

Approach to Literature Review

There appears to be little literature explicitly dedicated to demonstrating that human agency was a peculiar characteristic of Christianity, arising from an alternative and distinct worldview. Most literature on the topic is descriptive and propositional. Although not part of the academy, the best source addressing this topic is a podcast out of Sydney called Gospel Conversations.¹ Given that there is no direct literature on the topic, the approach to this literature review is as follows.

First, summarise the background to the hypothesis:² *That Judeo-Christian thought appears to be an overhaul of the Graeco-Roman conceptual nature of reality (cosmos) resulting in a new way of formulating society and of being human in the world (anthropology). This new way of thinking gave rise to greater human agency in the transformation of the world as well as the transformation of the self.*³

Next, explore the published literature of authors that feature on Gospel Conversations, Edwin Judge and Mark Strom. This analysis will seek evidence that supports or challenges the hypothesis; or identifies areas that require further exploration.

Thirdly, assess primary literature as representative of the classical world, keeping in mind that there is variety but also common elements. Plato has been selected for analysis given his influence in the classical world.

Fourthly, assess the significant challenge to the hypothesis contained in the Paul and the Stoics debate, and also in the way metamorphosis was understood in Paul and the Hellenised world.

¹ "Gospel Conversations | Monthly Podcasts on Reframing Christianity for Today's World," n.d., accessed November 18, 2018, <http://www.gospelconversations.com/>.

² The hypothesis needs to be able to be falsified.

³ This claim raises many questions for our study:

Do these two different ways of thinking result in different agency? Did the Judeo-Christian viewpoint provide the only framework for positive transformation of the world and, also the only one that introduced a positive notion of personal transformation?

Did the first Christians understand the call to agency in a way that we are interpreting, or are we just reading this back into the text?

Did the Christian behave in a way that logically flows from their worldview? Similarly, did the Graeco-Roman world behave in a way that logically flows from their worldview?

If action did arise from these systems of thought, was it purely from an intellectual assent to a set of principles, or was there more going on in the translation from worldview to action?

Because the literature does not address the topic directly, my analysis will not assess the strengths and weakness of these papers directly, or show an unfolding conversation in the literature. My focus, instead, will be to test the hypothesis against the literature; that is, drawing from them what they say about our study and their potential challenge or support for the hypothesis, and any other insights, signposts and markers for further investigation and analysis in the research body.

Methodological issues are encountered in the literature review related to the analysis of competing worldview claims. One of these issues is that any attempt to construct “neutral” criteria on which to judge would inevitably reflect an *a priori* established worldview. The literature review addresses this issue by using modern theories of change and adaption as heuristic lenses that set the criteria for evaluation. The literature review, therefore, introduces literature related to neuroscience, design thinking and complexity theory and explains why they are applicable in analysing agency in the classical world.

Hypothesis and setting of the framework

Judge provides a helpful framework through three different views: cosmos, society and anthropology. The separation is for clarity, even though each derives from, and influences the others.

	Graeco-Roman thought	Judeo-Christian thought
View of cosmos (overall reality)	<p>Cosmic Ideal: ordered, balanced, unchanging, perfect.</p> <p>What changes can't be true: Matter is of lower order; change is illusion – rotation.</p>	<p>Creation is good but not perfected; it is unfolding – a narrative with a start and end, it develops with purpose.</p>
View of society	<p>Society to conform and reflect the cosmic ideal; highly stratified; static. People to know their place and act accordingly – status quo to be maintained. Virtues are a property of the individual and reflect self-sufficiency, imperturbability and apathy.</p>	<p>Christ has upended cosmic order and hierarchy; possibility of genuine transformation; trust, hope and care are relationship centred. Participate with God in renewal of the earth (including society)</p>

View of anthropology (what it is to be human)	The self to reflect the cosmic ideal and fit with society. Eternal soul trapped in a tomb (sema)-like body (soma). The ideal is to escape from the world of matter.	Psychosomatic unity. The resurrection of the body. Transformation of the self through the work of the Spirit
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The polarities above provide the basis for our hypothesis:

Foundational literature: Supports hypothesis?

E.A. Judge is described as a pioneer⁴ and “the ‘new founder’ (a turning point on scholarship) of what came to be called social-scientific criticism of the New Testament”.⁵ As we have seen above, he sets the agenda and structure for this analysis. I will, therefore, begin with Judge’s work in analysing its support or otherwise for the hypothesis, and highlighting areas of further exploration.

Edwin Judge

Translation of cosmology into consciousness and action?

Judge’s essay “The Biblical Shape of Modern Culture”⁶ brings together many of the threads of his research and thinking about the contrast between Greek and biblical worldviews. While acknowledging the pitfalls of making such a stark division, Judge separates “a few of the major polarities of understanding” into “classical” and “biblical” categories.⁷ One such polarity is related to the Shape of the Whole⁸: the view of the cosmos as per the table below:

⁴ Edwin A Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge*, ed. Edwin A. Judge, Reprint edition. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), sec. 140.

⁵ Ibid., sec. 153.

⁶ E. A. Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World: Augustan and New Testament Essays* (Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 717–732.

⁷ Ibid., 718.

⁸ Ibid., 719.

