

PHILIP BOSMAN

Conscience
in Philo and Paul

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

166

Mohr Siebeck

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Philip Bosman

Conscience in Philo and Paul

A Conceptual History
of the Synoida Word Group

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This volume is a revised and edited translation of my doctoral dissertation, originally written in Afrikaans and submitted at the University of Pretoria in 1996. Financial assistance during my research by the Centre for Science Development of the former Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa, the Stichting Studiefonds voor Zuidoos-Afrikaanse Studenten, the Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst and the UNISA Research and Bursaries Fund is hereby acknowledged. All views expressed in this work are those of the author alone.

Quotations from the works of Philo are from Colson & Whitaker ([1929] 1968). Quotations from the Pauline Letters are from Nestlé & Aland (1979). Except where otherwise indicated, classical authors were quoted using the latest Oxford editions and those on the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae CD ROM, listed in Berkowitz & Squitier (1990). Apart from the instances mentioned in the text, translations from the ancient languages are by the author. Journals, dictionaries and other works of reference are abbreviated according to Schwertner (1992).

I am greatly indebted to many people for the final completion of this work, of which only a few can be mentioned. Prof. Andrie du Toit, under whose leadership the doctoral studies were conducted, punctiliously worked through the early drafts and encouraged me through periods of procrastination. Proff. Hans-Josef Klauck and Johann Thom made valuable observations on the submitted dissertation. Prof. Wolfgang Kullmann accepted me hospitably at the University of Freiburg during two periods of study, while Prof. Danie Lombard introduced me to truly fascinating fields of scholarship and profoundly influenced my thinking. My colleague Richard Evans, Anne Fourie and Alexa Barnby all assisted in preparing the final text, either with translation or with proofreading. I am also grateful to the staff of J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) for accepting a long overdue manuscript. Finally, my deepest appreciation goes to my family, Linda, Charlotte, Rudolph and Frederik, for all their love, patience and support. I dedicate this volume to my mother and the memory of my father.

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Chapter 1

Preliminary Remarks

1.1 Introduction

While the topic of conscience continues to attract considerable scholarly attention,¹ the concept remains elusive, apparently defying precise definition. There is no lack of approaches to the conundrum, each approach claiming to illuminate the essence of conscience.² The philological approach, however, is probably the oldest and most venerable. This approach entails investigating the concept's origins by means of linguistic and textual analysis. Philologists have long since realised that the long and complex history of conscience constitutes a major obstacle to grasping its meaning, and that investigations into its grammatical and sociohistorical evolution shed invaluable light on the modern concept. The present study, while remaining within the philological paradigm, aims to introduce novel perspectives arising from the so-called cognitive turn in semantics. Research in cognitive science on memory and the way information is stored in the human brain has opened new perspectives on the nature of concepts and conceptuality. In combination with strict philology, these insights justify a renewed investigation into the ancient roots of conscience.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, various studies on the ancient conscience have been published. Since the middle of the twentieth century, many have focussed even more narrowly on the classical terms.

¹ A few of the more recent titles devoting attention to conscience are, in philosophy and ethics, those of Harris (1999), Cornell (1998), Ibsch, Fokkema & Von der Thüsen (2000), Ricoeur (2000), Hammer (2001), Hyde (2001), Langston (2001); in theology, Harvey (1995), Connors & McCormick (1998), Curran (1999), Hogan (2000), Andrew (2001); in education, Furman (1998), Green (1999) and Stilwell (2000).

² The most prominent are probably psychoanalytical, sociobiological and system-theoretical, cf. Klauck (1994) 31.

Although some of these included brilliant textual analyses, virtually none have properly taken into account the conceptual nature of conscience. Focussing on the phenomenon, conscience has too readily been regarded as something “out there”, that has remained static in various ages and cultures and that can be studied objectively. Such referential assumptions hamper a historical determination of the ancient terms, mainly because a transfer of meaning from the modern concept to the ancient words proves to be simply too tempting. The hermeneutical short cut inevitably results in modern conceptualisation,³ which boils down to looking at the beginning of a process of development (the σύννοια word group) from the perspective of its eventual result (the modern concept of conscience).⁴

