OLE JAKOB FILTVEDT

Revelation and Self-Perception in the Gospel of John

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To my teachers:

Reidar Hvalvik and Karl Olav Sandnes

Preface

A key question in the present study is whether and how the Johannine characters recognize their own limitations when faced with Jesus. Writing the book has given me the opportunity to come to know some of my own limitations. This has, in turn, led me to reflect on how fortunate I am to be surrounded by people who have offered to help me along the way.

At an early stage of my research, Professor Jörg Frey invited me to discuss some of my ideas with him and his colleagues in Zürich. I was greatly impressed not only with his well-known and deservedly lauded expertise in Johannine studies, but just as much with his generosity and hospitality. I still vividly recall how Professor Jean Zumstein, at a seminar in Zürich where I presented some of my ideas, challenged me to reevaluate my understanding of the encounter between Jesus and Nicodemus. In a very Johannine way, his comments later proved to be important in ways I was not able to fully understand then and there. I would also like to thank Frey for the fact that he, some years later, kindly recommended that the study be published with in the WUNT series – a true honor. Cooperating with the excellent staff at Mohr Siebeck has been a great pleasure. I would also like to express my appreciation for the patience they showed me when the study was delayed.

One reason for that delay is that our three children were born while I was working on this book. I am deeply grateful to all of them, and to my wife, for reminding me each day that the most important things in life tend to happen in other places than my office. A further reason for the delay is that I was charged with the task of leading a research project – *Know Yourself: Echoes and Interpretations of the Delphic Maxim in Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Philosophy* (De Gruyter, 2023) – which proved to be even more interesting and challenging than I would have imagined. I would like to thank all the participants in that project for very fruitful cooperation over several years. I learned so much from all of you about things I needed to understand better in order to write the present book on John. A special thanks extends to my colleague at MF, professor Glenn Wehus, who greatly helped me shape the research project on the Delphic maxim, who has ignited my fascination with ancient stoicism, and who was also kind enough to read through the entire manuscript of the present study before publication.

While the work was still in progress, I profited a lot from comments and suggestions from professors Craig Koester, Kasper Bro Larsen, Samuel Byrskog, Håkon Sunde Pedersen, Wally Vincente Cirafesi, and Klaus Vibe. I am especially

indebted to professor Troels Engberg-Pedersen who was willing to engage extensively with me at an early stage of the project and who also friendly challenged me to reconsider several of my main assumptions. I am not sure I know anyone who is able to say "I think you are wrong" in a more cordial way than him. My meticulous colleague at MF, Olav Refvem, did an excellent job with checking formalities before publication, and was able to remove many mistakes – I take full responsibility for those that remain.

I could not have wished for a better environment to write this book than MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society in Oslo. Being surrounded every day by colleagues that only want the best for you, students that are eager to learn and staff that go out of their way to help you, is not something anyone should take for granted – but I have been fortune enough never to have experienced anything other than this so far in my academic career. I would especially like to thank the rector at MF, Professor Vidar Leif Haanes, for his support and encouragement, which has extended far beyond what I could have expected. Occasionally I hear people say that academia can be a lonely and cynical environment to live in. That is probably true for some, but I am lucky enough not to know anything about what they are talking about.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the great importance of my two New Testament teachers at MF, professors Reidar Hvalvik and Karl Olav Sandnes, both of whom retired while I was working on this book. I could not have wished for a better *Doktorvater* than Hvalvik, who was also the first one to encourage me to pursue an academic career. I remain indebted to him for all the time and energy he has invested in me. After I finished my doctorate, Karl Olav Sandnes took me under his wings and offered me a kind of unwavering support, both personally and academically, that I did not know that I needed, but that has proved very important. It would be difficult for me to express how much I appreciate Hvalvik and Sandnes and what they have done for me. I am therefore grateful that they both graciously accepted that I could dedicate this book to them, as a small token of my appreciation.

