

A Philosophical Analysis of the Heart as Presented by
Scriptural and Patristic Literature

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*“Much on earth is concealed from us, but in place of it we
have been granted a secret, mysterious sense of our living bond
with the other world, with the higher heavenly world, and the
roots of our thoughts and feelings are not here but in other
worlds.”*

– *Fyodor Dostoevsky*

The Heart of Man and Its Relation to the Soul for Aristotle

In the realm of philosophy and theology, a common question that occurs is who man is and what makes up his being. With philosophy, the account given by Aristotle might seem to suffice, that the soul with its three powers—the nutritive, sensitive, and rational—determines who man is. However, with theology, particularly with the Scriptures, the heart seems to be that which constitutes who man is in his truest self. A glance at Jeremiah 17:5 in the Septuagint gives an indication of this: “The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is the man. Even so, who can know him?”¹ From this passage, one sees that the heart is especially ascribed to man but at once remains obscure, “deep beyond all things,” so much that it appears only God can know it thoroughly. Other passages from the Scriptures suggest certain properties of the heart, such as being motive, in some way, of external actions, or also inclining one to consciously will a particular way; having a kind of habitual knowledge of right and wrong; being deep-seated and ingrained in man’s being, such that it appears very hard to try to influence or change the heart’s disposition; and, most of all, being a receptacle of the grace of God, through which one comes to know and love God with his whole being.

The natural question, from this, is how these two views relate to each other, as both have the character of being a principle of man’s being while having apparently different definitions. The Scriptural view seems to implicitly acknowledge the presence of the soul, as Aristotle describes it, insofar as men’s intellect and will are present as conscious faculties by which men exercise knowledge and act, so that the heart then seems to be something to which the soul has a particular relationship. The next question, then, is exactly what kind of relationship does the heart have to the soul, as Aristotle understands it? Namely, is the heart a metaphor for one of the soul’s powers—the will, for instance—or is the heart a kind of

¹ *St. Athanasius Academy Septuagint* (Elk Grove, CA: St. Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, 2008), Jeremiah 17:5.

basis, or final cause, from which the soul works—as, for instance, the good which is motive of all action?

Given the description of the heart by the Scriptures and Fathers of the Church, I propose that the heart represents, for Aristotle, the rational appetite acting according to the good which moves the soul of man in two senses: as the apparent good which man grasps as a state of character, and as the real good which is the end and fulfillment of man's nature.

In making this proposition, an analysis of the heart and its properties will first be shown from the Scriptures, and then an analysis of the Church Fathers' views of the heart will be made in bringing out the two senses of the heart previously mentioned, one which is directly equated with the intellect, or will, and one which is shown to be a proper place of the intellect. Next, an overview of Aristotle's account of the soul and the *Ethics* will be made, in which the relationship of the will to the perceived good as a principle, and also to the chief good as a final cause, match the two senses of the heart brought forth by the Fathers. In making this comparison, it will be made clear how one sense of the heart matches the will grasping the apparent good, and the other sense matches the will having the real good as a final cause.

The Scriptural Understanding of the Heart

Beginning with Deuteronomy 8:1-3, we see Moses exhort the Israelites to keep the commandments that the Lord laid down to them, saying why the Lord chastised them in their years of wandering:

Every commandment I command you today you must be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and inherit the land the Lord swore to your fathers. Now you shall remember the whole way the Lord your God led you in the desert, to deal harshly with you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. So He dealt harshly with you and weakened you with hunger, and fed you with manna,

which your fathers did not know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word proceeding from the mouth of God man shall live.²

Interestingly, the speaker notes that God tested the people of Israel to see what lay in their hearts, whether their hearts would follow or not follow God's commandments. This seems puzzling though, since God, by His nature, should know the thoughts and hearts of everyone as they are instead of having to bring out that knowledge through testing the Israelites. If God already knows what lies in the Israelites' hearts, it seems superfluous for God to test the Israelites to know something which He should know ahead of time. However, since the passage begins with an exhortation to follow the commandments, the speaker may rather be trying to show that God is bringing out what lies in the Israelites' hearts for the sake of making their hearts' condition known to the Israelites themselves, as if to suggest that their hearts may still be in such a condition to not follow God's commandments.

Given this understanding, the heart seems to have a property to dispose someone to act a certain way generally, by the fact that the Lord "knows" what lies in the Israelites' hearts by testing them and, through that testing, bringing out the actions that the Israelites would do given the kind of character their hearts have. This knowing of "what was in your heart," then, seems to imply something of knowledge, with the "what" in the heart as something on which the heart seems to grasp hold of and, in some sense, will. This sort of willing of the heart, however, does not seem to be the kind of willing which one does consciously in a particular case, like what the Israelites will at the moment when they are tested and forced to act one way or another in that moment—whether to obey God or not. Thus, the heart seems to know and will something in a general sense, like a principle disposing one in a particular direction.

² *Ibid.*, Deuteronomy 8:1-3.

This view is similar to that expressed in Jeremiah 17, which speaks of the plight of those who put their trust in man in contrast to those who put their trust in God who never fail to bear good fruit on account of their trusting God:

Cursed is the man who puts his hope in man, and who will strengthen the flesh of his arm in him, and withdraws in his heart from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert. He shall not see when good things come, but shall dwell in salt lands along the sea and in the desert, in a salt land where no one dwells. But blessed is the man who puts his trust in the Lord, for the Lord shall be his hope. He shall be like a flourishing tree alongside the waters which spreads its roots toward the moisture. He will not fear when the burning heat comes, for He shall be like the root in a grove in the year of drought. He shall not fear, for he shall be like a tree that does not cease yielding its fruit.