The cognitive, or mentalist, approach in semantics attempts to eliminate some of the objections raised to the language reference theory. Words do not simply refer to objects but relate to conceptions in the minds of people so that mental processes and cognition have to be incorporated into semantic theory.⁵ The meaning of a word is the idea or concept that the native speaker associates with that word.⁶ The world is dependent on our cognition,⁷ and speakers or authors are only able to communicate information in the form in which their perceptions of the external world are structured.⁸

³ By itself it does not necessarily constitute a translation error when συνείδησις is presented as “conscience” or “Gewissen”. On the contrary, these translation equivalents are preferable to the neutral rendering as “consciousness”, cf. among others, Horsley (1978) 581–589. However, a problem does arise when the Greek word group is burdened by the full load of connotations to the modern concept.

⁴ As a result, Eckstein (1983) and the majority of other scholars employ modern categories when describing the ancient concept, such as the ever recurring distinction between good and bad conscience (“gutes/schlechtes Gewissen”), the rather late distinction between *conscientia consequens* and *conscientia antecedens*, the so-called autonomy of conscience or its status as *vox dei* or *vox media*.

⁵ Jackendoff (1988) 81 formulates the “Mentalist Postulate” as follows: “... meaning in natural language is an information structure that is mentally encoded by human beings.”

⁶ De Stadler (1989) 10.

⁷ Cf. Lakoff (1988) 119–154. Fauconnier (1988) 62 puts it as follows: “... language does not link up directly with a real or metaphysical world; in between takes place an extensive process of mental construction, which does not mirror either the expressions of language responsible for setting it up, or the real world target situations to which it may be intended to apply.”

An emphasis on human conceptualisation has a profound impact on the way in which the ancient concept of conscience is approached. As concepts are variable, the relationship between words and concepts never remains static. Conceptual content continually fluctuates under the influence of historical factors, context and the individual language user. Sufficient methodological freedom should be assigned to these variables. Furthermore, there should be an acute awareness of two sets of conceptualisation which, although connected through history, nevertheless remain separate: the conceptual world of the modern investigator and that of the ancient authors. The modern researcher should not only be cautious of imposing his or her own conceptual framework on the ancient texts,⁹ but should also take care that deconstructing modern conceptuality precedes any attempt to (re)construct the ancient concept. The present study proceeds from the premises that: (i) the modern researcher has no immediate access to the phenomenon of conscience, (ii) the modern concept of conscience is the product of a long and intricate historical development during which various cultural-historical influences were exerted, (iii) modern conceptions about morality – embedded in a particular sociocultural system – play an important part in the formation of the modern concept, and (iv) the modern concept of conscience consists of a number of cultural-specific experiences designated to a single denominator. There are no extralinguistic, objective reasons why all these experiences or aspects of conscience should be assigned to a single concept. The fact

⁸ Various theories exist on how humans order their world conceptually, and the clusters of information or conceptual categories are called by various names, such as “schemas” or “frames”, cf. Minsky (1975) 211, Fillmore (1982), “mental spaces”, Fauconnier (1985) and “folk theories”, Lakoff (1988). The latter is a descriptive term for the complex collections of schemas which represent the culturally accepted structuring of experiences recurring in Holland & Quinn (1987) 4 as “cultural models”; cf. also Keesing (1987) 369–393. As these theories are sufficiently close for our present purposes, a choice between them need not be made. The term “conceptual framework” approximates the same general idea of an interrelated conceptual structure, with the understanding that such cognitive organisation is culturally determined.

⁹ The Sapir-Whorff hypothesis warns us that a person’s native language equips him or her with the categories to perceive and experience the world, cf. Malmkjaer (1991) 306.

that this indeed happened results from a particular cultural-historical process. Consequently, (v) the “phenomenon of conscience” is the product of a specific cultural framework. The same set of premises applies to the ancient concept involving the σύννοια word group. The cognitive approach to meaning implies that the meaning of an ancient concept should be described in terms of its ancient conceptual framework, which has to be constructed by means of historical-contextual information.

