view has been advocated in a special way by Chris Mearns. He says that 'both κοιλία and αἰσχύνη are euphemisms for the circumcised male organ',¹³ and as such a hostile reference to circumcision. Mearns' interpretation is thus not far from the food laws interpretation mentioned above. He considers Gal. 6:12–17, about those who 'look good in the flesh', to be the closest parallel to both Phil. 3 and Rom. 16. The belly may, therefore, be replaced by the flesh and more especially circumcision. Mearns holds that this meaning of κοιλία is widely attested in the LXX.¹⁴

Comments

Here the rhetorical function of κοιλία is dismissed. In Paul's two relevant texts, the stomach belongs to a polemical rhetorical strategy. Furthermore, the LXX references are entirely different in nature. As rightly pointed out by Gordon D. Fee,¹⁵ the Old Testament material refers to 'the fruit of the loins'. In 2 Sam 7:12 LXX, κοιλία is connected to the family. In 2 Sam 16:11 LXX, it refers to David's son, who has come forth from his own κοιλία; his life or loins. In other words, the Old Testament texts invoked by Mearns belong within the rhetoric of 'where life begins', and are irrelevant to the Pauline texts in question. Mearns may, however, still be right in bringing sexual aspects into the picture, although this has to be done on different terms.

Gluttony or greed

In Paul's references to serving or worshipping the belly, stomach is a metonym for unbridled sensuality, with the emphasis on gluttony or

¹² For σκεῦος as the male organ, see Torleiv Elgvin, 'Vessel'.

¹³ Chris Mearns, 'Opponents at Philippi', p. 198. ¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 198–200.

¹⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, p. 371 n. 36.

10 *Prolegomena*

greed.¹⁶ This is certainly the most straightforward reading of these texts, but even so, this interpretation can be supported in various ways. It can be substantiated by means of similar expressions in ancient Graeco-Roman material, or it can be seen as a typically Jewish idiom.¹⁷

Comments

Compared with the other interpretations, this derives strength from being so uncomplicated. It concurs with a major concern in the Pauline literature; but is that sufficient fully to explain the rhetoric of the texts in question? The question of a Graeco-Roman background or a Jewish idiom is very much the same as how Paul's addressees perceived these short remarks of the apostle. Finding the proper background is crucial, owing to the brevity of Paul's belly-dicta. These are so brief that we must depend on analogical expressions in interpreting them. This investigation will argue that the Graeco-Roman material is of the utmost importance.

Avoiding martyrdom

According to Ernst Lohmeyer, Paul's Epistle to the Philippians prepares his addressees for martyrdom. When he urges them to imitate himself, this involves willingness to face death. Phil. 3:17–18 speaks of a contrast with respect to the cross of Jesus Christ; hence both verses speak in terms of walking. The martyrs and those prepared for martyrdom have taken upon themselves the cross, while the belly-devotees seek to escape it. They therefore have their belly as their god.¹⁸ Lohmeyer says that Phil. 3:19 refers to those who seek to escape martyrdom, since they are also called 'enemies of the cross'.

Comments

Lohmeyer's thesis does not relate to the term *κοιλία* as such, but he sees the term as a metaphor for a selfish life, governed by the wish to safeguard oneself above anything else. Although Lohmeyer is not in touch with the term itself, nor its cultural allusiveness, he may still be not far from the rhetorical strategy in which the term is embedded in

¹⁶ See e.g. Martin Dibelius, *Philipper*, p. 71; Robert Jewett, 'Conflicting Movements', pp. 379–82.

¹⁷ This is claimed by Brian Rosner, who has kindly given me a copy of his presentation of the two relevant Pauline texts in his forthcoming study on greed in the New Testament.

¹⁸ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Philipper*, pp. 152–6.