The heart is deep beyond all things, and it is the man. Even so, who can know him? I, the Lord, examine hearts and test minds, to give each man according to his ways and the fruits of his practices. A partridge coos and collects eggs she did not lay. So is a man who obtains his wealth, but not with judgement. In the midst of his days his riches will forsake him, and at the time of his end he will be foolish.³

At the beginning of the passage, then, there seems to be a playing out of the consequences and effects of which foundation a man puts his trust in, that of man or God. The inability to see any good thing and being like a shrub in the desert—that which most needs water in the middle of a waterless land—is the expected effect for the one whose trust is in man, while the sense of thriving and never failing to bear fruit is the effect of the one whose trust is in God. The following paragraph seems to follow from this as a kind of proportion, in that from this deepness of the heart, man's actions are brought about, and the consequences

³ *Ibid.*, Jeremiah 17:1-7; for the passage in the Masoretic/Hebrew text, cf. Jeremiah 17:5-11. Intriguingly, the corresponding passage to Jeremiah 17:5 in the RSV (Jeremiah 17:9), reads: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt; who can understand it?” While “deceitful” can be read as a metaphor for “deep” in the Septuagint, as illustrating the deceiving depth of the heart, it may be asked how “desperately wicked” can fit with “it {the heart} is the man.” An alternate understanding of this passage could be that it is showing the general condition of man's heart as being wicked, perhaps in some ways as a consequence of the sin of Adam and the fallen state of man. Essentially what is said about the heart appears to be the same between both readings, that only God knows and tries the heart of man—the heart which forms the basis of his actions.

of those actions are brought about through God's knowledge of the heart, thus His giving to each man "according to his ways and the fruits of his practices." Verse 7 seems to be an example of this with the man who instinctively, without judgement, obtains wealth, as this implies that the man's heart is such that he takes his wealth without any conscious consideration of the right or wrong of his action, and because of the condition of his heart at that time, God will give to him according to the fruit of his ways.

From this understanding, like Deuteronomy 8, the heart is something which is hidden in man and yet possesses a kind of knowledge of what is good or evil as expressed through man's actions. Thus, the heart in this context seems to have a rooted character in man, where man will act in a good or bad way based on the condition of his heart, whether it be in a good or bad state. The words of Christ on the heart, in Matthew 12, put this succinctly: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good man out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure brings forth evil."⁴ This "bringing forth" from the treasures of a man's heart, again, implies how man consciously wills good or evil based on the condition or state of his heart, with treasures of a good or evil sort.

One might wonder about the sense in which the heart is unknowable, which Jeremiah 17:5 seems to imply by asking who can know the heart of man. Why should the heart be so unknowable that only God knows what lies in the heart of man? Of course, someone's own conscious thoughts are also hidden, insofar as his thoughts are not exposed to others except himself and God, barring the fact that thoughts may be expressed in words. Yet in Daniel 2, where Daniel gives the interpretation to King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, it is implied that one may not even be aware of the thoughts or undergoings of the heart:

⁴ *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version (RSV), Catholic Edition (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1966), Matthew 12:34-35.

Daniel answered before the king, and said, “The mystery which the king demanded to be told to the king cannot be revealed by wise men, magicians, enchanters, and diviners. But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to king Nebuchadnezzar what must come to pass in the last days. Your dream and the visions in your head upon your bed was this: As for you, O king, thoughts came to you while on your bed as to what must happen after this, and He who reveals mysteries has made known to you what must take place. But as for me, this mystery was not made known to me because I have more wisdom than anyone living, but for the sake of making known the interpretation to the king, that you might know the thoughts of your heart.”⁵

Thus, while Daniel is interpreting mysteries of the future that God is making known to Nebuchadnezzar through the dreams, the passage implies that Daniel is merely telling the king the thoughts of his heart. Ironically, then, Nebuchadnezzar already has the interpretation of the dreams through the “thoughts of [his] heart,” but since he does not consciously know these particular thoughts, God must make known Nebuchadnezzar’s own heart through Daniel. This aspect of the heart, then, seems to imply that only God can truly know certain details of the heart, which man can only know through divine revelation. Taken with Jeremiah 17:5, that the heart is “deep beyond all things” and only thoroughly known by God, this would imply that the heart has a kind of unknowable nature while affecting man’s being in some way.

One might also wonder, how does the heart acquire the knowledge, will, or particularly character that it possesses? Instances such as Pharaoh’s heart being hardened by both God and Pharaoh himself⁶ indicate both God and man affect the heart in some way. A particular instance where man affects his own heart appears in Matthew 15, when Christ says to avoid the things which come out of one’s mouth as opposed to those which go into the mouth:

⁵ *Septuagint*, Daniel 2:27-30.

⁶ Instances when Pharaoh hardened his own heart: Exodus 8:15, 8:32, 9:34; instances when God hardened Pharaoh’s heart: Exodus 9:12, 10:1, 10:20, 14:8, etc.