*The Shape of the Whole.**(a) The classical cosmos*

*The universe is a perfect whole,
comprehending the gods; being cyclical
and eternal, history repeats itself.*

(b) The biblical creation

*God made the universe, and rules it;
having an identified origin, it proceeds
towards a clear end, as history changes
things.*

The concept that history is unfolding rather than set would support a view of the cosmos that leads to greater human agency. However, the scope of the paper does not address specifically how such a “worldview” translates into action by an individual or corporately. While Judge indicates there is evidence that Christians did behave differently, it takes time for this translation to occur and that “what people believe does affect how they live in the end.”⁹ This is an area that demands further exploration - how (or if) people’s beliefs affect their actions.¹⁰

The change in historical method as evidence?

One such change that Judge points to is the approach to history as a discipline. The Greek approach was “rhetorical” in order to “persuade”, where today historians require “critical documentation and to demonstrate how one thing has given rise to another”.¹¹ Ironically, although Judge proposes that this “imprint on our culture” arises from the biblical view of history as “developmental”,¹² he does not demonstrate that the modern view of history arose from the Biblical perspective, although it logically follows. Such a demonstration would be valuable in support of the hypothesis.

The passive vs active effects of worldview?

Judge does introduce in this section a differentiator between the two worldviews that is taken further by Strom and will become a dimension for our analysis. The difference is between the passive conformance to the abstract and patterns versus a goal centred approach to the concrete and particular: “When we seek to work out the pattern of things, and to accept our place in it, we reflect our classical heritage. When we focus upon some goal that we see before us, and respond personally to its challenge, it is our biblically inspired understanding of the way the world works that we rely upon.”¹³

⁹ Ibid., 718.

¹⁰ This theme is taken up further in the section on neuroscience.

¹¹ Ibid., 721.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

The basis for the empirical method?

One of the polarities that Judge highlights relates to epistemology¹⁴:

<i>How do we know it (sic) all?</i>	
<i>(a) Classical logic Speculative philosophy supplies logical proofs in science and rhetorical models in history.</i>	<i>(b) Biblical experience Propositional theology requires empirical testing in science and documentation in history.</i>

Judge here highlights the basis for the development of the empirical method out of the biblical view. He provides good evidence for this being the case referring to primary writings, the research of G.E.R Lloyd, and the writings of Galen on medicine: “Galen is the earliest extant scholar to treat the biblical theology as a serious challenge to the traditional philosophical schools.”¹⁵

Although Judge proposes that “the huge upswing in knowledge is linked to the liberating effect of the biblical view of the world over the rational system of the Greeks”, not much explanation is given why it took so long. “Harvey’s demonstration of the circulation of blood”¹⁶ is given as an example of breaking out from under the dominating doctrines of Herophilus; the length of time related, presumably, to how difficult it is to begin to work from a “different intellectual premise”.¹⁷

This is evidence in support of our hypothesis to some extent, but the empirical method works well for discovery of *what is*, not for design and the creation of *what could be*. Although related, design practitioners consider that design method (constructive, creative, innovative and inventive) is distinct from the empirical scientific method (analysis of existing structures).¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 722.

¹⁵ Ibid., 723.

¹⁶ Ibid., 725.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Nigel Cross, “Designerly Ways of Knowing: Design Discipline Versus Design Science,” *Design Issues* 17, no. 3 (July 2001): 50.

The basis of design thinking?

Judge's polarity related to how we interact in society¹⁹ (see table below) also points to aspects of design thinking.

<i>How then shall we live?</i>	
<p><i>(a) Classical order</i> <i>People have their proper places determined by natural aptitudes; the republican state ensures harmony through selective participation.</i></p>	<p><i>(b) Biblical community</i> <i>Everyone has a personal mission, being endowed with gifts to make responsible choices; an open society helps each support the good of others.</i></p>

Although Judge is primarily addressing the nature of society here, the polarity highlights a distinction between an abstract analytic methodology and the design thinking²⁰ methodology: empathy. The empirical method typically tries to be objective and distant to what is being studied. Design thinking starts with empathy and concern for others along with a creative drive of mission and forming the world differently. Design thinking, therefore is a framework for assessing the Greek and biblical ways of thinking.²¹

The introduction of open-ended, other focused diversity of gifts: complex adaption vs order?

Another difference is the notion of gifts of a diverse community in the service of others as compared to the classical desire for order through "selective participation."²² Judge contends that Greek political thought was "essentially a rationalising defence of the established order."²³ And because society was rational and thought to be in accordance with the cosmic order, there was no basis for human action to drive for change or reform of the order.²⁴

The concept that everyone contributes, based on their individual and unique giftedness, also appears to be new according to Judge: "Such a mode of tackling the problems of oppression in human culture and society is an historical innovation of the first order."²⁵

¹⁹ Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 727.

²⁰ Design and design thinking is a key theme in the Gospel Conversations podcast based on the work of Tony Golsby-Smith and Professor Rikk Watts.

²¹ This will be taken up further in section called design thinking.

²² See further analysis of Plato's Republic and the contrived selection of Guardians in a following section.

²³ Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 728.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century*, sec. 2922.

An uncoordinated harnessing of a diverse community of gifting towards an overall, but non-prescriptive purpose appears to mimic the emergent and adaptive nature of complex systems. This, therefore, introduces another modern framework of analysis called complexity theory, which will also be expanded upon in a later section.

