Paul’s Usage of the Anthropological Term νοῦς

A New Approach to a Long-Standing Debate

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Abstract

The lexeme νοῦς has received little attention in Pauline exegesis. The few relevant studies on Paul’s use of νοῦς rely solely on Josephus’ use of the term. In order to overcome this one-sidedness, this article understands νοῦς against both a Jewish-Hellenistic and a Graeco-Roman horizon by grasping the range of its meaning in terms of a semantic frame. From there it becomes clear that Paul uses the word in the sense of a psychic faculty and not in the sense of a single thought—a conclusion that is quite different from those of former approaches, which contend that he means both at the same time. These insights will be illustrated by Paul’s use of the lexeme in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians.

Keywords

anthropology – history of research – Josephus – νοῦς/nous – Pauline exegesis – semantic frame

The meaning of the lexeme νοῦς in the undisputed Pauline letters is a highly contentious question. In contrast to other anthropological terms like σῶμα or σάρξ, there is only a handful of passages that include the lexeme νοῦς.1 This

1 In the undisputed Pauline epistles there are—if one does not count Rom 7:25b as a gloss (see, for instance, M. Wolter, Der Brief an die Römer: 1. Teilband: Röm 1–8 [EKK 6/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie/Ostfildern: Patmos, 2014] 463–465)—only 14 passages (1 Cor 1:10; 2:16b; 14:14–15, 19; Rom 1:28; 7:23, [25b]; 12:2; 14:5; Phil 4:7; see also 1 Cor 2:16a and Rom 11:34) which include the lexeme νοῦς.
is probably one reason it has received so little attention in Pauline exegesis. Whereas one can easily find several monographs and articles on other anthropological terms, a relevant analysis of Paul's usage of νοῦς remains a desideratum.

The fact that νοῦς is polysemous is another reason the term has played a minor role in the discussion of Paul's anthropology. Consulting the exegetical commentaries on the relevant passages one quickly recognizes that the meaning of νοῦς is anything but clear. It is not simply that different exegeses translate the term in different ways; rather, even within the work of a single exegete, one has the impression that it is not entirely clear what exactly Paul means when he uses the term νοῦς.

Yet, there are unmistakable hints that Paul uses the lexeme in a quite developed and intentional manner. This is true in both 1 Corinthians and Romans. At first glance, Paul seems to use the term disparately in the initial chapters of 1 Corinthians. But a closer look shows that the use of νοῦς in 1 Cor 1:10 prepares Paul's further argumentation for the νοῦς Χριστοῦ in 1 Cor 2:16 (see below, section 3.2). Moreover, Paul's use of νοῦς (and πνεῦμα) in 1 Cor 1–4 and 12–14 corresponds to the Corinthian groups he primarily addresses in these parts of the letter. Similarly, in Romans Paul draws a line with the lexeme νοῦς from

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4 See LSJ, s.v. νοῦς.


6 See H. Merklein, Der erste Brief an die Korinther: Kapitel 1–4 (ÖTK 7/1; Gütersloh/Würzburg: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1992) 140–145; see n. 58.
Rom 1:28 via 7:23, 25 to 12:2 and thus presents “an entire history of the distortion and possible renewal of the human mind.”

But what exactly does Paul mean when he speaks of the renewal (Rom 12:2) of what is described in Rom 1:28 as ἀδόκιμος νοῦς? Does he refer to the “mind,” “mentality,” “intellect,” or “reason”? This glimpse into the diversity of translations speaks for itself. In 1 Corinthians, the problems with νοῦς are even more striking. There, in the context of 1 Cor 2:6–16, Paul uses νοῦς and πνεῦμα interchangeably, as most exegetes suggest. Yet, in ch. 14, Paul contrasts the two terms in an exclusive manner. This raises the question of whether the lexeme νοῦς is used by Paul only in an anthropological sense.

Unsurprisingly, this article will not be able to give a solid solution to all the exegetical problems just mentioned. Instead, the aim of this article is to outline the insufficiency of the few studies on the polysemous term νοῦς (1). To achieve this, the article provides a brief insight into the history of research (1.1). As it will become clear from the insights of philology, former approaches to solving this problem attempt to merge two meanings that are mutually exclusive (1.2).

Furthermore, the problem of former studies lies in their reference to Josephus’ use of the lexeme. The second section of this article will argue that
this problem is twofold (2). On the one hand, the interpretation via Josephus by itself is too one-sided. To overcome this, Paul's usage of νοῦς must be read within a broader horizon. A semantic frame that includes all of the lexeme's possible denotations and connotations in use at the time when Paul was writing classified in terms of their probability does more justice to the apostle's linguistic habit (2.1 and 2.2). On the other hand, it can be demonstrated easily that Josephus' use of this terminology is not as consistent as is assumed in former studies (2.3).

Finally, the article demonstrates the exegetical potential of this new approach via the semantic frame (3). After having problematized the application of the semantic frame to Paul's texts (3.1), Paul's use of νοῦς in the opening chapters of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10; 2:16) will serve as a test case to sketch the exegetical insights of this new approach (3.2).