And he said, “Are you still without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach, and so passes on? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man; but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.”⁷

One should note the irony in Jesus’s words about how what rather comes out of the mouth, instead of what goes into the mouth, defiles a man; conventional wisdom would seem to imply otherwise, that what man eats, if it is bad, would put that man in a bad state. Rather what Jesus appears to emphasize is the lasting effect of being defiled because of the source of the action being one’s heart, which would indicate that man’s character. At once, however, Christ says the actions coming from the heart still defile a man, even if the heart is itself defiled, as a source of defiled actions, so that those actions imply a further defilement of that man’s character, and so a further defilement of that man’s heart. This would imply that, while one’s heart can influence his actions, that man’s actions can, to some degree, inversely give a further character or definition to his heart. This understanding would make sense in light of Deuteronomy 8:2, when God tested the Israelites to know what lay in their hearts, so that through the testing, God was seeing how the Israelites’ hearts would develop through their actions.

At the same time, and perhaps more primarily, it is God who also molds the character of the heart and not just man by his own actions, as is seen in the case of Pharaoh. Ezekiel 11 shows that God not only molds the heart but, literally, changes one heart for another:

Therefore I said, “Thus says the Lord: “I shall also receive them from the nations, and gather them from the countries where I scattered them; and I will give them the land of Israel. They shall enter there and remove all its abominations and lawlessness from it. Then I will give them another heart and put a new spirit within them. I shall remove the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so they may walk in My commandments,

⁷ RSV, Matthew 15:16-20.

keep My ordinances, and do them. They will be My people, and I shall be their God. But as for the heart set upon their abominations and lawlessness—as their heart went after these things—so I have recompensed their ways on their own heads,’ says the Lord.”⁸

Here, the heart seems to be something man is not able to change by himself but rather only God through replacing the “heart of stone” with a “heart of flesh” in a rather physical manner. This implies a kind of fixed aspect of the heart that seems proper only to God to adjust. However, at the same time, the last part of the passage makes clear that man is, in some way, responsible for the condition of his heart, with the heart “set upon their abominations and lawlessness—as their heart went after these things.” From this, there seem to be two distinct senses of the heart: the heart which God must change for the Israelites to follow Him, and the heart which men are responsible for, in whatever character it acquires.

Another unique property of the heart that is seen in Ezekiel 11 is that it is such an entity or principle through which one has a relationship to God. This can be seen when the passage says that God will replace the stony heart with a heart of flesh, in order that the Israelites may walk in and do God’s commandments. Thus, in this state, it can be said, “They will be My people, and I shall be their God”—only because they have a heart which can allow for them to do His commandments and acknowledge God as Lord. If the Israelites have a heart of stone, on the other hand, they will be unable to acknowledge God and keep His commandments, since their hearts are such that make it impossible to be molded in that way, like a heart of flesh which is receptive to God’s molding. Jeremiah 24 also seems to confirm this sense: “Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord, and they shall be to Me, as a people, and I will be to them as God. They shall return to Me with their whole heart.”⁹ It is with this heart that the people will know God personally, as Lord of their

⁸ *Septuagint*, Jeremiah 11:17-21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Jeremiah 24:7.

lives, and from this fact, they will abide by His commandments out of this knowledge which their hearts hold.

Thus, in considering characteristics of the heart, the heart appears to generally symbolize both man's given personal character and his whole nature as man. This can be seen with the heart's characteristic of being disposed towards an end, and the heart, in turn, disposing someone to act in that manner, as a man's personal character and his own nature are those things by which he comes to act a certain way. While the heart's deep and hidden nature may apply to a person's character, to some degree—a man may not be aware of the character of his actions, for example—there is a sense that the heart underlies even this, since a person's character seems to be constituted from the habitual way he acts. This sense of the heart, rather, seems to imply something which is below the conscious realm of his character or actions, and so this sense seems to deal more with what pertains to man's nature in itself, or, that is, what would fulfill the intended nature of that person. Cases such as 1st Samuel 24:5-7 seem to especially illustrate this sense, where David's heart convicts David of cutting off the corner of Saul's robe, although David followed through on what seemed good to him initially, "to do to [Saul] as it seems good from your perspective."¹⁰ While this aspect seems to apply more to man's nature than personal character, the other characteristics of the heart as being moldable by God and man and as being that through which one can love God seem to involve both of man's personal character and nature. This can be seen in Ezekiel 11, for instance, where God replacing the heart of stone with flesh seems to change the Israelites' very nature—so that they have a newfound ability to follow God—and even their character—where they may be apt to love and follow God. The kind of heart that man is responsible

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1st Samuel 24:5-7: "And David's men said to him, 'Look! This is the day of which the Lord spoke to you, that He would deliver your enemy into your hands, to do to him as it seems good from your perspective.' So David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe. Then it happened that David's heart afflicted him afterward, because he cut the corner of his robe. And David said to his men, 'The Lord forbid me, that I should do this to my lord, for he is the anointed of the Lord.'"

for seems to apply more to his character, which, it appears, he has a certain control over, whereas to change his very nature would belong to God only. Similarly, when the heart is mentioned as that with which one comes to know and love God, this would seem to involve both character and nature, where it is by having such a nature and a character to love God that one can come to actually follow through in this action, as in Jeremiah 24:7, “They shall return to Me with their whole heart.”

Behind both understandings of the heart as indicating the personal character of individual men and the inherent nature of man is a sense that what belongs to the heart belongs most closely to man and defines who he is. Given this sense, it is clear that whatever good the heart rests on and pursues, whether by nature or by particular character, affects who man is. Considering this understanding of the heart, a look at the writings of the Church Fathers on the heart will help to elaborate on this understanding of the heart and the heart’s relation to the soul.