May 2025 Ole Jakob Filtvedt

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1. Introduction

1.1 Starting Points, Key Terms, Basic Thesis, and Questions of Research

This study on the Gospel of John[1] seeks to bring two recent trends in New Testament[2] scholarship into conversation. The first trend has to do with research on Johannine characters and Johannine characterization.[3] The other is related to the renewed interest among scholars working in or around the New Testament in questions that have to do with ancient conceptions of persons and their self-perception (cf. 1.3).[4] These two trends have only intersected to a very limited

[1] Henceforth I shall refer to the Gospel of John and its author as "John." I have no intention of thereby commenting upon the controversial issue of the historical authorship of the gospel.

[2] The term "New Testament" is clearly anachronistic in a first-century setting. So, when the term is used here, it is used in a pragmatic sense to delineate a certain text group that we as scholars today examine. The term is not intended to refer to the way in which ancient people would have viewed or labeled these texts.

[3] Here are some examples of recent contributions: Colleen M. Conway, "Speaking through Ambiguity: Minor Characters in the Fourth Gospel," *BibInt* 10 (2002): 325–41; Cornelis Bennema, "A Theory of Character in the Fourth Gospel with Reference to Ancient and Modern Literature," *BibInt* 17 (2009): 375–421; Susan E. Hylen, *Imperfect Believers: Ambiguous Characters in the Gospel of John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009); Cornelis Bennema, *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014); Christopher W. Skinner, ed., *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, LNTS 461 (London/New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Steven A. Hunt, D. Francois Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann, eds., *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT 314 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013); Ruben Zimmermann, "Figurenanalyse im Johannesevangelium: Ein Beitrag zu Sinn und Wahrheit narratologischer Exegese," *ZNW* 105 (2014): 20–53; Fredrik Wagener, *Figuren als Handlungsmodelle: Simon Petrus, die samaritische Frau, Judas und Thomas als Zugänge zu einer narrativen Ethik des Johannesevangeliums*, Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlischer Ethik 6 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015); Alicia D. Myers, "Gender, Rhetoric and Recognition: Characterizing Jesus and (Re)defining Masculinity in the Gospel of John," *JNTS* 38 (2015): 191–218; Michael R. Whitenton, *Configuring Nicodemus: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Complex Characterization*, LNTS 549 (London: T&T Clark, 2019); Michael R. Whitenton, "Towards a Blending-Based Approach to Early Christian Characters: Nicodemus as a Test Case," *BibInt* 29 (2021): 498–529.

[4] For a fuller discussion of debates within various disciplines within and beyond the New Testament, see Ole Jakob Filtvedt, "Ancient Self-Knowledge: Exploring Some of the Scholarly Debates," in *Know Yourself: Echoes and Interpretations of the Delphic Maxim in Ancient Judaism, Christianity, and Philosophy*, ed. O. J. Filtvedt and J. Schröter, BZNW 260 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 21–54. Here are some selected titles, focusing on New Testament material: Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Philosophy of the Self in the Apostle Paul," in

degree.[5] The present study seeks to explore what could be gained by bringing these two trends into deeper conversation.

In creating a dialogue between these two trends of scholarship, the present study focuses on two key concepts, namely "revelation" and "self-perception," and asks how these two concepts are related in John. The term "revelation" is here understood to include both the way God makes himself known through Jesus (the *how* of the revelation), and the content of the knowledge thereby communicated (the *what* of the revelation).[6] While the term "self-perception" could have been used in a wide sense to refer to anything persons might say in order to describe themselves, in the present study, we will use the term in a more specific sense to refer to the degree to which literary characters in John are able to recognize their *limitations* and *problems*.[7] A "limitation" is here understood as the absence of some positive quality. A "problem" is understood as the presence

Ancient Philosophy of the Self, ed. P. Remes and J. Sihvola, The New Synthese Historical Library 64 (New York: Springer, 2008), 179–94; Clare K. Rothschild and Trevor W. Thompson, *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Christian Personhood*, WUNT 284 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Susan G. Eastman, *Paul and the Person: Reframing Paul's Anthropology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017); Gudrun Holtz, *Die Nichtigkeit des Menschen und die Übermacht Gottes: Studien zur Gottes- und Selbsterkenntnis bei Paulus, Philo und in der Stoa*, WUNT 377 (Tübingen: Mohr Sibeck, 2017); Eve-Marie Becker and Jacob P. B. Mortensen, eds., *Paul as Homo Novus: Authorial Strategies of Self-Fashioning in Light of a Ciceronian Term* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018); Maren Niehoff and Joshua Levinson, eds., *Self, Self-Fashioning and Individuality in Late Antiquity*, Culture, Religion and Politics in the Greco-Roman World 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019).