1 Problems of Earlier Research

1.1 The Interpretation of the Term νοῦς in NT Scholarship

The problematic reference to Josephus' use of the lexeme νοῦς in Pauline exegesis starts with Walter Gutbrod in 1934. Whereas Henry Robinson, for instance, chooses a rather general definition for the lexeme and speaks of the "intellectual faculty of the natural man," Walter Gutbrod soon recognizes that not all passages containing νοῦς fit this cognitive ability in an active sense. In addition to this interpretation, Gutbrod understands the lexeme in 1 Cor 1:10 and Rom 14:5 to denote "a constant disposition." That is, the word νοῦς here does not stand for the activity of the faculty that "thinks." Instead, it represents the result of thinking—thus, one or more thoughts. In support of his innovative interpretation, Gutbrod cites his teacher Adolf Schlatter and draws attention to Josephus' use of the lexeme νοῦς. According to Schlatter, the term in Josephus "does not mean a mental faculty, but the stock of finished thoughts that fills the consciousness in a given situation." To be sure, there were also other interpretations of the word νοῦς drawing attention to the

14 See also Jewett, Terms, 358–366.
16 W. Gutbrod, Die paulinische Anthropologie (bwANT 67; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1934) 51.
17 A. Schlatter, Die Theologie des Judentums nach dem Bericht des Josefus (BFChTh.M 26; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1932) 27. Schlatter himself, in his commentaries on 1 Corinthians and Romans, does not explicitly point to Josephus' usage of νοῦς. His interpretations of the term in 1 Cor 1:10; 2:16 and Rom 12:2; 14:5, however, are very reminiscent of his definition quoted above (see A. Schlatter, Paulus der Bote Jesu: Eine Deutung
environment of the NT. Yet, Gutbrod’s model took a direction that was influential for subsequent investigations of νοῦς.

Besides the more or less helpful TDNT article by Johannes Behm, there have only been two additional studies on the Pauline use of νοῦς of note. They attempt to interpret the lexeme as uniformly as possible, and, ultimately, rely on Gutbrod’s suggestion. In his monograph on Paul’s anthropological terminology, Robert Jewett compares the semantic spectrum of the lexeme to a two-sided coin. One side, following Schlatter and Gutbrod, stands for the “constellation of thoughts”; the other stands for “the agent of self-control and rational communication.” While the latter is primarily conditioned by 1 Cor 14:14–15, 19 and Rom 7:23, 25, Jewett recognizes the “stock of finished thoughts” not only in Rom 14:5 and 1 Cor 1:10, as Gutbrod does but also in Rom 1:28; 11:34; 12:2; and Phil 4:7.

Going one step further, Christof Strüder seeks to overcome this two-sidedness of Jewett’s coin. To keep it short: In his chapter on the polysemous term, he tries to show that both sides of Jewett’s coin are to be assumed for all instances of the lexeme νοῦς. From his point of view, Paul is flexible and can emphasize the two aspects to different degrees. But the apostle never thinks of the one without the other semantic option.

1.2 Evaluation of the Former Interpretations

Thus, the NT discussion around the term νοῦς has—without being aware of it—focused on a semantic characteristic of the lexeme that has been recognized in philology for some time now. There, however, it has been grasped more precisely. According to Bruno Snell, it is characteristic for the word νοῦς and similar anthropological terms to encompass up to three meanings in early Greek literature. In modern language, he explains, we generally use three

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different terms for the organ (eye), the function of the organ or the associated ability (seeing), and the concrete result of the activity of this organ (sight). Terms like νοῦς, instead, can encompass all three semantic possibilities. For νοῦς, λόγος, διάνοια and similar psychological terms this would mean that they can stand for “mind” (organ), “thinking” (function/ability), and “thought” (result).

However, as Snell has to admit, there is only a very small step between the “organ” and the “function” of the organ. Fritz von Kuhn, therefore, questions whether the Greeks made such a nuanced differentiation at all. Thus, Shirley Darcus Sullivan’s twofold distinction probably does better justice to the matter. In her view, the lexeme νοῦς describes “the agent that thinks, feels, and wills and also [...] the thoughts, feelings, and plans that are formed.” Concerning the former meaning, Sullivan specifies her observations as follows: “‘Faculty’ seems an appropriate term for noos because it implies both the agent that acts and the activity that takes place. It covers, therefore, the ambiguity that exists in psychic terms between agent and function.” Following her conclusions, I will name the two mutually exclusive semantic options for νοῦς: “faculty” and “result.”

Accordingly, the interpretations of Jewett and Strüder attempt to unify something that was already distinguished in the early usage of the lexeme νοῦς. Even though the word can mean both the faculty (Jewett’s agent of self-control), on the one hand, and the result (Jewett’s constellation of thoughts), on the other hand, the two meanings should be distinguished. Thus, if it holds true that one interpretation excludes the other, the unifying attempts of Jewett and Strüder are to be seen quite critically.