1.2 Aim, Scope and Method

The title of this study may seem presumptuous as it focusses narrowly on the evolution of the concept in the ancient Greek language, particularly by means of two Greek substantives derived from the verb σύννοια. However, this remains the most direct and fruitful approach, even though the Latin *conscientia* profoundly influenced later conceptions of conscience. Compelling reasons for remaining within the Greek domain may be advanced. The linguistic evolution starts earlier in Greek than in Latin, since the words συνείδησις and συνειδός are undoubtedly older than *conscientia*. And as the Greek terms morphologically correspond to *conscientia*, the latter term was most probably formed by analogy to an already existing Greek term.¹⁰ It may be concluded that the derivatives in Western languages are, via Latin, all morphologically dependent upon the Greek forms. As will be argued, the dependence reaches beyond morphology to include conceptuality. Consequently, the σύννοια word group, and especially the nouns συνείδησις and συνειδός, are of supreme importance when investigating the origin and formation of the modern concept of conscience.

It should be acknowledged that the more inclusive the approach, the better the result would be. In order to illuminate just one phase of the cultural-historical development of the conscience, one would have to view an entire panorama from the widest possible angle.¹¹ For such an investigation, one word group alone would not have sufficed, and the

¹⁰ See the discussion below, pp. 73–75.

¹¹ The images are borrowed from Klauck (1994) 15.

broadest collection of concepts would have had to be taken into account, including related terms such as σύννοια, συγγινώσκειν and συνιστορεῖν,¹² value terms like the problematic αἰδῶς,¹³ the function of καρδιά in Jewish-Hellenistic literature, and prominent terms from Hellenistic philosophy, such as νοῦς and ψυχή. Furthermore, the investigation would have had to be extended to include not only the analysis of terms, but also of situations and episodes in narrative texts and other genres (for instance, penitential psalms). Each of these aspects can only be properly considered through intensive “Einzelarbeit” on each of the separate mosaic pieces that together constitute the panorama.¹⁴ Only then would all sources of the modern concept of conscience have received their due attention. By restricting its scope to the σύννοια word group, the present study contributes to the mosaic, but does not claim to present the entire panorama.¹⁵

Approaching the ancient conscience as a concept implies that the ancient terms are determined by their own conceptual fields, and the peculiarities of those fields have to be carefully circumscribed. The stages of evolution are explained with reference to the cultural-historical developments of the fifth century BCE to the first century CE, that is, by referring to the history of mentality of the six centuries concerned. The undertaking is obviously complex, as textual sources are limited and historical variables (social, contextual, individual) are infinite. However, this procedure guarantees results that are historically more reliable than simply indicating similarities and differences between ancient and modern concepts.

A general conceptual framework establishing word meaning has certain implications for ascertaining the meaning of a word in a particular author. These mainly concern the relative importance attributed to synchronic and diachronic meaning respectively. In a cognitive approach to lexical

¹² Cf. Cancrini (1970) 65–80.

¹³ Cf. Von Erffa (1937); Cairns (1993).

¹⁴ Klauck (1994) 15.

¹⁵ This of course does not imply that the decision to use the σύννοια word group as angle of incidence is arbitrary or even on a par with other angles of incidence; as already indicated, the substantive forms of the σύννοια word group afford us the most immediate access to the situation in which the concept of conscience originated.

meaning, the dichotomy between diachronic and synchronic meaning weakens because etymological meaning is not contrasted with contextual meaning. The evolution of a concept is a sequence of synchronic meanings since developments constantly supplement the conceptual framework in which the word attains meaning. Various new connotations become attached to the conceptual framework in the course of time, which reflect the sociocultural mentality of a particular era. According to the demands of a particular context, one or more appropriate connotations – drawn from the accumulated pool of connotations – are promoted, while others remain only potentially or latently present. The connotations accentuated by a specific author and their function within a specific context are determined through textual analysis. Even when contextual meaning has been established, it may not be assumed that the remaining aspects of the conceptual framework are completely absent. Therefore, a cognitive approach to meaning is accommodating in the sense of incorporating both diachronic and synchronic approaches. As far as development in word meaning is concerned, the approach is conservative in that it leaves room for a whole network of inherited connotations which are often only latently present in a particular usage of a word. It is also individualising, however, as a cognitive framework is by definition unique to a particular language user. In this sense, meaning functions not on an abstract, ideal level but on that of the concrete, context-bound language user.