[5] A notable exception is Richard B. Bauckham, "Individualism," in *Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 1–19.

[6] There are countless studies that somehow deal with questions of revelation in John. Here are some examples. J. Terence Forestell, *The Word of The Cross: Salvation as Revelation in the Fourth Gospel*, Analecta Biblica: Investigationes scientificae in res Biblicas 57 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974); Larry W. Hurtado, "Remembering and Revelation: The Historic and Glorified Jesus in the Gospel of John," in *Israel's God and Rebecca's Children: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado and Alan F. Segal*, ed. D. B. Capes, A. D. DeConick, H. K. Bond, and T. A. Miller (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 195–213; Gail R. O'day, *Revelation in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Mode and Theological Claim* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1986); Johanna Rahner,*"Er aber sprach vom Tempel seines Leibes": Jesus von Nazaret als Ort der Offenbarung Gottes im vierten Evangelium*, BBB 117 (Bodenheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1998); Clemens Hergenröder, *Wir schauten seine Herrlichkeit: Das johanneische Sprechen vom Sehen im Horizont von Selbsterschließung Jesu und Antwort des Menschen*, FB 80 (Würzburg: Echter, 1996); Saaed Hamid-Khani, *Revelation and Concealment of Christ: A Theological Inquiry into the Elusive Language of the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT 2/120 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000); Rainer Hirsch-Luipold, *Gott wahrnehmen: Die Sinne im Johannesevangelium*, Ratio Religionis Studien 4 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Jeannine Marie Hanger, *Sensing Salvation in the Gospel of John: The Embodied, Sensory Qualities of Participation in the* I Am *Sayings*, BIS 213 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2023).

[7] For a more specific discussion about the kinds of problems and limitations that Johannine characters are depicted as facing, see 1.4.2.

of some negative quality.[8] The problems and limitations of the characters will often be referred to simply as their "situation."[9]

The terms "revelation" and "self-perception" are thus related to two bodies of knowledge. One concerns the truth about Jesus.[10] Who is he? What is the purpose of his coming? What does he offer humans? How does he offer this? How can one come to know and believe in him? Answering such questions will help us say something about revelation in John.[11] The other body of knowledge concerns the truth about the situation of the Johannine characters that encounter Jesus. What do they lack? What do they need? What is possible for them to do? What is impossible? What is known to them? Of what are they ignorant? What would it take for them to enter a saving relationship with God through Jesus? The answers to such questions will help us say something about their limitations and problems. When we ask whether a literary character recognizes its situation we are asking about the character's self-perception.

An assumption that underlies the present study is that some Johannine characters find themselves faced with both these sets of questions at the same time. Most fundamentally and most importantly, the characters are faced with

[8] For a recent exploration of the kind of predicament that salvation presupposes in John, see Mathew E. Sousa, *Sin, the Human Predicament, and Salvation in the Gospel of John* (LNTS 647; London: T&T Clark, 2021).

[9] There have been some attempts at giving a more general description of the anthropology in John. Such studies are only indirectly relevant to the present study. For examples, see Udo Schnelle, *The Human Condition: Anthropology in the Teachings of Jesus, Paul, and John*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996); Christina Urban, *Das Menschenbild nach dem Johannesevangelium: Grundlagen johanneischer Anthropologie*, WUNT 2/137 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); Benjamin E. Reynolds, "The Anthropology of John and the Johannine Epistles: A Relational Anthropology," in *Anthropology and the New Testament*, LNTS 529 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 121–39; Craig R. Koester, "What Does it Mean to Be Human? Imagery and the Human Condition in John's Gospel," in *Imagery in the Gospel of John: Terms, Forms, Themes, and Theology of Johannine Figurative Language*, ed. J. Frey, J. G. van der Watt, and R. Zimmermann, WUNT 200 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 403–20; Craig R. Koester, "The Death of Jesus and the Human Condition: Exploring the Theology of John's Gospel," in *Life in Abundance: Studies of John's Gospel in Tribute to Raymond E. Brown, S.S.*, ed. J. R. Donahue (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 141–57.