In what appears to be in support of our hypothesis, Judge provides evidence of the transformative effects of this community within the Graeco-Roman society in trying to accommodate this uniqueness with the birth of association in opposition to the laws of established society “for the sake of truth”.²⁶ This was, however, as a result of the Christian community being different to anything that had come before; it does not necessarily demonstrate the agency effects of the biblical message itself. Judge does provide evidence of Christian social action as demonstrated by Julian’s efforts to get the Roman cult to take care of the poor like the Christians.²⁷ This is the type of evidence needed in support of the hypothesis.

Mark Strom

[The link to current social context](#)

Strom builds off and extends the work of Judge. In this paper ‘To Know as We Are Known’: Locating an Ancient Alternative to Virtues,”²⁸ Strom translates the innovations of Paul (the innovations of grace, transformation, and epistemology) in his Graeco-Roman context into the tensions within a current social and corporate context. Drawing on his earlier work from 2000, Strom appears to be one of the original people to directly link the Christian worldview, and particularly the letters of Paul, to issues of innovation and transformation in the modern world and the concept of design thinking.²⁹

Evidence that “Paul’s vision of personal, social and ... cosmic transformation was a striking innovation” might be found in Paul’s thought and behaviour.³⁰ For this we turn to Strom’s book.

²⁶ Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 728.

²⁷ Ibid., 729; Mark Strom, “‘To Know as We Are Known’: Locating an Ancient Alternative to Virtues,” in *Wise Management in Organisational Complexity*, ed. Mike J. Thompson and David Bevan (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2013), 96.

²⁸ Strom, “‘To Know as We Are Known.’”

²⁹ Ibid., 96. Strom writes: “Paul grounded rationality in context, experience and relationship - modes of knowing now championed in design-thinking as crucial for grappling with the complexity of ‘wicked problems’ that defy rationalistic problem solving (Vickers, 1981; Golsby-Smith, 1996; Buchanan 1992).”

³⁰ Strom makes some bold claims about Paul that form a backdrop for our investigation. On page 87 he says: “Paul’s positive use of metamorphoo~ (transform) was unprecedented in classical literature;” and on

Questions arising from the polarities of worldview

In his book³¹ and building off Judge, Strom draws some stark distinctions between the classical view and Paul's writings along two significant polarities.

Abstraction vs story and grounded everyday experience

The first is related to the Greek tendency to abstraction, which Paul fought against; a fight Strom declares that Paul ultimately lost.³² Abstraction meant that the Greeks thought "truth lies above any historical and cultural setting".³³ This theme of abstraction is one that we will turn to later, as it has parallels with Rowe in the comparing of Paul to the Stoics.

Apathy and dispassion vs relationship

The other polarity relates to the Greek tendency to cultivate virtues that foster apathy and disconnection from others,³⁴ as compared to Paul's fostering relational virtues of faith, hope and love.³⁵

To support our hypothesis, we will need to demonstrate that each of these polarities has effects on human agency, and that the second in each is more conducive to agency. It is expected that the methodology of using criteria from modern theories of change and agency will aid in the analysis of these polarities.

Furthermore, the hypothesis will need a strong demonstration of a distinctive behavioural difference between the first Christians and Graeco-Roman society. A first step would be to investigate the thought and behaviour of Paul himself.³⁶

The thought and behaviour of Paul as distinctive?

Drawing on the work of Judge and Strom, some questions arise in the investigation of this distinction:

page 91: "Paul's call to be transformed, metamorphoo³, is the first use of the word positively in classical literature."

³¹ Mark Strom, *Reframing Paul: Conversations in Grace & Community* (InterVarsity Press, 2000).

³² Ibid., sec. 68.

³³ Ibid., sec. 74.

³⁴ Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century*, sec. 2034.

³⁵ Strom, "'To Know as We Are Known,'" 92.

³⁶ Paul's potential distinctive behaviour and his call to imitate him (Phil 3.17) will go towards establishing the hypothesis.

Are Paul's writings where he "exposes himself so ruthlessly to direct human contact and reveals himself to others with such candour and directness"³⁷, and a man "gripped, transformed, engaged and passionate"³⁸, unique in the classical world?

Are Paul's writings unique in being "neither abstract or idealised",³⁹ and "favouring the possibility of radical innovation"?⁴⁰

Did Paul introduce a unique and different way that opened up new possibilities in the classical world through the "deliberate abandonment of status" which resulted in opening a "way to a new spirit of human cooperation through mutual service"?⁴¹

Did Paul call for a "personal transformation displacing social convention and status (Rom 11:33-12:4)",⁴² and was it unique in the classical world?

Was love, as the "centrepiece of Paul's new way of living and conversing"⁴³ unique in the classical world, as was the call to creative action driven by love?

Could philotimia and the "progress within one's allotted place"⁴⁴ have been a driver of agency, even though change of the system was censured?⁴⁵

Not only the letters' content, but the way Paul wrote his letters could be a rich source of investigation. Paul appears to be responding to an event that resulted in him reframing his own Jewish tradition. It also resulted in a narrative that put him at odds with the Greek tendency to formulate abstract undiluted, and objective truth. Something had happened (historical and personal), that required Paul to respond to 'on-the-go' and "generate new meaning".⁴⁶ Strom gives the analogy of a jazz player,⁴⁷ improvising on a theme, adapting as

³⁷ Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century*, sec. 1991; Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 671.