1.3 Preliminary Survey

A cursory survey of the σύνοιδα word group yields various points of interest. Most striking is that, while the verb σύνοιδα has occurred in a variety of constructions since the sixth century BCE, the two substantives both appear only once in Greek literature prior to the first century BCE. The Ionic verbal substantive συνείησις occurs in a fragment attributed to the fifth-century philosopher Democritus, while the sole occurrence of συνείδος, a substantive participle of Attic origin, appears in an oration of Demosthenes from the fourth century. Although fragmentary transmission from the third and second century BCE renders any final

conclusion impossible, a few instances of *συνείδησις* from the first century BCE suggest that the substantives came into more frequent usage during this era. Only during the following century do they reach a certain degree of maturity, both in frequency and in manner of usage. Two Jewish-Hellenistic authors, Philo and Paul, feature prominently in this regard. The frequency of usage increases considerably from the second century CE, especially within the Christian tradition, which may at least partly be attributed to the influence of Philo and Paul.

Karl Jaspers once declared European culture to be the product of the Bible and the classical world. The Western concept of conscience stands on the same two legs. Its development may be traced by following two paths: the theological-philosophical and general cultural history of Europe, and the interpretation of the Christian Scriptures. Already in this regard, Philo and Paul are relevant. Paul is the New Testament author of primary importance to this research topic. The apostle was in many respects the founder of Christian ethics. In his correspondence, he touched on issues that proved to be fundamental to Christian thought, including issues directly pertaining to the present field of investigation such as the soteriological and eschatological functions of conscience. Philo of Alexandria, on the other hand, represents the amalgamation *par excellence* of the Jewish Scriptures with Greek patterns of thought. Early Christian theologians naturally linked up with him when the first attempts were made to express the burgeoning Christian faith in rational categories. Philo's influence on Western thought cannot be overestimated.

There are other reasons for selecting these two writers. The most important of these is material, as indicated by the history of usage of the word group. Philo became the first author in both the Jewish and the Greek philosophical traditions to make frequent reference to something called the *συνειδός*. Paul, on the other hand, was the first and most frequent user of the *σύννοια* word group in the early Christian tradition. Furthermore, on a formal level, the two authors used the substantives in a very similar fashion.

The fact that Philo and Paul represent a decisive turn in the history of the *σύννοια* word group does not necessarily imply originality with respect to the content they attached to the words. As will be shown, they borrowed from the popular usage of their times and their meanings

display various influences. Both Philo and Paul assume that their readers are familiar with the words so that they never present them with any kind of systematic exposition. Neither goes about it as if they intend the words to convey new information. However, the contexts in which they use the words are novel. Philo incorporates them into his distinctive way of interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures; Paul employs the word group as part of his textual strategy to affirm his own trustworthiness and to present his own perspective on ethical controversies within the early Christian communities. Both assimilate and link up with connotations that have become attached to the words in the course of history.

The relationship between the selected authors begs consideration. Is it permitted to have the one's usage of the word illuminate that of the other? May Philo's use of *συνειδός* serve as background when interpreting Paul's use of *συνειδησις*? A working hypothesis of this study is that such a comparison is indeed permissible. This hypothesis may be supported by the broad similarities between the authors.

The differences between Philo and Paul should not, of course, be underestimated. Philo's literature is completely different in kind from that of Paul. Philo's oeuvre witnesses a higher level of literary sophistication resulting from his elitist background and education in which Greek categories of thought are firmly entrenched. Although Philo remains fundamentally a Jew, he understands the world far less in terms of Old Testament conceptions than Paul. Still, both remain Jewish-Hellenistic authors who produced their literature in the same era, within a common span of approximately fifty years. In addition, both are of non-Palestinian origin. Although this factor should also not be overestimated,¹⁶ it does mean that both were exposed to a mentality that had assimilated the broad cultural and philosophical influences of the era.