How, then, is this complex terminology to be dealt with appropriately? Was Paul aware of the semantic ambivalence of νοῦς? Do the results of Snell, von

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23 See B. Snell, “Die Seele und das Ich im homerischen Epos. Mit einem Anhang: Vergleich mit dem Glauben der Primitiven Joachim Böhme,” Gnomon 7,2 (1931) 74–86, at 76–79. Nevertheless, modern terminology, as Snell notes, also can overlap. For such a synonymous use he hints to the German phrases “mit schnellem Blick” and “mit schnellem Auge” which mean the same thing (Snell, “Seele,” 76).


Fritz, and Sullivan on Homer and other early Greek literature also apply to Paul’s time? As the next section will show, the semantic spectrum of νοῦς can be formulated more precisely. Assuming a broad and multilayered influence on Paul by his Jewish-Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman environment, Paul probably had access to a wide range of semantic options when he talked of νοῦς.

To grasp Paul’s use of νοῦς a detailed investigation of texts representing the socio-cultural horizon of his time is necessary. This evaluation enables one to determine which denotations and connotations of the semantic spectrum were known to the apostle. That Jewett and Strüder ultimately refer to Josephus is already a good start, but just a start.

Moreover, to name a third insufficiency of the former approaches, an analysis of νοῦς in Josephus shows that Adolf Schlatter’s thesis about the “stock of finished thoughts” (i.e., the result a cognitive process) is untenable. Against Schlatter’s assumption, it can easily be shown that Josephus does not use νοῦς exclusively in the sense of a cognitive result. Instead, there are several passages in Josephus where νοῦς means the faculty of thought (see section 2.3). Thus, the recent relevant approaches to the word νοῦς in Paul lose the foundation of their argumentation.

2 A New Approach: The Semantic Frame of the Greek Term “νοῦς”

2.1 A Multidimensional Perspective on Paul and the Possible Semantic Range of νοῦς

The first step of an appropriate approach to the lexeme νοῦς in the Pauline texts is to identify all denotations and connotations principally associated with the term around the 1st c. BCE/CE that could be relevant to Paul’s usage. Since the apostle brings together both Jewish-Hellenistic culture and Graeco-Roman Hellenism, texts from both cultural horizons are to be investigated for this purpose. In doing so, it is essential to keep in mind the probability of Paul’s usage with respect to each connotation.

For example, it is more than likely the case that, upon hearing the word “nut,” we think first of a peanut or a hazelnut instead of a nut which is installed by a mechanic or even the “numb nut” in the car in front of us. The same holds for the semantic options of νοῦς in Paul’s time. Based on the insights of

cognitive psychology, which have been increasingly introduced into biblical exegesis by cognitive linguistics in the last decades, the frequency of usage is decisive for the associations which arise in the human brain when a person hears or reads a linguistic expression. In our cultural setting, we mostly mean an edible nut, when we speak of a “nut.” Thus, this meaning is the one we most likely have in mind when the linguistic expression “nut” occurs. Accordingly, the result of the investigation of Paul’s environment is a semantic frame of the lexeme νοῦς which tries to evaluate the prominence of each connotation associated with it.

The idea of such a semantic frame is grounded on the insights of cognitive linguistics. The interpretative premise of the latter assumes that the meaning of a lexeme and its connotations depend on the encyclopedic knowledge of the person who reads the word or the phrase. That is, “language refers to concepts in the mind of the speaker.” Within this theory a semantic frame describes “the knowledge network linking the multiple domains associated with a given linguistic form.”

The advantage of identifying such a frame is obvious: it is not in danger of being a one-sided representation of the evidence. As Martin Hengel has shown, Paul and the NT are not to be understood against either a Jewish or a Hellenistic background. And—so one could formulate it in the light of current tendencies—not against either a Stoic or a Platonic background. Rather, we can assume that Paul knows how to make use of “certain concepts and ways of thinking of Hellenistic-Roman ‘practical philosophy’ and

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32 Evans and Green, *Cognitive Linguistics*, 158.
This is especially true in the case of a term like νοῦς, since in the moral-philosophical debates of both of these (and other philosophical) currents it denotes the decisive element of a human being. Instead of repeating the mistakes of previous exegetical inquiries, the semantic frame of νοῦς presented here is an attempt to do justice to the porousness of cultural boundaries at the turn of the age.

This article is not the place for a detailed analysis of the Pauline environment. I have examined the latter in depth elsewhere. Instead, I will summarize the insights of this investigation in the following table with some comments on it. Afterwards I will shortly demonstrate how problematic the assumptions of Schlatter’s influential thesis on Josephus’ use of νοῦς are.

### 2.2 The Semantic Frame of νοῦς

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level I (highest probability)</th>
<th>Level II (less probable than I)</th>
<th>Level III (lowest probability)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>νοῦς in an anthropological sense</td>
<td>νοῦς in an anthropological sense</td>
<td>νοῦς in an anthropological sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inward perspective on a human being</td>
<td>rational function</td>
<td>communicative activity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| cognitive-volitional faculty | divine element | concrete result of thinking or planning (thought, wish, intention etc. ...)
| psychic center | | |
| core of the self | | |
| human relation to God | | |
| most positive element in a human being | | |

This frame, of course, is restricted to an anthropological meaning, leaving aside the cosmological usage of the term. Generally speaking, the usage of

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38 I have discussed the usage of νοῦς in both Jewish-Hellenistic and Graeco-Roman texts at length in my dissertation (see Nägele, Paulus, forthcoming).