[10] On the concept of "truth" in John, see the first part of Rudolf Bultmann, "Untersuchungen zum Johannesevangelium," *ZNW* 27/29 (1928/30): 113–63, 169–93; Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 170–79; Ignace de la Potterie, "The Truth in Saint John," in *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. J. Ashton, IRT 9 (London/Philadelpia, PA: SPCK/Fortress, 1986), 53–66.

[11] On Jesus as the revelation of God in John, see Jörg Frey, "Was trägt die johanneische Tradition zum christlichen Bild von Gott bei?" in *Narrativität und Theologie im Johannesevangelium*, ed. J. Frey and U. Poplutz, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 130 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2012), 217–57; Jörg Frey, "'Wer mich sieht, der sieht den Vater': Jesus als Bild Gottes im Johannesevangelium," in *Vermittelte Gegenwart: Konzeptionen der Gottespräsenz von der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels bis Anfang des 2. Jahrhunderts n. Chr.*, ed. A. Taschl-Erber and I. Fischer, WUNT 367 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 179–208.

questions having to do with revelation.[12] What are they to make of Jesus? How should his actions and words be interpreted? That literary characters in John face questions such as these is hardly a controversial claim.[13] The contribution of the present study is to explore the ways in which the revelation carries with it questions that have to do with the situation of the literary characters – questions that challenge the characters in terms of their self-perception.[14] The aim of this study is not simply to describe what the situation of the literary characters looks like, as seen from the perspective of the reader. Instead, this study seeks to explore the complex epistemological challenges facing the characters themselves within the narrative.[15]

The present study aims to show that there is a close relationship in several Johannine passages between the self-perception of literary characters and their reception of the revelation. This relationship is mostly negative in the sense that one and the same character not only fails to receive the revelation with faith and understanding but also fails to recognize their own situation. However, there are also some examples of a positive relationship, where one and the same character both receives the revelation with faith and understanding and also recognizes their own situation. If this holds true, it raises the question of whether there is also a causal relationship between reception of the revelation, on the one hand, and the degree to which characters recognize their situation, on the other. This question can be articulated as follows: *is the self-perception of the literary characters in John presented either as the explanation for or as something that is explained by the way they receive the revelation?*

The *thesis* of this study is thus that in several Johannine passages there is a relationship between the self-perceptions of literary characters in John and their reception of the revelation. One crucial aim of the present study is simply to demonstrate and explore this relationship. However, if there in fact is such a relationship, this raises the *question* of how this relationship can best be under-

[12] The two key terms in the title of this study, "revelation" and "self-perception," are therefore *not* conceived of as standing in a symmetrical relationship. The fact that the term "revelation" stands before "self-perception," rather than the other way around, is no coincidence. On the priority of Christology above anthropology in John, see Josef Blank, "Der Mensch vor der radikalen Alternative: Versuch zum Grundansatz der 'johanneischen Anthropology'," *Kairos Neue Folge* 22.3–4 (1980): 146–56.

[13] For an examination of some of the key terms used to describe how people receive Jesus in John, see Josaphat C. Tam, *Apprehension of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, WUNT 2/399 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[14] Even if "revelation" is clearly a more important topic in John than "self-perception," the present study will often use more space to elaborate on issues having to do with self-perception, because "self-perception" is a more disputed concept and the main *new* contribution of the present study is tied to issues having to do with self-perception.