Much may still be said about the general similarities and differences between Philo and Paul. The possibility of direct influence deserves our attention, all the more so because the *σύννοια* word group has direct bearing on it. It has to do with the identity of Paul's "opponents" within

¹⁶ Hengel has frequently argued that the so-called Diaspora Jewry probably knew just as much diversity as the various Jewish groups within Palestine itself; cf. Hengel (1989) 28.

the Christian community in Corinth.¹⁷ Paul uses the σύννοια word group for the first time in his Corinthian correspondence. The group appears most frequently in these letters: eight out of a total of fourteen times in the undisputed Pauline letters. This has caused scholars to assume that συνειδησις was a buzzword among the Corinthians, which was then used by Paul in response.¹⁸ While this does not imply that Paul did not know the word himself or that he did not conceptualise it in his own manner, the issue of Paul's opponents in Corinth becomes urgent.¹⁹ For the major part of the twentieth century, scholars fixated on the so-called "Peter party" as Paul's real opponents in Corinth. Recently, however, scholarly consensus appears to have moved in another direction, as more scholars think that Paul argues against a form of Alexandrian speculation on wisdom, represented in Corinth by the followers of Apollos.²⁰ Since Philo is – as far as transmitted literature is concerned – the main exponent of Alexandrian wisdom literature, a real link between him and the Corinthian Apollos group and the way both employed the words συνειδός/ συνειδησις cannot be excluded. This possible link supports the decision to use Philo as a sounding board for Paul.

Objections may be levelled against the proposed working hypothesis on the basis that Philo and Paul do not use the same substantive form of the σύννοια word group. Can these two different forms be regarded as completely interchangeable? The two words are, respectively, the Attic and Ionic substantive forms which both developed from verbal σύννοια constructions. The fact that συνειδός is Attic explains Philo's predilection for this form: it would have had a more sophisticated ring to it in the literary circles of first-century Alexandria. Philo uses συνειδησις a few times, but then only with a qualifying genitive.²¹ Συνειδός, on the other hand, is used consistently in an absolute sense, the same way Paul uses

¹⁷ Cf. Klauck (1994) 40.

¹⁸ Cf. Pierce (1955) 60–65; Jewett (1971) 421–422.

¹⁹ Despite the controversies surrounding the attempts to establish their identity; see the methodological criticism levelled against the process of reconstruction by Sumney (1990) 13–73.

²⁰ Cf. among others Merklein (1992) 134–152; Klauck (1994) 30.

²¹ A fragment from *QEx.* constitutes a glaring exception, see however the discussion below, p. 131.

συνείδησις. This similarity implies that the two words – as used by Philo and Paul respectively – may be regarded as synonyms.²²

In philological research on the concept of conscience, scholars often explore possible origins of the concept. The Stoics feature most prominently as originators, although that honour has also been bestowed upon Epicureans and Pythagoreans, while Schönlein traces the concept back to the forensic context of a typically Roman environment.²³ Kähler's conjecture, that the term evolved in non-philosophical, colloquial speech, has found broad acceptance.²⁴ The present study also accepts this view, that is, that both substantives were products of the natural linguistic and conceptual processes of evolution from the verb σύννοια.²⁵

1.4 Structure

The overall structure of this study is dictated by the textual evidence for the σύννοια word group. Firstly, the prehistory of the substantive forms is described using phrases in which the verb σύννοια appears. Secondly, the works of two authors, Philo and Paul, given a position of prominence by the textual evidence, are analysed. There are consequently three main sections. Firstly, a selection from the existing research is discussed in Chapter 2. Focus is directed at the main exponents of New Testament research, Kähler, Pierce, Stelzenberger, Maurer and Eckstein. A considerable body of literature on the topic has been published since Eckstein's monograph, which, owing to limitations of space, is not included in the survey. Recent articles and contributions in commentaries and works specifically concerned with Philo or Paul are considered in Chapters 5 and 6 where they are pertinent to the texts under scrutiny.

Chapters 3 and 4 deal with the use of the σύννοια word group in Greek

²² See also Kähler (1967) 31; Pierce (1955) 19–20.

²³ Pierce (1955) 13–20 argues against the general assumption of a Stoic origin, Seeberg (1928) 291–319 champions an Epicurean source, while Bornkamm (1959) 113 and Maurer (1964) 904 look for Pythagorean roots. The position of Schönlein (1969) is discussed below, pp. 74–75.

²⁴ Norden (1956) 136; Eckstein (1983) 66.

²⁵ See the discussion below, pp. 64, 69–71.

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