³⁸ Strom, *Reframing Paul*, sec. 1805.

³⁹ Ibid., sec. 1804.

⁴⁰ Judge, *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century*, sec. 2533.

⁴¹ Strom, *Reframing Paul*, sec. 2911.

⁴² Ibid., sec. 1321.

⁴³ Ibid., sec. 2145.

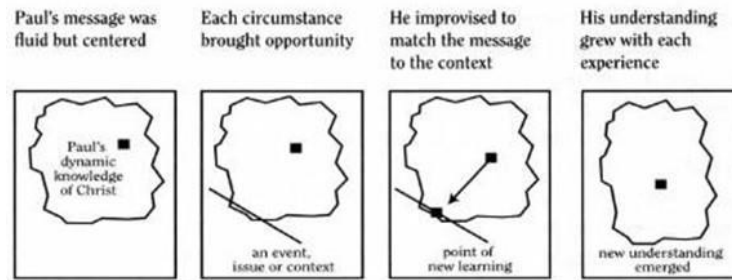
⁴⁴ Ibid., sec. 2189.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., sec. 1984.

⁴⁷ Ibid., sec. 1978.

the context changes (see Strom's diagram below). This is similar to NT Wright's fifth act metaphor.⁴⁸



This is a good demonstration of agency. To support our hypothesis, it would be required to show that this open-endedness and creative response is unique in the classical world.

Challenges to the hypothesis would come from seeing this sort of improvisation in the classical documents (see a section below for an assessment of Plato's Republic) and academic work showing Paul to be similar to the Stoics (see section below on the Paul -Stoic debate).

Albrecht Dihle

The absence of the concept of 'will' in antiquity

Both Judge and Strom refer to the work of Dihle. Judge highlights that Dihle "singled out" many "notions or attitudes which were injected into the classical tradition of thought as a result of Paul's life and ideas."⁴⁹ Included in these are the concept of conscience; the conception of one's neighbour as one's first obligation in life; and the conception of humility as a deliberate humiliation of oneself."⁵⁰ All of these are aspects of investigation because of their potential agency inducing effects. The most significant regarding agency, however, is the absence of the concept of will in classical antiquity.

According to Dihle, "The Greeks had no word ... in their language to denote will or intention as such."⁵¹ He gives evidence in support of this through examples from Greek tragedy and comedy, and the administration of justice. Instead of the will, "it was always knowledge or ignorance which determined human intention."⁵²

⁴⁸ N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God (Christian Origins and the Question of G* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1996), 140.

⁴⁹ Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 682.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 683.

⁵¹ Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity / Albrecht Dihle.*, Sather classical lectures; v. 48 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 20.

⁵² Ibid., 33.

To support our hypothesis, I would need to show that will is an important component of human agency, and also that the behaviour of people in that time was congruent with its alternative: an “interaction of rational and irrational forces.”⁵³

Does the concept of will apply to Moral action only?

Dihle also gives some indication of the dampening effects of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies that will need to be explored further: “According to the Stoics, every deed, even the most insignificant detail in everyday life, has been predetermined by nature or fate in the very same way as the cosmic phenomena.”⁵⁴ It may only be a small jump to show that this mindset would not result in motivation to “reinvent” the future. Similarly, for the Epicureans: “According to the Epicurean view, everything owes its existence solely to chance. There is no cosmic order to rely on for moral purposes.”⁵⁵ My analysis will need to show that this relates to not only moral action, but all action in the service of a new future. It appears that this mindset and the push to detach oneself from anything that would cause pain would dampen action in the world. Furthermore, Dihle’s thesis that the concept of the will was not apparent in the Greek worldview seems to be in support of our hypothesis. However, it would need to be shown that this focus on conformance to a rational view of the cosmos dampens human agency in general (i.e. beyond moral action).

Dihle does identify a point that could falsify our hypothesis in that Greek philosophy could require personal change: “Traditional Greek philosophy had always taught that man, in order to become virtuous, had to adapt himself to nature.”⁵⁶ This would require more investigation. Let us turn to Plato’s *Republic* to assess the extent Plato calls for personal and societal change.

The cultural backdrop – a society built on rational thought

Although a number of philosophical traditions were in play during Paul’s time,⁵⁷ Plato was an influence on them and the Graeco-Roman world in general.⁵⁸ Therefore, Plato’s *Republic* has been chosen as a backdrop to the period’s cultural context.

In the review of Plato’s *Republic*, several impressions and themes arise.

⁵³ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁷ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God, Vol 4.*, Christian Origin and Question of God (LONDON: SPCK, 2013), 2519, accessed September 11, 2018, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/slq/detail.action?docID=1564071>.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 443.

The first is that there does appear a call for change, but this change is to conformance with what is already known, an already established ideal. Perhaps there is some agency effects of the Platonic system, but this is not emergent and the development of something new. The idea of forms seems to direct action away from the world and detachment from it.