The Fathers on the Heart in Itself

A general observation the Fathers of the Church have about the heart is that it influences and affects all of man's being, whether it stands for man's state of character or his given nature. St. John Climacus, for instance, interprets the heart as encompassing the whole person, when commenting on the Psalms, "I have called with my whole heart, says the Psalmist, that is, with body, soul and spirit."¹¹ The heart, in this case, is something which encompasses the entire person, and so is a principle through which the whole of man, "body, soul and spirit," is affected, and thus that *by* which one acts.

St. Maximus the Confessor, by contrast, interprets the heart as the intellect when talking about purification of the intellect, itself:

And that is why He also says, 'Sell what you possess and give alms' (Luke 12:33), 'and you will find that all things are clean for you' (Luke 11:41). This applies to those who no longer spend their time on things to do with the body, but strive to cleanse the intellect (which the Lord calls 'heart') from hatred and dissipation. For these defile the intellect and do not allow it to see Christ, who dwells in it by the grace of holy baptism.¹²

The heart, for St. Maximus, implies a moral state of character when he talks about striving to cleanse the intellect rather than being focused on "the things to do with the body," so that if one's "heart" or intellect is in a state of defilement, Christ is not able to be seen. Intriguingly, St. Maximus notes that Christ already dwells in the intellect through "the grace of holy baptism", even though the intellect can itself be in a state of defilement, implying that there is a sense that the grace of God, and generally some sense of the good, can still reside in a corrupted intellect. At the same time, St. Maximus also implies that the state of the intellect affects whether the intellect can see into itself, in seeing God who resides there by grace, so

¹¹ John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* 28.61; ed. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, trans. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1991), 220.

¹² Maximus the Confessor, *Fourth Century of Love* 73; translation in *The Philokalia*, tr. and ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (London: Faber and Faber, 1979–), vol. 2, 109.

that it is all the more important for one to “cleanse the intellect” if he is to be fully aware of Christ’s presence in him.

St. John Chrysostom also attributes the heart to the intellect, in a certain sense, saying it belongs solely to God to know what lies in man’s heart or mind:

For “behold, certain of the scribes,” it saith, “said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?”

But that it belongs to God only to know men’s secrets, hear what saith the prophet, “Thou most entirely alone knowest the hearts;” and again, “God trieth the hearts and reins;” and Jeremiah too saith, “The heart is deep above all things, and it is the man, and who shall know him?” and, “Man shall look on the face, but God on the heart.” And by many things one may see, that to know what is in the mind belongs to God alone.¹³

St. John Chrysostom’s observation that the heart, the place of “men’s secrets,” is only properly known by God matches what was said earlier of the heart as having a certain aspect that God only knows. In this case, St. John Chrysostom seems to link the mind to the heart when he comments on passages of God knowing the heart, implying that the heart has thoughts and intentions, which naturally appear to be related to the mind.

St. Thomas Aquinas, commenting on the understanding of the “heart” in Deuteronomy 6:5, also attributes a principled nature to the heart as that through which man comes to love God, when he treats the heart as the will in relation to the rest of the soul of man:

This precept {to love the Lord “with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength”} is differently worded in various places: for, as we said in the first objection, in Dt. 6 three points are mentioned: “with thy whole heart,” and “with thy whole soul,” and “with thy whole strength.” In Matt. 22 we find two of these mentioned, viz. “with thy whole heart” and “with thy whole soul,” while “with thy whole strength” is omitted, but “with thy whole mind” is added. Yet in Mark 12 we find all four, viz. “with thy whole heart,” and “with thy whole soul,” and “with thy whole

¹³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew* 29.2 (Commentary on Matt. 9:3-4); translation in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Rev. Sir George Prevost (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1888), Vol. 10.

mind,” and “with thy whole force” which is the same as “strength.” Moreover, these four are indicated in Luke 10, where in place of “strength” or “force” we read “with all thy might.”

Accordingly these four have to be explained, since the fact that one of them is omitted here or there is due to one implying another. We must therefore observe that love is an act of the will which is here denoted by the “heart,” because just as the bodily heart is the principle of all movements of the body, so too the will, especially as regards the intention of the last end which is the object of charity, is the principle of all movements of the soul. Now there are three principles of action that are moved by the will, namely, the intellect which is signified by “the mind,” the lower appetitive power, signified “by the soul”; and the exterior executive power signified by “strength,” “force” or “might.” Accordingly we are commanded to direct our whole intention to God, and this is signified by the words “with thy whole heart”; to submit our intellect to God, and this is expressed in the words “with thy whole mind”; to regulate our appetite according to God, in the words “with thy whole soul”; and to obey God in our external actions, and this is to love God with our whole “strength,” “force” or “might.”¹⁴

Thus, St. Thomas notes, to love the Lord “with all thy heart,” implies the other entities, “soul,” “strength” and “mind,” since the heart, as St. Thomas represents it, signifies the will as the principle of action behind the other things, as the bodily heart is the source of life for the body’s members. From this understanding of heart as “will” with regard to a certain end, St. Thomas says that the will, grasping the object of charity, thus orders all the movements of the soul toward the end which it pursues, so that the soul finds its character and principle of action around whatever the will takes to be the good, with “the intention of the last end which is the object of charity.”