[15] Of course, this question cannot be answered in the absence of an active reader who engages with the literary characters. For further elaboration on the relationship between characters and readers, see 1.4.3.

stood and described, and whether there is a causal relationship between revelation and self-perception. The present study aims to pursue this question as well. The way the present study will *approach* this question is by exploring the epistemological dynamics taking place within some chosen passages in the Johannine narrative.[16]

1.2 Revelation and Self-Perception in John: Beyond Bultmann

Some may associate the topic of this study with Rudolf Bultmann. Both in his *New Testament Theology* and in his commentary on John, he strongly stressed the importance of revelation in John and its relationship to the question of self-perception.[17] He claims, for instance, that the light provides the needed "illumination in and by which a man understands himself."[18] If humans are thus illuminated, they will also, in light of their new "self-understanding" discover that the way to a different kind of existence has been opened up.[19] Humans can now reach a "genuine" understanding of themselves as "God's creature."[20] As creatures, humans possess "a prior knowledge" and "this consists in a knowledge of one's own situation which leads one to seek constantly for its true meaning. In such prior knowledge man in no way possesses the revelation – the ἀληθινόν; indeed it can lead him to destruction, if he attempts to derive from it the criteria by which to judge how God must confront him and how the revelation must become reality."[21] Bultmann defines the kind of knowledge humans already have prior to the revelation as negative: "Our prior knowledge is a negative

[16] The epistemological dynamic in Jesus' encounters is complex. Kasper Bro Larsen demonstrates that they contain an element of reciprocity such that Jesus' knowledge of various characters helps them recognize who he is. See Kasper Bro Larsen, "The Recognition Scenes and Epistemological Reciprocity in the Fourth Gospel," in *The Gospel of John as Genre Mosaic*, ed. K. Bro Larsen, Studia Aarhusiana Neotestamentica 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 341–57.

[17] For further elaboration on Bultmann's interpretation of John, which includes comments about revelation and self-perception, see see John Painter, "Inclined to God: The Quest for Eternal Life – Bultmannian Hermeneutics and the Theology of the Fourth Gospel," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith,* ed. R.A. Culpepper and C.C. Black (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 346–68; Robert Kysar, "Rudolf Bultmann's Interpretation of the Concept of Creation in John 1,3–4: A Study of Exegetical Method," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 77–85.

Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament*, trans. K. Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 2:18.

[18] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Theology of the New Testament* (trans. K. Grobel; 2 vols; New York, N.C.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 2:18.

[19] Bultmann, *Theology*, 2:18.

[20] Bultmann, *Theology*, 2:18.

[21] Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel According of John*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1971), 61–62.

knowledge: the knowledge of man's limitations and his estrangement from God, combined with the knowledge that man must look to God for his salvation."[22] Disbelief is understood as unwillingness to concede that one has been created by God.[23] Faith is therefore a surrender of human "self-assertion."[24] Faith can thus be understood in terms of a revised self-understanding, characterized by a surrender the human tendency towards self-assertion, self-sufficiency and security, whereby humans acknowledge that they do not possess the norms or criteria by which to judge, predict of control how God will reveal himself. The revelation thus builds upon a prior knowledge possessed by humans already before they encounter Jesus. However, humans are in no way capable of moving from their negative knowledge about their situation to a true understanding of the revelation.

Although Bultmann's legacy remains important in Johannine research, Richard Bauckham correctly states that "Bultmann's use of a philosophical analysis of human existence to express the kind of self-understanding he found in the kerygma of the Gospel has found few followers in recent writing on John."[25] Some of the problems with Bultmann's theory can be summarized in four points.

Firstly, Bultmann's theory seems to lack sufficient textual basis. Several of his key terms and concepts – such as self-sufficiency, security, and the distinction between positive and negative knowledge of God – seem to have little or no basis in John.[26] Secondly, Bultmann's distinct reading of John is (partly) based on historical assumptions that are now left behind or seriously questioned.[27] Thirdly, Bultmann's theory seems to presuppose a distinctly modern view of "the self" and the idea that humans are uniquely responsible for making a "knowing choice of one's self."[28] Fourthly, Bultmann's theory seems prone to a certain kind of

[22] Bultmann, *John*, 62.

[23] Bultmann, *Theology*, 2:28.

[24] Bultmann, *Theology*, 2:23.