39 The terminology used for such frames varies significantly, as C. Stettler, Das Endgericht bei Paulus: framesemantische und exegetische Studien zur paulinischen Eschatologie und
νοῦς in an anthropological sense can include several connotations that are more or less connected to the lexeme. Although, presumably, all connotations were familiar to most ancient individuals, some of them were dominant while other connotations were quite unusual. Therefore, for heuristic purposes, I assume three levels of probability for the connotations in question.

To start with the first level: As a rule, the lexeme νοῦς stands for a cognitive-volitional faculty. In this sense, the term is suitable to refer to the interior of a human being—more precisely to the psychic center controlling an individual’s behavior. Thus, the lexeme is identified with the core of the self, the center of the person. With this connotation that is constitutive in terms of anthropology, moreover, νοῦς can be used to describe a human being’s relation to God. It does not matter how this relation to God is classified, optimistically or pessimistically. In both cases the term represents the most positive anthropological element. In contrast to the anthropological component and faculty associated with σῶμα, for example, this positive role assigned to what is called νοῦς becomes unmistakably obvious.

Somewhat less likely, but still widespread, is the association of the term with a decidedly rational function (second level). The authors of the Jewish-Hellenistic milieu who were open to philosophical ideas (esp. 4 Macc, Philo, and Wis) and the Graeco-Roman authors speak in support of this. On the same level of probability, νοῦς is connected not only with the idea of the best part, but even of a divine element in a human being.

In addition, a third level of probability can be assumed. In some places νοῦς describes the precondition for intersubjective communication. Far less popular and therefore also to be located within the third level is the option brought into Pauline exegesis explicitly by Walter Gutbrod (see 1.1). Νοῦς, herein, represents the result which follows from the activity of the cognitive-volitional faculty. In contrast to this semantic option, none of the other connotations mentioned so far use the word νοῦς in this way. Rather, they think of the activity or better the cognitive-volitional faculty itself. Yet, in the sense of Gutbrod, for instance, it stands for a concrete thought, a wish, or an intention (esp. in Josephus, see below).

2.3  
Josephus’ Use of νοῦς Reconsidered

Particularly frequent in the 37 occurrences of νοῦς in Josephus is the idiomatic expression κατὰ νοῦν.40 With this expression, Josephus describes a per-
son’s “wish” or concrete “intention.”\textsuperscript{41} For example, in his report about the war, Uriah tells David that everything went according to their wish (πάντα κατὰ νοῦν αὐτοῖς κεχωρηκέναι τὰ πράγματα, A.J. 7.132). Admittedly, in this and similar instances, the lexeme represents a kind of result of thinking, i.e., what Schlatter means by the “stock of finished thoughts” (see 1.1).

In other places, however, Josephus uses the term to describe the “faculty [not result] of thought.”\textsuperscript{42} In A.J. 1.19, for instance, νοῦς means the eye of “reason” that contemplates God’s works. The result of this process, in turn, is the condition for what Josephus calls a νοῦν ἀγαθόν (A.J. 1.20). With this expression, he describes the anthropological faculty that guarantees virtuous behavior. The fact that he does this in the prologue to his Jewish Antiquities, which certainly is not formulated without immense reflection,\textsuperscript{43} is remarkable and makes Schlatter’s thesis seem all the more questionable.

Moreover, the phrase κατὰ νοῦν is not necessarily restricted to the meaning of νοῦς as a “result.” There are, at least, three instances where it is unclear whether Josephus has in mind the concrete result of thinking or the cognitive faculty (cf. A.J. 3.287; 14.454; 20.76). In A.J. 2.100 and 7.350 it is even more probable that κατὰ νοῦν refers to the agent that thinks. Other idiomatic expressions also presuppose this understanding of νοῦς (cf., for instance, εἰς νοῦν βάλλω, A.J. 6.287; 7.92; 14.278; προσέχω τὸν νοῦν, A.J. 15.377; 16.233). To go one step further, all unidiomatic references of νοῦς are used in terms of the “faculty” rather than the “result” (cf. A.J. 1.19–20; 8.23; 16.380; C.Ap. 2.142).

This short overview sufficiently shows how problematic Schlatter’s thesis on Josephus’ use of νοῦς and thus all relevant investigations of νοῦς in Paul’s letters are.

3 Application of the Semantic Frame on the Pauline Use of the Lexeme

3.1 Some Methodological Remarks on the Application of the Semantic Frame

With the help of this semantic frame, a decisive criterion is gained to clarify the many controversial questions about νοῦς in Pauline exegesis. To be sure, the classification into levels is artificial and would not have existed in this way


\textsuperscript{42} L.H. Feldman, Judean Antiquities 1–4: Translation and Commentary (FJTCS 3; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2000) 8 n. 24 (emphasis mine); see A.J. 1.19–20; 7.92; 8.23; 16.380; C.Ap. 2.142.