The second impression is that diversity does not feature as a concept: Creative emergence out of a diverse community of gifts may not be desirable, or even conceptually possible in Plato's worldview of ideals and forms. For example, diversity is not a condition in the makeup of the Guardians, rather, they are selected on their conformity to an ideal: "And can there be anything better for the interests of the State than that the men and women of a State should be as good as possible?"⁵⁹

The example above also illustrates the third impression, that everything seems contrived for the benefit of the state. The State is also the prime concern in the discussion about sending children to observe war. The key problem of this is that they could all be killed, "and the State will never recover."⁶⁰

Love, and the dignity of the individual does not feature, which is the fourth impression. Book 5 takes a very logical approach to why babies should be dispatched if they are the result of the wrong union.⁶¹ Logic also demands that children not know who their parents are, or parents their children.⁶² Any love of attachment between the guardian could also threaten this utopia.⁶³

The fifth impression is that Plato has a low view of everyday life, the visible and the tangible, ⁶⁴ and the senses.⁶⁵

⁵⁹ Plato, "Plato's Republic EBook: Plato, Benjamin Jowett: Amazon.Com.Au: Kindle Store," trans. Benjamin Jowett, sec. 6802, accessed November 7, 2018, https://www.amazon.com.au/Platos-Republic-Plato-ebook/dp/B07D4Q2CPJ/ref=sr_1_6?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1541561239&sr=1-6&keywords=Plato%27s+republic+jowett.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 7055.

⁶¹ Ibid., 6887.

⁶² Ibid., 6819.

⁶³ Ibid., 6845. It appears that Jesus concern for sick and broken people would be very foreign to Plato. Also foreign would be the stories of specific people at a specific time and place, as it is not generalised principles or ideals.

⁶⁴ Plato, "Plato's Republic EBook: Plato, Benjamin Jowett: Amazon.Com.Au: Kindle Store," 8272, 8303.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 9958.

The final impression is that the Republic seems to be the outcome of a male philosopher's self-serving fantasy.⁶⁶ A key point to make here is that Plato's Republic, a society that he was determined to build entirely from rational means, reflects the life situation in which Plato lived. This point will become important when we discuss Rowe's response to the Stoic-Paul debate.

None of the above impressions support the notion that Plato was an advocate of human agency or could imagine emergence out of diversity.⁶⁷

A challenge to the hypothesis? The Paul and the Stoics debate

A fruitless debate?

The Paul and the Stoics debate is relevant to our discussion because if Paul's thinking can be shown to be an extension of Stoicism, then it potentially follows that any notions of human agency in Paul are derived from the Stoic formulation. The literature on Paul and the Stoics is extensive, with the lively exchange between Engberg-Pedersen, Esler, and Thorsteinsson an indication of the nature of the debate.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., 8621. In this section, Plato sums up the Republic thus: "*And so, Glaucon, we have arrived at the conclusion that in the perfect State wives and children are to be in common; and that all education and the pursuits of war and peace are also to be common, and the best philosophers and the bravest warriors are to be their kings? That, replied Glaucon, has been acknowledged.*" Of course, the philosophers would be reluctant to take the reins, but would do so for the good of the state.

⁶⁷ However, Campbell seems to think that Plato's work "Laws" is different to the Republic, and provides sense of human agency: "Again I must emphasize that the purpose of this essay has been to suggest only that Plato's theology in Laws stipulates human agency as the highest ethical norm." In my view, Campbell does not adequately lay out his case. As his conclusion shows, his purpose is "to suggest only". Furthermore, he goes on to say, that "I have not addressed the question of whether, in the final analysis, this agency is allowed to prevail among the citizens of Magnesia." However the claim is enough to warrant further investigation. Blair Campbell, "Deity and Human Agency in Plato's Laws," *History of Political Thought* 2, no. 3 (1981): 447.

⁶⁸ Thorsteinsson gives a good introductory history of the debate: It appears to have begun with Troels Engberg-Pedersen's book "Paul and the Stoics" where he defends the proposition that "there is a fundamental similarity between Stoic ethics and the moral teaching of Paul." Philip F. Esler replied with a paper using 'Romans 12 as a Test Case' and came to the conclusion that, while there indeed are some similarities with the Stoic ethical tradition, 'the existence of differences in [Paul's] account produces a total package which is, in the end, radically divergent from Stoicism'." Runar M. Thorsteinsson then responds to Esler, and using different "contemporary" sources of Stoicism comes to the conclusion that, when compared to Paul's moral teaching in Rom. 12, one would arrive at a different result to Esler's. Runar M. Thorsteinsson, "Paul and Roman Stoicism: Romans 12 and Contemporary Stoic Ethics," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29, no. 2 (December 2006): 139.

Judge questions the wisdom of comparing Paul to the Stoics and considers it a fruitless exercise that “does not work.”⁶⁹ However, to the extent that the debate crosses into the areas of human agency and transformation, some engagement with the debate is necessary. It also raises some methodological questions, as we shall see.

N.T. Wright responds to Engberg-Pederson

NT Wright’s extensive response to Engberg-Pederson is significant in this engagement. For example, themes of relationship and community have featured as a difference between the Graeco-Roman world and Judaeo-Christian thought, and also as an ingredient for human agency. Engberg-Pederson tries to dilute this difference by claiming that the “Stoics were just as ‘community-oriented’ as Paul”. However, to show this is the case, Engberg-Pedersen uses Paul himself as an example of Stoic community.⁷⁰ Wright highlights the audacity of such an approach.⁷¹

Wright also criticises Engberg-Pedersen’s approach in that he “comes looking for parallels to the Stoics, rather than ... the other way round,”⁷² and also trying to construct a “real-option” within a historical analysis.⁷³ Wright begins to identify some methodological issues that are important for our project.