Thus, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. John Chrysostom, and St. Thomas Aquinas generally take the heart as a metaphor for either the intellect or the will, insofar as they generally see the heart as that which is motive of the whole soul, and in also being able to take on one or another kind of state of character—its intention can be directed to God or it

¹⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 2 of 2, q. 44, a. 5; trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1920).

can be defiled with such things as “hatred and dissipation,” as St. Maximus observes. For Pseudo-Macarius and St. Diadochos of Photiki, however, the heart has a kind of distinct being from just the intellect and the will. They take this sense of the heart to be a place of purity distinct from the intellect which can be corrupted. Pseudo-Macarius, or Macarius, speaks of this sense when he speaks of the heart as a place of purity in man which lies in danger of being eroded by evil thoughts:

So it is with man’s heart. It has its good thoughts; but the streams of evil also are always near the heart, desiring to cast it down, and to incline it to its own side. Then if the mind be ever so little light, and yield to unclean thoughts, behold, the spirits of error have found scope, and have entered in, and have overturned the beauties that were there, and have destroyed the good thoughts and laid the soul waste.¹⁵

Macarius indicates that the heart is naturally a place of good thoughts while temptation lies outside the heart itself. He next seems to indicate that the mind begins in the heart but is easily tempted by the “streams of evil” near the heart, so that the mind finds its focus either in the heart or in the “streams of evil,” and thus affects the whole soul in whatever it places its attention in. This sense of the heart seems to indicate a natural place where man finds his fulfillment, but it is also something which can be missed and overrun by the mind being focused outside of this natural place.

Macarius makes this clear when he further notes how the mind and even the soul, in a way, are contained in the heart, such that the heart influences the whole soul when grace is implanted in the heart:

Grace itself writes upon their hearts the laws of the Spirit. They ought not therefore to rest their assurance only upon the scriptures that are written in ink; the grace of God writes the laws of the Spirit and the mysteries of heaven upon *the tables of the heart* as well. For the heart governs and reigns over the whole bodily organism; and when grace possesses the ranges of the heart, it reigns over all the members and the thoughts. For there, in the heart,

¹⁵ *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, 43.6; trans. A.J. Mason, D.D. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921), 272.

is the mind, and all the faculties of the soul, and its expectation; therefore grace penetrates also to all the members of the body.¹⁶

Intriguingly, Macarius notes how the heart as a physical organ lies at the center of man's body and is a source and governor of the body, as well as, in an odd way, thoughts too. Since he signifies the heart as the center of man's being where "the mind, and all the faculties of the soul, and its expectation" reside, Macarius uses this to show how man is transformed by God's grace being written, literally, on "the tables of the heart," quoting from 2 Corinthians.¹⁷ Because the heart lies at the center of who man is, and since the heart also has been transformed by grace, Macarius is then reasonable to say that "grace penetrates also to all the members of the body," since they are given being by the heart providing life to them.

One may wonder, however, in what way the heart can still be purified, having already been changed from a "heart of stone" as seen in Ezekiel, while the mind is able to fall into evil and detractive thoughts. Macarius admits that while the mind and the heart can both start out with good thoughts and a good will, the mind focusing little by little on evil things can sufficiently influence itself and thus the whole soul to bring about their downfall and overturn the "good thoughts" of the heart. St. Diadochos of Photiki seems to have this particular problem in mind when he writes about how evil thoughts, perceived to come from a heart purified by baptismal grace, come rather through the mind which is divided from the heart:

It is true that the heart produces good and bad thoughts from itself (cf. Luke 6:45). But it does this not because it is the heart's nature to produce evil ideas, but because as a result of the primal deception the remembrance of evil has become as it were a habit. It conceives most of its evil thoughts, however, as a result of the attacks of the demons. But we feel that all these evil thoughts arise from the heart, and for this reason some people have

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.20; tr. Mason, 115-116.

¹⁷ RSV, 2 Corinthians 3:3: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."

inferred that sin dwells in the intellect along with grace. That is why, in their view, the Lord said: ‘But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, adulteries,’ and so on (Matt. 15:18-19). They do not realize, however, that the intellect, being highly responsive, makes its own the thoughts suggested to it by the demons through the activity of the flesh; and, in a way we do not understand, the proclivity of the body accentuates this weakness of the soul because of the union between the two. The flesh delights endlessly in being flattered by deception, and it is because of this that the thoughts sown by the demons in the soul appear to come from the heart; and we do indeed make them our own when we consent to indulge in them. This was what the Lord was censuring in the text quoted above, as the words themselves make evident. Is it not clear that whoever indulges in the thoughts suggested to him by Satan’s cunning and engraves them in his heart, produces them thereafter as the result of his own mental activity?¹⁸

St. Diadochos here makes clear that it is not so much from the heart, having been purified by grace, that evil thoughts proceed, as it is more the mind which “makes its own the thoughts suggested to it by the demons through the activity of the flesh.” This is a case where the mind, though its source is the heart (as noted by Macarius), can take on a life of its own by focusing on thoughts which are not of the heart but of another source—the flesh, and therefore the demons by proxy. Since the mind changes its focus to the things of the flesh, it comes to “make its own” the thoughts suggested to it, so that in a way one’s mind, with his thoughts, “engraves them in his heart and produces them thereafter as the result of his own mental activity,” even though the heart, by its original nature, is left in a pure state, as a result of the grace of God residing there.