[25] Richard Bauckham, "Dualism and Soteriology in Johannine Theology," in *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, ed. B. W. Longenecker and M. C. Parsons (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 133–54 (139).

[26] The contention that in employing such terminology and such concepts, Bultmann was driven by philosophical and theological ideas of his own time, *rather than* explaining the ideas found in the New Testament texts, is a widely shared view. For similar judgments, see Karl Barth, "Rudolf Bultmann: Ein Versuch ihn zu verstehen," in *Rudolf Bultmann, Christus und Adam: Zwei theologische Studien* (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1964), 9–65 (10–11); Jörg Frey, "Johannine Christology and Eschatology," in *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, ed. B. W. Longenecker and M. C. Parsons (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 101–32 (102–3); Larry W. Hurtado, "Christology and Soteriology," in *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, ed. B. W. Longenecker and M. C. Parsons (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 193–209 (194–95, 199); Richard B. Hays, "Humanity Prior to the Revelation of Faith," in *Beyond Bultmann: Reckoning a New Testament Theology*, ed. B. W. Longenecker and M. C. Parsons (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 61–77 (76–77).

[27] See Frey, "Johannine Christology," 130.

[28] This quotation is taken from Bultmann, *John*, 47.

reductionism, in that everything which is said about the revelation and Jesus, on closer scrutiny and analysis, can be translated into statements about different options of human self-understanding. One gets the impression that this self-understanding is what *really* matters for John, and that the presentation of Jesus is merely an indirect way of articulating what genuine and authentic self-understanding entails. To be sure, the revelation is crucially important in John, according to Bultmann. But its main significance does not lie in its Christological content but rather the self-understanding to which it leads.

If one wants to investigate questions having to do with revelation and self-perception in John, the need to move *beyond* Bultmann is therefore obvious. The first thing that needs to be done is to subject the very concept of "self-perception" to critical discussion. What does this term mean? Does it presuppose ideas that we can identify as distinctly modern and which are therefore invalid interpretative frameworks for an ancient text such as John? Or can the concept be defined in a way that is sensitive to the differences between ancient and modern times? These issues will be briefly addressed in section 1.3, where focus will be on how to define the term "self-perception."

The next pressing issue that needs to be dealt with has to do with finding a textual basis in John for discussing revelation and self-perception in John. In section 1.4, we present the material to be discussed it the present study and the hermeneutical assumptions guiding the study.

1.3 What We Do and Do Not Mean by Self-Perception

1.3.1 Self-Perception: What Kind of Self-Knowledge does the Concept Require?

We explained above that we will use the term "self-perception" to refer specifically to the knowledge a person has of their own problems and limitations (1.1).[29] It is now time to consider more carefully *what kind* of knowledge about oneself the term self-perception requires (1.3.1).[30] We will then move on to briefly consider how our definition of self-perception stands in relation to scholarly debates about ancient self-knowledge (1.3.2).

[29] We will not speak of persons as having a "self" or try to define what precisely this "self" is or where it should be located. The term "self" will not be used separately. When used together with the term "perception," it is not intended to carry any specific meaning beyond the kind of particularized meaning it carries in reflexive pronouns such as him*self*, her*self*, my*self* and one*self*.

[30] A much fuller discussion of different understandings of the term "self-knowledge," and the relation between ancient and modern usages of the term, is found in Urzula Renz, "Introduction", in *Self-Knowledge: A History*, ed. U. Renz (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–18; Fiona Leigh, "Kinds of Self-Knowledge in Ancient Thought," in *Ancient Philosophy: The Eight Keeling Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. F. Leigh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1–50.