\textsuperscript{43} See van Henten, “Νοῦς,” 155–160.
in the mind of any ancient person. It does, however, have a heuristic purpose. It guarantees a comprehensible and transparent basis of argumentation for weighing the semantic options available in the relevant passages. Decisive for the respective semantics of the Pauline passages, on the one hand, is the probability of each connotation. The results of the semantic frame demonstrate that it was more likely Paul had certain usages in mind because they were used more prominently by his contemporaries. On the other hand, one has to pay attention to elements of activation. That is, whether the context of the relevant passage containing the lexeme νοῦς evokes a specific connotation of the frame. Such elements make it clear that Paul presupposes a less probable connotation that lies within the semantic spectrum.44

For instance, after he unmistakably deals with “speaking” in 1 Cor 14,45 his use of νοῦς in vv. 14–15, 19 bears the connotation of “communicative activity,” which is denoted by the lexeme according to the third level of the frame. Of course, this does not mean he could not have had other connotations in mind. As can easily be shown, Paul also presupposes at least one other connotation in 1 Cor 14: rationality (see the second level). Since speaking in tongues, which Paul associates with a faculty of the πνεῦμα, is classified by outsiders as something irrational (cf. 1 Cor 14:23 [μαίνομαι]), the faculty denoted by the term νοῦς guarantees rational behavior. Moreover, the first level of the frame is in view, too. The abandonment of the activity associated with the believer’s πνεῦμα and the affirmation of speaking with one’s νοῦς is quite convincing concerning the positive connotation that is connected with the lexeme on grounds of the first level of the frame.

The semantic frame of νοῦς also makes more visible the undertones of the apostle’s statements. Against the background of the exceedingly positive appraisal of the anthropological faculty designated by the term νοῦς, the polemical undertones become audible, which must be attached, for instance, to the mention of a renewal of this faculty (Rom 12:2 [ἀνακαίνωσις τοῦ νοὸς]).

In applying the frame to the relevant references, then, several things need to be taken into account: first, which connotations does Paul presuppose with his usage? Second, which connotations does he relativize or modify? Third, from which connotations does he distance himself? And finally, which connotations are not presupposed at all?

44 See Finnern and Rüggemeier, Methoden, 154–155, 159–162.
45 See λαλέω in vv. 2 (3×), 3, 4, 5 (2×), 6 (2×), 9 (2×), 11 (2×), and more often.
3.2 Paul’s Use of νοῦς in 1 Cor 1:10 and 2:16 as a Test Case

At first glance, Paul uses the word νοῦς in the first chapters of 1 Corinthians in a quite undeveloped manner. This impression, usually, is confirmed by Pauline exegesis. In 1 Cor 1:10 most exegetes interpret Paul’s exhortation to be restored in the same νοῦς and the same γνώμη as hendiadys. As γνώμη clearly means “opinion” in 1 Cor 7:25, 40, both terms in 1:10 refer to the disparate opinions causing the factions in the Corinthian congregation. Thus, for Paul, νοῦς and γνώμη are interchangeable and νοῦς here stands for the result of a cognitive-volitional process. With regard to the third level of the semantic frame this interpretation seems thoroughly possible. Yet, things become more difficult when 1 Cor 2:16 comes into view.

There, Paul mentions the word νοῦς twice. Concluding his considerations about the epistemological abilities of humans, Paul cites the rhetorical question of Isa 40:13 in v. 16a: “For who has known the mind of the Lord...”? Despite the fact that this is a rhetorical question which anticipates the answer “no one” within the original context of the book of Isaiah, Paul offers a positive answer in v. 16b: “We”—meaning all who received the Holy Spirit (cf. v. 12)—“have the mind of Christ.” Paul’s concluding statement seems unproblematic as long as an ambiguous term, such as the English word “mind,” is used for the translation of νοῦς (cf. NRSV). Going deeper into detail, however, the difficulties of this verse arise immediately.

In order to clarify what exactly Paul has in view when he refers to “the mind of the Lord” (νοῦς κυρίου), NT scholarship usually draws on the preceding context. There, Paul discusses the possibility of discerning (ἐραυνάω, v. 10; γινώσκω, v. 11; ἐξετάζω, v. 12; δέχομαι, v. 14) several objects: τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 10), τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 11), τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ χαρισθέντα ἡμῖν (v. 12), and τὰ τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 14). Against the background of Paul’s overall framework of the first two chapters these expressions refer first and foremost to the Christ event (cf., esp., 1:18–25). Exegetes frequently understand the question of whether it is possible to know (γινώσκω) the Lord’s νοῦς raised by the quotation in v. 16a in line with these expressions. Thus, as Weiss in his often-cited statement claims, the phrase νοῦς κυρίου means “not the organ of thinking, but the content, his [the Lord’s] thoughts of salvation.” Strüder, who also agrees with this interpretation, additionally claims that it is not possible to discern God’s cognitive

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46 See, for instance, H.-C. Kammler, Kreuz und Weisheit: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu 1 Kor 1:10–3,4 (WUNT 159; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 5; Behm, “νοέω,” 956.
47 Rom 11:34–35 shows that Paul knows the rhetorical function of Isaiah’s question.
48 J. Weiss, Der erste Korintherbrief (9th ed.; KEK 5; Götttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 68. See also Jewett, Terms, 387; Strüder, Gesinnung, 229.
ability at all. Rather, he assumes, the object of human knowledge is God's particular thoughts.49