Methodological issues: can we compare?

The Paul-Stoic debate is a comparative study. So too is this project in that it is comparing the Graeco-Roman world and Judaeo-Christian thought in terms of human agency and transformation. How do we compare? Do we look for similarities or differences? By what criteria do we assess the two different worlds?

D’Costa’s work in comparing ‘religions’ is relevant here. Although we are not comparing ‘religions’ in the modern sense, the axioms that he develops are relevant to our purposes in discussion worldviews. These two axioms about the criteria for judging between worldviews are:

"The first is that in relation to the increased specificity of an alleged neutral proposal its neutrality diminishes. The second is that in relation to the

⁶⁹ Judge, *The First Christians in the Roman World*, 675.

⁷⁰ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2541.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2542.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2524.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2527.

decreased specificity of an alleged neutral proposal its usefulness diminishes."⁷⁴

I believe that Engberg-Pedersen's work demonstrates the second of these axioms.

Engberg-Pedersen uses a model for both Paul and the Stoics of the form I-> X -> S.⁷⁵ As applied to Paul's thought, the "individual (I) comes to see him or herself as belonging to God and Christ (X), and thereby a member of a new social entity (S).⁷⁶ The same model, according to Engberg-Pedersen, applies to the Stoics, but (X) represents reason.⁷⁷ I would suggest that, in keeping with D'Costa's second axiom, this model is so general that it ceases to be useful. For example, I could make a case that the model applies to the Reds' rugby club, where X becomes a great experience in a Reds' corporate box, and S the Reds' fan base.

However, adopting more specific criteria or models will bring in chauvinistic principles since there is no neutral Archimedean point by which to judge between the traditions.⁷⁸

C Kevin Rowe on comparing life traditions

C. Kevin Rowe encountered a similar problem. In his work "One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions"⁷⁹ he found that if one takes an "encyclopaedic" approach to knowledge in assessing Paul and the Stoics, similarities could be found. For example, both traditions refer to 'God'. However, the meaning of God in the Stoic tradition is very different to how Paul would have thought of God.⁸⁰ He proposes that Stoicism and early Christianity are very different "life traditions" that "summon people to a different pattern of being in the world". Their "stories are incommensurable and incompatible," which an "encyclopaedic" comparison does not recognise.

This is in keeping with D'Costa's axioms, however, it also leaves Rowe, and this current project, with the inability to make any comparison between the traditions and their effect on human agency. I am in the same danger of falling into either an approach of analysing

⁷⁴ Gavin D'Costa, "Whose Objectivity? Which Neutrality? The Doomed Quest for a Neutral Vantage Point from Which to Judge Religions," *Religious Studies* 29, no. 1 (1993): 82.

⁷⁵ I will draw on Esler's description of Engberg-Pedersen's work for this summary.

⁷⁶ Philip F. Esler, "Paul and Stoicism: Romans 12 as a Test Case," *New Testament Studies; Cambridge* 50, no. 1 (January 2004): 108,109.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁷⁸ D'Costa, "Whose Objectivity?," 90.

⁷⁹ C. Kevin Rowe, *One True Life: The Stoics and Early Christians as Rival Traditions* (New Haven, UNITED STATES: Yale University Press, 2016), accessed October 21, 2018, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/slq/detail.action?docID=4429612>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 227.

from a general “encyclopedia” point of view, or from *a priori* principles drawn from my own worldview. I will address this further, with a potential way out of this dilemma in the section on methodology.

Metamorphosis in the classical world

Another dimension to our study is how the concept of personal transformation was understood in the classical world. Literature on how Paul understood metamorphosis will be important in this study. The work of Gonzalez is one of the best in this regard.

Magic or reason?

González’s work⁸¹ has some relevance in the Paul/Stoic debate. In his paper “Paul’s Use of Metamorphosis in Its Graeco-Roman and Jewish Contexts,” he demonstrates how Paul used the term “metamorphosis” in ways that were understandable within both the Jewish and Hellenistic cultures of his time, and how he subordinated the contemporary understandings of metamorphosis to the gospel that he preached.”⁸²

Gonzalez’s analysis shows that, even though Greek thought struggled with the concept of change, the concept of personal transformation was in the literature from antiquity. Because in many ways it looks similar to Paul’s concept of transformation, it could falsify our hypothesis.

Nevertheless, Gonzalez does highlight several differences between Paul’s and the Hellenistic understanding of metamorphosis. However, there appears to be one inconsistency between this analysis and other literature that needs some attention: the contrast between transformation as the work of magic and the gods, and the Greek understanding of the work of reason.

Gonzalez finds that “at least for the period in which Paul was writing, metamorphoses were ‘limited to the realm of magic and the extraordinary capacities of the gods’”.⁸³ Furthermore, such “metamorphosis is always at the will of the gods alone, independent of the will of humanity”.⁸⁴ This seems to be at odds with Greek thought outlined in previous sections,

⁸¹ Eliezer González, “Paul’s Use of Metamorphosis in Its Graeco-Roman and Jewish Contexts,” *DavarLogos XIII* (2014): 20.

⁸² Ibid., 57.