One way of delineating different things that a person may know about themselves is to construct different sets of questions that a person may ask themselves and then consider what sort of self-knowledge these sets of questions require.[31] We will now construct three such sets of questions. The first set is aimed at clarifying the concept that *I am a distinct entity, distinguishable from other persons and objects*.[32] Examples of such questions may be: who is that person in the mirror in front of me, moving simultaneously with me? How many people are in this room together with me? Do I need to express my thoughts in order for others to know what I am thinking right now? Does it make any difference whether that rolling stone hits me or someone else? Although it is possible to conceive of people who could use those questions as the starting point for some sophisticated philosophical discussion about self-knowledge, these questions could also be given very shallow, straight-forward answers. A person who can answer such and similar questions is in possession of what we may call a "thin" form of self-knowledge.[33] Answering these questions requires little reflection, and we may even attribute a certain degree of self-knowledge to persons who can act as if they know the answers to the sort of questions articulated above, even though they are unable to articulate these questions themselves. Even small children and developed animals may thus be said to possess this thin kind of self-knowledge.[34] No scholars seem to doubt that the ancients had this rudimentary kind of self-knowledge or self-awareness.[35]

Secondly, one could construct another set of questions, aimed at *locating persons socially*. Such questions presuppose the existence of social groups and categories in relation to which people have the ability to locate themselves and others. Examples of such questions would be: Am I male or female – or something else? Am I rich or poor? Where does my family live? Where do my

[31] The following builds on and largely follows Filtvedt, "Ancient Self-Knowledge."

[32] Eastman, *Paul and the Person*, 12–13, notes that Paul, despite not having a "theory about the person" is still clearly aware of himself as a distinct locus of agency, as is evident from his frequent use of first-person pronouns.

[33] This reminds one of what Bauckham refers to as "individuation" and which he distinguishes from "individualism." See "Individualism," 2.

[34] The kind of thin self-knowledge discussed here strongly resembles the term *sensus sui* in certain Stoic authors (e. g. Cicero, *De Finibus,* 3:16) and the discussion about what sort of self-knowledge newborn babies have. Corresponding Greek terms could be: ἑαυτοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι, ἑαυτοῦ ἀντίληψις and ἑαυτοῦ συναίσθησις. For discussion, see Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (London: T&T Clark, 2000), 53–56; Anthony A. Long, "Hierocles on *oikeiōsis* and Self-Perception," in *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 250–63; Maximilian Forschner, "Das Selbst- und Weltverhältnis des Weisen: Über die stoische Begründung des Guten und Wertvollen," in *Jenseits von Indikativ und Imperativ*, ed. F. W. Horn and R. Zimmermann, Kontexte und Normen neutestamentlicher Ethik 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 19–37.

[35] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 112–13, rightly emphasizes that there is no reason to "suppose anything so bizarre."

people come from? What is the appropriate action for a person in my social position, faced with this or that situation? People for whom such questions are both meaningful and significant, and who are able to locate themselves and others in relation to such groups and categories, are in possession of what one may call "social identity."[36] Scholars who question whether ancient people cared about knowing themselves are typically not trying to deny that they had what we have here described as "social identity." On the contrary, they are more likely to be claiming that social identity was the only self-understanding they had or about which they cared.

However, one could also identify a third kind of self-knowledge related to a third set of questions. These questions presuppose an element of self-*reflection* on the part of the person.[37] Such self-reflection may take the shape of self-assessment: Was it right of me to act in that way? What sort of person should I strive to become in the future? And how can I reach that goal? What am I able to do, control or influence? How much do I actually know? Am I fooling myself? How can I develop self-control and learn to rule over my passions? Alternatively, the questions may be more metaphysically oriented: Where do I come from and where am I heading? What is my (true) nature? How should I relate to my corruptible body? Is there a divine element in me?[38]

The three kinds of self-knowledge sketched above may and will overlap in all sorts of ways. It will, for instance, be impossible to abstract a person's self-reflection from their social location,[39] and raising self-reflexive questions would not be possible in the absence of self-awareness. Nevertheless, the kind of self-perception we are interested in in the present study, is the kind which presupposes an ability for self-reflection. We are, in other words, presupposing that the literary characters in John are portrayed in a way that makes it plausible

[36] For a brief elaboration on social identity theory, see D. Abrams and M.A. Hogg, "An Introduction to the Social Identity Approach," in *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and Critical Advances*, ed. D. Abrams and M.A. Hogg (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 1–9.