This is why St. Diadochos says later: “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.”¹⁹ Oddly, then, the heart is a source from which the

¹⁸ Diadochos of Photiki, *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination: One Hundred Texts* 83; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, 284.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 88; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 1, 287.

intellect proceeds, but, at the same time, the intellect can readily grasp other thoughts which are not from its source. Once again, this shows how the heart maintains a kind of distinct existence from the mind as a proper place from which the mind operates, although the mind is free as an agent to pursue whatever is suggested to it, whether it is the grace of God in the heart or temptations suggested through the senses, as mentioned above. At the same time, one should pay attention to the close relation between the heart and the intellect, as implied when St. Diadochos almost seems to equate the intellect and heart by saying the intellect produces spiritual thoughts, while the “outer parts of the heart continue to produce spiritual thoughts.” This would, then, imply that the heart is almost the given nature that the intellect possesses, though it is free to deviate from its given nature.

St. Gregory Palamas helps to clarify this understanding of the heart as a principle from which the mind proceeds and, in a certain sense, finds its natural home in:

Our heart is, therefore, the shrine of the intelligence and the chief intellectual organ of the body. When, therefore, we strive to scrutinize and to amend our intelligence through rigorous watchfulness, how could we do this if we did not collect our intellect, outwardly dispersed through the senses, and bring it back within ourselves—back to the heart itself, the shrine of the thoughts? It is for this reason that St Makarios—rightly called blessed—directly after what he says above, adds: 'So it is there that we must look to see whether grace has inscribed the laws of the Spirit.' Where? In the ruling organ, in the throne of grace, where the intellect and all the thoughts of the soul reside, that is to say, in the heart.²⁰

This terminology of the heart as the “shrine of intelligence and the chief intellectual organ,” seems to summarize the relationship of the mind to the heart as a faculty to a source, or also as a given nature the mind possesses in contrast to a state of character the mind can acquire. Speaking this way, the intellect may be in a state of being “outwardly dispersed through the senses,” in a confused and distracted state, rather than bringing itself back into its own

²⁰ Gregory Palamas, *In Defense of Those who Devoutly Practise a Life of Stillness* 3; tr. *Philokalia*, vol. 4, 334.

source, into the “shrine of the thoughts,” where it finds its proper focus and fulfillment through attaining the grace of God which is already present in the heart.

Thus, where the heart appeared to imply either the individual character of certain men or man’s natural fulfillment in the Scriptures, there seems to be a similar division of interpreting the heart with the two interpretations put forward by the Fathers, the heart standing for either the intellect (or will) itself or a proper place of the intellect through which the grace of God is found and man’s fulfillment is realized. The former sense implies that the heart is something which can be, at once, corrupted or purified, while the latter implies that the heart is pure and whole by nature, in contrast to the intellect which is, like the former sense mentioned, something which can be pure or impure. At the same time, it is important to note how the latter kind of heart is the “chief intellectual organ of the body,” something proper to the intellect, as if to say it is the intellect’s own proper nature, when speaking of the heart as an organ of the body which has a fixed nature. Speaking this way of the heart will hearken back to a sense of the heart brought out from the Scriptures as indicating man’s given nature, as an innate desire of man for the fulfillment of his nature according to God’s will. This sense of the heart, as well as the sense of the heart indicating the intellect (or will) which can acquire a changeable state of character, will be helpful in showing an analogical relationship to the intellect and will, for Aristotle, as the principle movers of the soul and man.

Aristotle on the Rational Appetite’s Relation to the Good

From seeing how the heart, generally, moves and affects the whole man, as noted by St. John Climacus, one must look at the correlation to this in Aristotle’s account of the soul with the principle that moves the whole soul of man, the rational appetite, and the way it is anchored to the good, by nature, and to what it perceives to be good. In bringing this out, an

examination of Aristotle's concept of the good for man as happiness, and the state of character that arises from the rational appetite grasping the good it perceives, will help to show the analogy of the rational appetite to the heart.

In *On the Soul*, when Aristotle considers what the principle of movement is, he first limits his discussion to local movement which only applies to animals, excepting a certain, distinct movement of growth and decay in all living things, and then sets out that local movement is not able to originate in either the mind or appetite simply, but rather both must be involved in some way: the mind, in its practical mode, calculates means to a given end, while the appetite is "in every form of it relative to an end: for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of mind practical; and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of the action."²¹ Thus, the appetite grasps goods it sees, in a way like the intellect forming first principles, and gives them over to the practical mind to calculate the means toward obtaining that good. However, we are later given an important distinction between the appetite and the mind:

As it is, mind is never found producing movement without appetite (for wish is a form of appetite; and when movement is produced according to calculation it is also according to wish), but appetite can originate movement contrary to calculation, for desire is a form of appetite. Now mind is always right, but appetite and imagination may be either right or wrong. That is why, though in any case it is the object of appetite which originates movement, this object may be either the real or the apparent good.²²

Therefore, while the mind's calculations are always correct, the appetite can desire rightly or wrongly by seeking an object which is "the real or the apparent good," which it takes to be the good that fulfills the end it is relative to, as mentioned above. This is more aptly and clearly stated by Aristotle in the *Ethics*, when he talks about reason and desire, as sources of

²¹ Aristotle, *On the Soul* III.10 433a10-20; translation in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, tr. J. A. Smith (New York: Random House, 1941), 597-598.

²² *Ibid.*, 433a23-28; tr. *Basic Works*, 598.

moral action, needing to respectively affirm and pursue the right action which constitutes a good choice—namely, for the desire to pursue what the intellect affirms.²³ Thus, the intellect and the appetite have a proper end they are anchored to in respect of their particular natures: the intellect, in thinking truths and discerning truths from falsities, and the appetite, in desiring and pursuing what is good, as affirmed by the intellect. Seeing that the intellect and the rational appetite have an end their natures aim at, an analogy can be seen with the sense of the heart as the natural place and end for the intellect to dwell in.