Whereas this interpretation of νοῦς in 1 Cor 2:16a could still easily be seen in accordance with 1:10, the assumptions about Paul's use of the word in v. 16b stand in stark contrast. According to most exegetes, Christ's νοῦς simply refers to the Holy Spirit.50 In order to make their interpretation plausible, these exegetes draw on Paul's statements about the πνεῦμα in vv. 10–12: The Spirit searches everything (v. 10) and it is only God's Spirit who comprehends what is truly God's (v. 11). Thus, in these verses Paul prepares his surprisingly positive answer to the question cited in 2:16a: No one except the Spirit is able to know the νοῦς κυρίου. As the apostle already stated in v. 12, it is this divine Spirit he and the Corinthian Christians received, enabling them to understand the gifts bestowed on them by God. “We have the mind of Christ,” consequently, is a compressed version of Paul's statement in v. 12. The linguistic shift from πνεῦμα to νοῦς is commonly explained as an assimilation to the citation of Isa 40:13.51 After mentioning the νοῦς κυρίου Paul prefers νοῦς to πνεῦμα because it fits better with the epistemological principle like-with-like (cf. v. 11). Moreover, to underline this pneumatological interest of Paul, some exegetes point to the Hebrew text of Isa 40:13 which reads מַיִן.52

Admittedly, these interpretations are plausible if they are considered in isolation. Yet, when the construction of Paul's argument in these opening chapters of 1 Corinthians is taken into account, several exegesis have shown convincingly that 1 Cor 2:16 is the “Zielsatz”53 of the argumentation. In the first two chapters, as Brown notes, Paul aims at “cognitive transformation.”54 Thus, one would rather expect that in both instances—the beginning of Paul's

49 See Strüder, Gesinnung, 229.
51 See, for instance, W. Schrage, Der erste Brief an die Korinther: 1. Teilband: 1 Kor 1,1–6,11 (EKK 7/1; Zürich/Neukirchen-Vluyn: Benziger; Neukirchen, 1991) 267; Kammler, Weisheit, 234.
52 See, for instance, Barrett, Corinthians, 78.
thought in 1 Cor 1:10 and his endpoint in 2:16—νοῦς means the same thing. In other words: The standard interpretations of νοῦς in 1 Cor 1:10 and 2:16 seem to be irreconcilable with the formal observations concerning the structure of Paul’s argument. Apart from this, it is more probable, in principle, that an author uses a term uniformly. Although it is not impossible that Paul can use the same word in radically different ways, such an assumption would not be the most natural option.

As will be argued in the following, Paul uses the word νοῦς in a developed and consistent way. However, none of the above-mentioned options comes into view. Paul neither means a person’s opinion—νοῦς in the sense of the result of a cognitive-volitional process—nor does he refer to the Holy Spirit. Against the background of the above-mentioned semantic frame, the following will demonstrate the convincing nature of these findings and that the exegetical problems surrounding the lexeme νοῦς can be solved.

We will begin with 1 Cor 1:10: According to the semantic frame, it is not very probable that Paul has in mind the result which stands at the end of a cognitive-volitional process. Rather, with the word νοῦς the apostle means the psychic faculty that thinks and wills. Whereas the latter is the semantic option that not only resides on the first but also on all three levels of the frame, the former is located only on level three. Taking into account the context of Paul’s exhortation, this interpretation can easily be confirmed.

Since Paul mentions the Corinthians’ γνώμη immediately after νοῦς, at first sight, he indeed seems to activate the semantic option which associates νοῦς with the cognitive result. This, however, presupposes that he uses νοῦς and γνώμη interchangeably and that he formulates a hendiadys. Although this assumption is possible it is not convincing. The problem in the Corinthian community is that they adhere to different slogans (see 1 Cor 1:12). Therefore, Paul admonishes them to say the same thing (τὸ αὐτὸ λέγειν, v. 10). Paul, so to speak, approaches their problem through the aspect of their communication (λέγω, vv. 10, 12). Thus, the apostle’s usage of the lexeme νοῦς falls within the third level of the semantic frame. There, however, it is not the concrete result of thinking he has in mind, but rather the activity which is responsible for communication. At the same time, Paul obviously presupposes the first level of the semantic frame. The different slogans which cause trouble in the Corinthian community are the result of a misunderstanding of Paul’s message about the cross. In solving these problems Paul has to appeal to the faculty where this misinterpretation took place. Using the term νοῦς he virtually aims at the core of the problem, that is, ultimately the Corinthians’ cognitive-

55 Cf., e.g., Paul’s highly disputed use of νόμος.
volitional faculty, their psychic center and core of their self, that led them not only to their false interpretation of Paul’s message, but also to their competitive behavior. Therefore, νοῦς and γνώμη are better understood as a merism: the former means the cognitive-volitional faculty and the latter the product that results out of the activity of this faculty.