⁸³ Ibid., 59.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 68.

where the philosopher transforms himself⁸⁵ and reaching conformity is the work of the mind and reason. The gods have little to do with this, being subject to reason themselves.⁸⁶

For our purposes, we need to establish that magic, as an arbitrary intervention into the universe, undermines an empirical approach to the world (e.g. because it no longer follows consistent rules that it can be investigated), as well as agency (e.g. because human action can be arbitrarily overwritten by the gods). Similarly, we would need to demonstrate that Greek reason, with its focus on the world of forms/ideas, along with its low view of the world of matter and distrust of the senses, also stifles an empirical approach and agency in the world.

In the same vein as Gonzalez's work and drawing on Roman's 12.2, Keener's project⁸⁷ looks promising for our research, however the approach he takes is one of explanation and exposition.⁸⁸ Throughout his work, Keener points out similarities and differences in Paul to the classical backdrop, but does not try to build an overall picture for the reader. The work is useful as a starting point due the encyclopaedic referencing on the topic of transformation.

anakaino: Something new?

Heidebrecht, also drawing on Romans 12.2 makes a startling claim: "When we explore the background of the concept of renewal we discover the term Paul uses is not found in Greek literature prior to his epistles, suggesting that Paul most likely coined a new word to describe his unique concept of renewal (*anakaino*)."⁸⁹ Such a claim may point to a difference in understanding of change and transformation between Paul and the Greek world, and is worth further exploration.

⁸⁵ Women, of course, were not philosophers.

⁸⁶ According to Seneca: *Non pareo deo sed assentior*. "I do not obey God; rather I agree with him"(sic) (ep. 96.2)

⁸⁷ Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul's Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016).

⁸⁸ Location: 251 "Although I am interested in Paul's theology on the matter in question, I am not staking out positions on many of the contested issues of Pauline theology today."

⁸⁹ Doug Heidebrecht, "The Renewal of Perception: Romans 12:2 and Post Modernism," *Direction* 25, no. 2 (1996): 57–58.

Contemporary Theories of change and transformation as an heuristic lens?

As discussed, to break our methodological deadlock it is proposed to allow modern theories of change and transformation to set the criteria of analysis.⁹⁰ The theories chosen are neuroscience, design thinking and complexity theory.

Neuroscience

Cosmology: Narrative, a component of personal formation and social transformation?

Vogt's paper⁹¹ is valuable as it is a general introduction to the interdisciplinary fields of neuroscience and anthropology as frameworks for assessing the "interplay among social context, personal formation and social change."⁹² The recent scholarship in these fields addresses some concepts already raised in the analysis above that relate to human agency.

For example, Brown and Reimer's theory called "embodied cognition", develops a relationship between narrative and action.⁹³ Similarly, Charlene P. E. Burns' work highlights the importance of narrative in personal formation.⁹⁴ Narrative, as we have seen in the work of Judge and Strom, is an aspect of difference in cosmology between the Judeo-Christian and Graeco-Roman worlds; the former seeing the cosmos as an unfolding story, and the latter seeing the cosmos as a static ideal. The literature here links narrative closely to action, personal formation and social change, and is therefore relevant to our study. The idea would be to show that these practices, arising from a different understanding of cosmology, are somewhat unique to the Christian community.

In addition to cosmology, an understanding of anthropology and 'embodiment' vs 'disembodied' affects our agency, and for that we turn to the work of Brown and Strawn, who are also cited in Vogt's paper.

⁹⁰ I am aware that applying these theories to the classical world is anachronistic. Therefore, care needs to be taken to understand the classical world on its own terms in this approach.

⁹¹ Christopher P Vogt, "Virtue: Personal Formation and Social Transformation," *Theological Studies* 77, no. 1 (March 2016): 181–196.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 181.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

Anthropology: Embodiment an ingredient of human agency?

Although, Vogt considers the Brown and Strawn's thesis⁹⁵ as "problematic" because it "critiques what amounts to a straw-figure caricature of 'dualism'",⁹⁶ the work is valuable for our analysis because this anthropological dualism appears to be a characteristic of the Hellenistic world. Our analysis will explore whether the view of a person as a disembodied ideal will result in practices that "tends the soul" with resulting inwardness, individuality, and dampening of agency.

The Judeo-Christian view of the person as a psychosomatic unity however, could result in different practices. Neuroscience highlights the formative importance of practices related to our very physical nature like empathy,⁹⁷ trust,⁹⁸ relationships and social interactions, the experiences of everyday life.⁹⁹ Again all themes encountered earlier analysis.

Neuroscience, therefore, provides a lens from which to analyse human agency in the first century. The insight proposed in this analysis is that 'embodiment' gives rise to human agency; it is not merely an intellectual assent to a series of principles or beliefs about cosmology or anthropology, although it would include this. Our analysis would explore whether the very nature of social embeddedness of the early Christians led to agency and continued social transformation.¹⁰⁰

James K. A Smith, comes to a similar conclusion from a different direction: that we are shaped not merely by a "set of ideas, principles, claims, and propositions that are known and believed".¹⁰¹ Rather, "we are what we love, and our love is shaped, primed, and aimed by liturgical practices that take hold of our gut and aim our heart to certain ends."¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church*, 1 edition. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁹⁶ Vogt, "Virtue," 189.