In seeing that the rational appetite aims at a chief good by nature—similar to the heart finding its good in whatever it aims at—it will, next, be helpful to consider the nature of this good with the notion of happiness that Aristotle considers as that at which all men order their actions to. Already, at the first line of the *Ethics*, Aristotle states as a first principle, “Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.”²⁴ Everything, therefore, is anchored to an end which is their good, and which they pursue in whatever degree they possess. In the case of man and the good which, by nature, he aims at as an end, Aristotle emphasizes that our whole lives are affected by this fact:

If then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object.²⁵

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.2 1139a17-31; translation in *Basic Works*, tr. W.D. Ross, 1023-1024.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I.1 1094a1-3; tr. *Basic Works*, 935.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I.2 1094a17-27; tr. *Basic Works*, 935.

Having desire in itself, then, implies that there must be an end for which other, lesser things are desired. If there were no end to what we desire, our desire would be “empty and vain,” or, that is, we would have no desire. By this *reductio ad absurdum*, Aristotle shows that this desire we have by nature must be aimed at an end for its own sake, for which nothing further is desired, and that this end must be the fulfillment of that desire. Our whole lives must then be about the end which is behind this desire.

Further, since we have this desire by nature towards a chief good, then this chief good must therefore be happiness, or at least have something to do with happiness, which would be the end of all our activities. Aristotle implies this when he says virtually all agree the chief good to be happiness, while diverging on what constitutes happiness:

Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth or honour; they differ, however, from one another [...] ²⁶

Though all agree that there is some end which consists in living and doing well, the definition of happiness and the means to it are not self-evident for a majority of people. This helps exemplify how the rational appetite can perceive goods which may or may not be the real good which it naturally desires, as seen in the differing opinions on happiness, though all agree it is the end which they seek.

After going through different common opinions about what happiness is, Aristotle sets out a definition for happiness by considering particular qualities contained in the notion of happiness: that the good constituting happiness must be self-sufficient, for which nothing further would be expected or needed; and that it would be a fulfillment of the function of man which is particularly unique to man, as compared to a tool which is exercised well

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.4 1095a16-23; tr. *Basic Works*, 937.

according to its intended function.²⁷ From these two views, Aristotle comes to define the human good which is happiness as an “activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.”²⁸ Therefore, according to Aristotle, man’s highest good would have to be an activity according to the highest virtue the soul possesses, and thus the rational appetite would find its satisfaction in this kind of activity which perfects man’s nature. This sort of chief good would have to be the end of the rational appetite’s desiring—whether or not the rational appetite realizes and desires this good actually.

Since the rational appetite can desire rightly or wrongly in respect of this sense of the real good as its end, the state of character which one acquires from this must next be considered. Aristotle defines the state of character as “the things in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions, e.g. with reference to anger we stand badly if we feel it violently or too weakly, and well if we feel it moderately; and similarly with reference to the other passions.”²⁹ Thus, one is impeded or helped in attaining the happiness perfective of his nature as a man, depending on the state of character he possesses. One can, then, acquire a certain state of character depending on how he perceives the good, whether by habituation, birth, or perhaps, even, an act of God—the virtuous man who is continent, for instance, is “ready to abide by the result of his calculations,” and thus can do what he knows to be right.

Thus, while such a man can acquire a virtuous state of character with his rational appetite grasping the good which fulfills the end of its natural desire, a man can also misread the good he perceives and, from this, acquire a state of character which hinders him in pursuing this natural desire. The incontinent man is an example of this, where such a man is

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I.7 1097b13-1098a12, tr. *Basic Works*, 942-943.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I.7 1098a12-19; tr. *Basic Works*, 943.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, II.5 1105b25-27; tr. *Basic Works*, 957.

blameworthy and not able to abide by his calculations, but rather does, as a result of passion, what he knows to be bad for him³⁰—for example, one who eats gluttonously knows, at once, that he must eat modestly. The vicious man, or the “self-indulgent man”, is another example of this, where a man does what is bad without being aware of the evil of his actions—a worse state of character than the incontinent man, who is still aware of his doing evil.³¹ Such a state Aristotle describes as destructive of the first principle, recognizing and desiring the chief good in any sense, since one can only realize and desire the chief good as the first principle of his actions by habituating or receiving by nature the virtue which “teaches right opinion about the first principle.”³² So, even though the vicious man’s actions are destructive of the first principle of his acting, the real good in a certain way still moves such a man to desire the apparent good he perceives, as it is the final cause and first principle of his acting.

Given what has been said, the rational appetite is motivated to the good relative to its natural end and, from this, grasps the real or the apparent good. Happiness is, then, what constitutes the real good about which all men’s actions are ordered, and that it is only in properly exercising an activity of the soul according to the highest virtue that man is truly happy—so that if man is not acting according to that virtue, he falls short of the chief good constitutive of happiness for him. Therefore, by having the right virtue, man already has the proper state of character which will incline him to act in the right way according to the higher virtues. The vicious man and the incontinent man, especially, are particular cases of the kinds of men who are moved by the perceptual good which is not in accord with the first principle of a given virtue. In a way, such men are still moved by the chief good as their proper end, however their appetites wrongly apprehend this end with a lower thing which is perceived to be the good. Here, the division between the real and apparent good becomes

³⁰ *Ibid.*, VII.1 1145b7-15; tr. *Basic Works*, 1037.