[37] A similar distinction is found in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "A Stoic Concept of the Person in Paul? From Galatians 5:17 to Romans 7:14–25," in *Christian Body, Christian Self: Concepts of Early Christian Personhood*, ed. C.K. Rothschild and T.W. Thompson, WUNT 284 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 85–112 (91).

[38] Most of these questions would align with what Leigh calls "dispositional" or "character" self-knowledge, which in ancient thought is so often related to the issue of flourishing and living a good life. But it would also include what Leigh calls "cognitive" self-knowledge, which has to do with the question of how accurately a person can know and assess the contents of their own mental states, including such things as appearances, beliefs, desires, and other motivating states. This distinction is found in Leigh, "Kinds of Self-Knowledge," 2.

[39] In defending the idea that there was such a thing as ancient individuals, Richard Sorabji, "Graeco-Roman Varieties of the Self," in *Ancient Philosophy of the Self*, ed. P. Remes and J. Sihvola, The New Synthese Historical Library 64 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 13–34 (14), still emphasizes: "I do not think there could be humans who did not build social relations into their idea of self."

for readers to imagine that they were able to raise and answer questions such as the following: What do I lack? What do I need? What do I know? What am I able to do? Is this beyond my control? Am I free? Have I really understood things correctly? Or may it be the case that I need to reconsider my prior judgments? Am I presently in good standing before God? Do I possess and grasp the truth? Questions such as these reveal the "situation" in which the characters find themselves when faced with the revelation.

1.3.2 What Our Definition of Self-Perception Does Not Require

Questions having to do with ancient self-knowledge have been contested both within and beyond New Testament studies.[40] Many scholars have alerted us to the risk that we, as modern interpreters, tend to read ancient texts anachronistically in light of distinctly modern conceptions of self and self-knowledge.[41] Above, we

[40] For a very influential and convincing critique of the attempt to read Paul on the assumption that his letters deal with issues arising from an "introspective consciousness," see Krister Stendahl, "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199–215. Two more recent quotations can serve to exemplify the radical degree to which some scholars – less convincing, in my opinion – deny that ancient people had *any* sense of themselves as individual persons. The first is taken from Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, rev. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 67: "In our culture we are brought up to stand on our own two feet, as distinct wholes, distinctive individuals, male and female. We are motivated to behave in the 'right' way, alone, if necessary, regardless of what others might think or say. In our processes of identity formation, we are led to believe and act as though we do so singly and alone, responsible only for our own actions, since each person is a unique sphere of feeling and knowing, of judging and acting. When we relate to other people, we feel that they are distinct and unique beings as we ourselves are. In addition to being unique and distinct persons, each of us live within our unique social and natural environments. This is individualism, and this sort of individualism is rare in the world's cultures today. It was perhaps totally absent from the societies represented in the New Testament." The other quotation is taken from Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 21: "Rather than trying to force ancient language into our conceptual schemes, we would do better to try to imagine how ancient Greeks and Romans could see as 'natural' what seems to us bizarre: the nonexistence of the 'individual,' the fluidity of the elements that make up the 'self,' and the essential continuity of the human body with its surroundings." For further clarification about what Martin means, cf. also similar statements in *Corinthian Body*, 15, 132, 173, 176, 259 n. 6. For a recent critical assessment of the anti-anthropological tendency in post-Stendahl studies on Paul, see Gitte Buch-Hansen, "Beyond the New Perspective: Reclaiming Paul's Anthropology," *ST* 71 (2017): 4–28.

[41] Some scholars (e. g. Taylor, *Sources*, 113) draw attention to the fact that ancient Greek does not nominalize the term αὐτός and therefore lacks any semantic equivalent to "the self." For discussion, see Peter T. Struck, "The Self in Artemidorus' *Interpretation of Dreams*," in *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, ed. D. Brakke, M. L. Satlow, and S. Weitzman (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 109–20 (109–10). Instead, if using the term "the self," Anthony Long argues ancient philosophers tended to focus on the term "soul" and its relation to the "body" in order to conceptualize issues that we today would refer to with terms such as "the self" or "personal identity." See his essay, "Soul and Body in Stoicism," in *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 224–49.

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