⁹⁷ Brown and Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life*, 33.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹⁰⁰ Such a notion arises from the analysis of Brown and Strawn: Ibid., 82. "Thus, the process of personal growth toward becoming persons of wisdom and virtue is strongly influenced by the nature of the communities in which we participate. We form each other through reciprocal imitation."

¹⁰¹ James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies): Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009), 32.

¹⁰² Ibid., 40.

This is potentially at odds with a more didactic emphasis of the community as “scholastic”.

¹⁰³ Notwithstanding Smith’s softening this to “learning community”¹⁰⁴ where educational aspects “were not exclusively intellectual and rational” and the “teaching activity was embodied and/or enacted”,¹⁰⁵ the emphasis remains on ‘education’ and ‘teaching’. The insight coming out of this analysis is that agency would potentially require the early Christians to be more than a “learning community”. Rather, it requires them to be an innovative community of embodied love in action, where “the transforming power of Christ was most at work in the *relationships* of those who gathered.”¹⁰⁶

My analysis, therefore, will explore how (and if) agency emerges out of a set of practices community interaction, and how distinct these were from Greek society.

Design Thinking

The links between cosmology, anthropology and design thinking were made in Strom’s early work¹⁰⁷ and the link has also been explored by Rikk Watts,¹⁰⁸ and Michael Hodson.¹⁰⁹ As mentioned above, design thinking is more closely associated with human agency than the empirical scientific method because design requires the creative imagination to innovate and bring something new into the world.

Design thinking, as a field of academic exploration, came out of Stanford University,¹¹⁰ from which a emerged a consulting arm called IDEO.¹¹¹ Published literature from IDEO’s Tim

¹⁰³ E. A. Judge, “The Early Christians as a Scholastic Community,” *Journal of Religious History* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1960): 4–15.

¹⁰⁴ Claire S. Smith, *Pauline Communities as “Scholastic Communities”: A Study of the Vocabulary of “Teaching” in 1 Corinthians, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Tübingen, GERMANY: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 390, accessed November 18, 2018, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/slq/detail.action?docID=1104630>.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 389.

¹⁰⁶ N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1864.

¹⁰⁷ As far as I can tell, Tony Golsby-Smith with Strom were pioneers in this insight and connection. Tony’s PhD these can be found here: <http://www.gospelconversations.com/pursuing-the-art-of-strategic-conversations/>

¹⁰⁸ Rikk Watts, “Design & Theology – Part 3 | Gospel Conversations,” n.d., accessed November 15, 2018, <http://www.gospelconversations.com/design-and-theology-part3/>.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Hodson, “The Missing Link from Theology to Business Practice?,” *Faith in Business Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (n.d.): 3.

¹¹⁰ “A Place for Explorers & Experimenters at Stanford University,” *Stanford d.School*, accessed November 16, 2018, <https://dschool.stanford.edu/>.

¹¹¹ “About IDEO: Our Story, Who We Are, How We Work,” accessed November 16, 2018, <https://www.ideo.com/about>.

Brown¹¹² will be useful for our analysis, as will design as particularly applied to social innovation.¹¹³

Because design thinking is a currently evolving practice, the approach will be to extract common themes from selected representative literature to develop a composite framework of analysis. Although design thinking is a modern conception, it is expected that these characteristics will provide an appropriate lens by which to assess agency in the first century.

Complexity Theory

Two features in our discussion so far point to complexity theory as a potential heuristic in which to analyse Christian behaviour in the classical world.

The first was Strom's observation of Paul improvising similar to a jazz player. This has been identified as a metaphor in complex adaptive systems.¹¹⁴ Like a jazz improviser, Paul "simultaneously compos[es] (planned act) and perform[s] (spontaneous act)"¹¹⁵ from a theme. And, picking up another aspect of complexity theory, Paul did not maintain control but rather "supported emergence of a new order".¹¹⁶

The second feature relates to the value placed on each person's contribution of their gifts to the larger body. Such an environment is similar to a definition of a complex adaptive system: "A system of individual agents, who have freedom to act in ways that are not always predictable, and whose actions are interconnected such that one agent's actions changes the context for other agents."¹¹⁷

Due to these features and because complexity theory is related to change and adaption,¹¹⁸ it potentially provides another useful heuristic of investigation related to human agency. Like

¹¹² Tim Brown, "Design Thinking," *Harvard Business Review* 86, no. 6 (June 2008): 84–92.

¹¹³ Jeanne Liedtka, Randy Salzman, and Daisy Azer, *Design Thinking for the Greater Good: Innovation in the Social Sector* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Richard Buchanan, "Wicked Problems in Design Thinking," *Design Issues* 8, no. 2 (1992): 5–21.

¹¹⁴ Martijn Hartog, "Towards Improvisational Governance? Jazz Improvisation and Networked Complex Governance," 2014.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Benyamin M. Bergmann Lichtenstein, "Emergence as a Process of Self-Organizing - New Assumptions and Insights from the Study of Non-Linear Dynamic Systems," *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 13, no. 6 (June 2000): 528.

¹¹⁷ Gary M Grobman, "Complexity Theory: A New Way to Look at Organisational Change," *Public Administration Quarterly* 29 (2005): 360.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 377.

our approach with design thinking, our task is not to provide a critique of complexity theory. The task before us will be to assess the conditions of the early Christians, in contrast to the Hellenistic world, as an emergent complex adaptive, self-organising system.

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