³¹ *Ibid.*, VII.7 1150b29-1151a4; tr. *Basic Works*, 1049.

³² *Ibid.*, VII.9 1151a15-19; tr. *Basic Works*, 1050.

apparent, where the real good which really completes man lies in happiness, as Aristotle indicated; whereas the corresponding state of character is variable based on the kind of apparent good a man has come to perceive through that state, either virtuously or viciously. There are, then, two senses in which man's rational appetite, or will, desires and seeks after the good: according to what is perfective of man's nature as a final cause, and according to the relative state of character man possesses, through which he acts as from a first, efficient cause.

Before considering the relation of the heart to these two senses, the nature of happiness as it relates to the Christian context must be clarified, so that the relation of man to God as regards his happiness might be made clear in relating the heart to happiness as a principle of the will. In Aristotle's account of happiness, the chief good which constitutes man's happiness presupposes a natural understanding of man's end, so that there is an open possibility whether man's complete fulfillment lies within or beyond his natural end, through the exercise of his natural virtues. St. Thomas Aquinas considers this when answering the question of whether man has an innate knowledge of God:

To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching; for many there are who imagine that man's perfect good which is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasures, and others in something else.³³

Thus, while God is man's happiness, man's knowledge of God is only self-evident in a "general and confused way," so far as man desires the fulfillment of his being, while to desire

³³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa* I, q. 2, a. 1, ad 1.

God would be beyond the reach of a natural desire in relation to a supernatural end.³⁴ It is for this reason, as St. Thomas shows earlier, that there was a necessity of divine revelation for the sake of making manifest man's happiness, so that truths which only God could know might be revealed to man for man's end, as well as naturally known truths which might be given with divine certainty.³⁵ Thus, while man's happiness can be naturally known and had—to a degree—there is an aspect of man's happiness which lies beyond himself, though his nature permits and, in some way, desires its supernatural end in God, so far as God has called man to himself. This may help answer how God may know things about the human heart that we might not know about ourselves, as referenced in Daniel 2 with the hidden thoughts of Nebuchadnezzar's heart, since it pertains to God to know fully and entirely who man is and what his end is, including such an end which one may not be capable of knowing naturally, without revelation. In this way, then, the will—the intellect and the appetite—is tied to what is the good of the whole man as a final cause, an aspect of which is beyond man's own knowledge but fully known to God. Thus it is through the rational appetite seeking after its own final cause which it has by nature that man finds his fulfillment.

The Relation of the Heart to the Rational Appetite and the Good

Looking back at the Scriptures, two senses of the heart were seen as either standing for the character of an individual man—a certain man's heart leading that man to good or evil acts, depending on the given state of his heart, for example—or also indicating a natural desire for good, in spite of the character of certain men—David's heart convicting David of

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I, q. 1, a. 1, corpus: "Firstly, indeed, because man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason: 'The eye hath not seen, O God, besides Thee, what things Thou hast prepared for them that wait for Thee' (Is. 66:4). But the end must first be known by men who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation."

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I, q. 1, a. 1, corpus.

cutting off a piece of Saul's cloak, as an instance of this. The Fathers of the Church also conveyed two different senses of the heart, either as representing the intellect or will, or also as representing a proper place or nature of the intellect, where the grace of God resides and a fulfillment of man is brought about by the intellect being in that proper place. In Aristotle, there were shown, similarly, two senses of the will, or the rational appetite, desiring the good—either the chief good as a final cause of the rational appetite's desiring, or the apparent good, which the rational appetite immediately perceives and desires. Seeing the way Aristotle lays out the rational appetite as being naturally drawn to the good, while at the same time grasping goods which may or may not be the real good for man, an analogy can, then, be seen with the two senses of the heart, where the one sense of the heart as man's changeable character directly implies the rational appetite grasping and desiring the apparent good it perceives. The other sense of the heart as the natural end and proper place of the intellect is analogous to Aristotle's account of the rational appetite's desire for the chief good as a final cause, inasmuch as the chief good can be spoken of as the proper end and place of the rational appetite and also intellect, if man is to find his fulfillment.

Speaking this way, the rational appetite, then, has an innate and fixed desire for the real good which brings about its own perfection and the perfection of the whole of man, and it can attain this real good when it properly pursues the innate, natural desire that it possesses. This would match what Pseudo-Macarius and St. Diadochos of Photiki say about the heart as the place where the grace of God resides and where the intellect finds this grace when it is centered in its own proper place, in the way just mentioned. This would also match what St. Maximus the Confessor says about cleansing the intellect to find the grace of God within the intellect, so that, through this cleansing, one may find the grace of God which underlies whatever state the intellect is in. In the same way, for Aristotle, man is happy when he perfectly exercises his own natural function as a man through a virtuous activity of the soul,

which is in accord with the innate desire the rational appetite has for the chief good. In the Christian context, this sense of man's fulfillment is brought about not just through man exercising the virtues of his own nature but also in his relationship and communion with God, through the grace of God raising and energizing his nature and through the intellect actively cooperating with that grace.

Thus, in returning to the question of how the heart of man in the Scriptures and the Fathers relates to the way Aristotle speaks of the soul, the heart can, thus, be characterized as the will seeking out the good for man, either as an apparent good it immediately grasps, or as the final good which it naturally desires as an end.

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