To push the exegetical potential of the semantic frame one step further, one could also take into account the semantic options that view νοῦς as the most positive element in a human being (level 1) and as a divine element (level 2). It was argued by several exegetes that the Corinthians are influenced by Alexandrian traditions. If this is true, the sharp critical undertone of Paul’s exhortation becomes obvious. According to Philo of Alexandria, the νοῦς plays the most important role in a human being. The anthropological faculty designated by νοῦς represents the dominant element of the soul which acts thoroughly rationally, is equipped by God, or even bestowed on humans as a divine element (see esp. Leg. 1.31–42; Opif. 134–135). Claiming the necessity of a “restoration” of this anthropological faculty ranked as so highly positive, Paul obviously questions the optimistic appraisal of the human νοῦς by the Corinthians or rather one of the “factions” among the Corinthians.58 Even though this Alexandrian influence in Corinth is questionable, the implications of Paul’s exhortation at least can be made plausible in terms of common philosophical ideas among Paul’s contemporaries. Popular philosophy in


57 See LSJ, s.v. καταρτίζω.

58 Taken for granted that in 1 Cor 1–4 Paul argues foremost against those Corinthians who overestimated their wisdom, it is likely that Paul questions this group’s ideas about the human νοῦς in particular. With regard to this group, Paul emphasizes the importance of the divine πνεῦμα in order to deal with God’s wisdom. At the same time, he concedes that this wisdom remains “noetisch vermittelbar” (Merklein, Korinther, 145). On the contrary, in chapter 14 Paul faces those who overestimate the gifts they received by the divine πνεῦμα, especially their speaking in tongues. There, Paul downplays the relevance of the πνεῦμα and stresses the νοῦς (14:14–15). For this “integrative argumentation” see Merklein, Korinther, 140–145; J. Frey, “Das Ringen des Paulus um die Einheit der Gemeinde: Der erste Korintherbrief als Vermittlungsschreiben und seine integrative Argumentationsstruktur,” in Paulus und die christliche Gemeinde in Korinth: Historisch-kulturelle und theologische Aspekte (ed. J. Thiessen and C. Stettler; BThSt 187; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020) 149–181.
Paul's time ranks the human νοῦς in a similar fashion as Philo.59 Thus, Paul's exhortation presumably (level 1) bears critical undertones against the view that understands the human νοῦς as the most positive element. Perhaps (level 2) he has also in mind the νοῦς understood as a divine element.

However one judges these final considerations about Paul's critical undertones, it is quite clear that Paul's reference to the Corinthians' νοῦς means their psychic center, wherein cognitive-volitional processes take place and wherein the responsibility for communication is made. This last aspect, incidentally, fits also with the above-mentioned activity of communication presupposed for the Corinthians' νοῦς in chapter 14 (see section 3.1). Thus, it is rather implausible that Paul speaks of νοῦς in 1 Cor 1:10 only in an idiomatic fashion using the lexeme interchangeably with γνώμη.60 Instead, he obviously intends to prepare his following argumentation, aiming at a conclusion about the anthropological faculty of the Corinthians which, up to now, did not function in a correct way. This conclusion about their νοὐς is drawn in 1 Cor 2:16b. “We”—the Corinthians included—“have the νοῦς of Christ.”

What exactly does Paul mean with this qualification of their νοῦς? Once again, the semantic frame helps to clarify the exegetical issues, regardless of whether or not v. 16 is seen as Paul’s concluding remark referring to 1:10. Against the background of the three levels of the semantic frame, again, it is not likely that Paul has in mind the “thoughts of Christ,”61 i.e., the result of a cognitive-volitional process. Instead, νοῦς means the faculty that is responsible for this process, whereupon the emphasis is placed on this faculty’s cognitive aspect. For the possession of Christ’s νοῦς is the answer to v. 16a. It is clear that a person is able to know (γινώσκω) the Lord’s νοῦς with this νοῦς. Moreover, the communicative activity of the third level is also in view. This becomes evident by the fact that after 2:16 Paul immediately comes back to the Corinthians’ situation, citing once again their slogans (cf. 3:1–4; esp. v. 4). This is further evident when we include the preceding context where Paul problematizes the possibility of communicating the divine wisdom (see λαλέω in 2:6, 7, 13; [3,1]; cf. also 2:1–5). The possession of Christ’s νοῦς obviously is the condition which is necessary to participate with understanding in God’s wisdom and to communicate it.

60 Note that Paul does not use his common expression τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν (cf. Rom 12:16; 15:5; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2; 4:2).
61 Schlatter, Bote; 124; see also Jewett, Terms, 378; Fee, Corinthians, 119; Willis, “Mind,” 118.
To some extent, these findings seem to support the pneumatological interpretation of Christ’s νοῦς. Yet, it is questionable whether Paul tautologically repeats v. 12 in v. 16b. That is to say, Paul does not speak of the νοῦς of Christ because of his citation of Isaiah which “forces” him to use νοῦς instead of πνεῦμα. Actually, it seems that quite the opposite is the case: Paul cites Isa 40:13 because he wants to conclude his epistemological thoughts with a statement about the human νοῦς already intimated in 1 Cor 1:10 and to demonstrate its transformation by a person’s reception of the Holy Spirit.62 Such an anthropological instead of a pneumatological reading is confirmed by both the semantic frame’s disposition of probability as well as the context of 2:16.

With regard to the semantic frame, the following considerations clearly suggest an anthropological reading. The only connotation that would support a pneumatological interpretation of νοῦς is located on the frame’s second level (the divine element). It is, of course, possible that Paul’s focus on the πνεῦμα in vv. 10–12 intends to activate this connotation. Yet, the implication of v. 16 that with their νοῦς of Christ the Corinthians are enabled to know the νοῦς of the Lord definitely activates (see above) the first level (cognitive-volitional faculty) and the third level (communicative activity) where we have a clearly anthropological focus. Thus, the higher probability has to be ascribed to the anthropological sense of νοῦς and not to the pneumatological option.

Regarding the contextual evidence for an anthropological interpretation, it is, first of all, anything but clear that Paul knew the Hebrew רוח in Isa 40:13.63 The reference to רוח, thus, hardly can lead to a pneumatological reading. Then, it is rather implausible that Paul simply wants to repeat what he has already stated in v. 12. This would be tautological and would miss the development of his argument in 2:6–16. After deepening his thoughts with a pneumatological excursus in vv. 10–12, Paul comes back in v. 13 to his opening thoughts of v. 6 (see λαλέω in vv. 6, 7, and 13) and from now on explicitly pushes his argument forward in an anthropological fashion (cf. ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος, v. 14; πνευματικός, vv. 13, 15).64 Therefore, it is plausible that v. 16 still focuses on the

62 Strüder, Gesinnung, 242 remarks that Paul mentions “genau denjenigen Begriff […], von welchem schon in 1,10 die Rede war und auf den es ihm als Abschluss der ersten Hälfte von 1 Kor 1–4 ankommt.” See also Merklein, Korinther, 219, 244.
anthropological implications of a person’s receipt of the divine πνεῦμα.\(^{65}\) In short, the natural νοῦς is transformed into the νοῦς of Christ as soon as the ψυχικὸς ἄνθρωπος receives the divine πνεῦμα. With νοῦς, thus, Paul takes up the anthropological faculty of perception which he already circumscribed in v. 11 with πνεῦμα\(^{66}\) and in v. 9 with eye (ὁφθαλμός), ear (οὖς), and heart (καρδία).\(^{67}\)

A few short remarks about the νοῦς κυρίου should suffice within this article. Both above-mentioned arguments which speak in favor of an interpretation in the sense of a cognitive-volitional result can easily be challenged. Strüder’s allegedly logical argument about the object of human knowledge is a mere hypothesis that seems to originate his own subjective impression. Still, questioning the contextual argument shows that this assumption against Strüder stands on firm ground. With regard to the expressions in vv. 10–12, and 14 seen in parallel with “νοῦς κυρίου,” it is anything but clear what they mean. If Paul, for instance, had in mind the “heart”\(^{68}\) of God with these expressions, the object of cognition would be more than simply God’s “thoughts of salvation.” Within these exegetical difficulties—as it should be obvious from the above-mentioned examples—the application of the semantic frame here, too, disambiguates the vagueness of former approaches.

A few final remarks need to be made before concluding. Being reconciled in the same νοῦς means that all the Corinthians have the νοῦς of Christ. Thus, v. 16b bears a double message: With their νοῦς standing under the influence of the divine πνεῦμα the Corinthians, on the one hand, are enabled to find out what God has planned with his νοῦς. In the context of the first two chapters this implies that they reappraise in a divine—not “worldly”—manner the cross of Christ (cf. 1:18–25).\(^{69}\) On the other hand, this reasoning supposedly involves and results in Christ-like behavior.\(^{70}\) Whereas the former message underscores the cognitive dimension, the latter implies the volitional aspect of the cognitive-volitional faculty. With their νοῦς Χριστοῦ, as Schrage puts it,


\(^{66}\) As Paul clearly attaches his thoughts in v. 11 to the epistemological principle like-with-like he presumably speaks of the human πνεῦμα instead of νοῦς because he wants to make a statement about the divine πνεῦμα.

\(^{67}\) On further arguments for an anthropological reading see Nägele, “Pneuma,” forthcoming.

\(^{68}\) F. Voss, *Das Wort vom Kreuz und die menschliche Vernunft: Eine Untersuchung zur Soteriologie des 1. Korintherbriefes* (FRLANT 199; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) 174, with regard to τὰ βάθη τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 10) and ultimately also τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 11).

\(^{69}\) See Merklein, *Korinther*, 244; Schrage, *Korinther*, 269.

the Corinthians should both “apprehend the divine wisdom intellectually and implement it into action.”\textsuperscript{71}

As a result, the question of Paul’s use of the lexeme νοῦς is an illuminating enterprise which not only clarifies ambiguities about the relevant passages but also promises deeper insights into the apostle’s linguistic habits and his anthropology, as well as his (philosophical) educational horizon. The frame thus helps to interpret Pauline texts assuming a broad and multilayered influence by the anthropological concepts of Paul’s time and also helps to uncover all the implications of his usage of νοῦς which have remained hidden for so long.

\textsuperscript{71} Schrage, \textit{Korinther}, 267.