CHAPTER 24

A Comparison of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 with Ancient Thought on Ethics and Emotion

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A comparison of Paul's virtue list in Gal 5:22–23 with the thoughts of some of his contemporaries may help us to appreciate more fully some of the concepts that ancient auditors would have found here.

Examining Paul's usage elsewhere offers the surest clue for determining how Paul understands the terms on his list. Nevertheless, some of Paul's examples of fruit of the Spirit in his virtue list in Gal 5 are harder to define in Pauline terms than others. Because philosophers were often meticulous about defining their ethical language, we may compare and contrast some of Paul's ethical language here with that of other intellectuals, especially often with that of the dominant philosophic school of his era, namely the Stoics.

1 A Virtue List

Virtue lists were quite common in antiquity, including in works of philosophers and rhetoricians. Virtue and vice lists often appear together, as here

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1 E.g., 1QS 4.3; applied also to what we might call gifts, e.g., Aelius Theon, Prog. 9.15–19; Pliny, Ep. 6.26.1; Symmachus, Ep. 1.2.7.
2 Philo, Sacr. 27; Seneca, Lucil. 95.55; Musonius Rufus 4 (44.10–12); 8, (66.11); 14 (92.31–33); 17 (108.8–11); 38 (136.3); Aelius Theon, Prog. 9.15–24; 9.15b (10.16–25); 2.7.5 (14.18–20); 2.7.11i (78.12–18); 2.7.11m (88.1–8); Plutarch, Stoic rep. 7, in Mor. 1034C. References to Musonius Rufus in this essay are all from Lutz, “Musonius Rufus,” giving section, then in brackets, the page(s) and line number(s). References for Aelius Theon in this essay are all from Pomeroy, Aelius Theon, giving section, then in brackets the page(s) and line number(s).
3 Pseudo-Aristotle, Rhet. Alex. 6.1427b.39–41 and 1428a.1–2; 36.1442a.11–12; Cicero, Mur. 14.30; 29.60; Rhet. Her. 3.2.3; Aelius Theon, Prog. 9.15–24; Dio Chrysostom, Or. 32.37; Pliny, Ep. 6.11.2; 6.26.1; Lucian, Imag. 11; Maximus of Tyre, Or. 3.1; 18.5. Particularly fitting in a eulogy (e.g., Arrian, Anab. 7.28.1–3), they could surround individuals in biographies, as in Cornelius Nepos 15 (Epam.), 3.1–3.
Sometimes they employed asyndeton, suppressing conjunctions, as here. Despite considerable overlap with wider social values, the earliest Christian lists sometimes omit some key virtues common in other lists. Engberg-Pedersen suggests that Gal 5:22–23 is “in principle an ordinary Greek virtue list”; thus the Spirit generates “certain states of mind, namely mental attitudes.” As we shall see, regarding them as purely “mental” states may be too narrow, at least in view of what we often mean by that term. Nevertheless, Paul's interest is in behavior and not just attitudes, but Stoic virtue lists do offer points for comparison. For Stoics, virtues are continuous dispositions.

Stoics would have defined some elements in Paul's list as virtues, although they would have highlighted self-control and may have emphasized internal tranquility more often than virtues such as the communal “peace” that Paul likely envisions here. Stoics sought to eradicate harmful emotions and behavior, but whereas most philosophic schools valued εὐδαιμονία, a goal lacking in our earliest Christian sources, they probably would not have highlighted “joy” the way Paul did. Most notably, Paul's special emphasis on love reflects a different value tradition stemming from Jesus' interpretation of Scripture.

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4 E.g., Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 2.8.1–8, 1108b–1109a; *Eth. eud.* 2.3.4, 1220b–1221a; *Virt. vit.* 1249a–1251b; *Rhet. Alex.* 36, 1442a.11–14; Arios Didymus 2.7.11e (68.12–20). Alternation could be rhetorically effective (Cicero, *Cat.* 2.10.25; Seneca, *Dial.* 4.13.2), and positive and negative lists in proximity highlight their contrast (Cicero, *Scaur.* 16.37; *Phil.* 3.6.15; 3.11.28; *Cael.* 22.55; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 32.27–29; Fronto, *De Nepote Amisso* 2.8; 1QS 4.3–11); cf. discussion of antithesis in R. D. Anderson, *Glossary*, 21–22. Cf. the two ways tradition (e.g., Deut 11:26–28; 4Q473, frg. 2.3; *Did.* 1.1; *Barn.* 18.1). On virtue lists, see also Charles, *Vice and Virtue Lists*; see examples of vice lists in Keener, *Acts*, 2269–70.

5 Lists could use polysyndeton (e.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 33.23), but could also use asyndeton, as here; see *Rhet. Her.* 4.30.41; R. D. Anderson, *Glossary*, 33–34; Rowe, “Style,” 136; Lee, “Translations,” 779–80; for examples, see e.g., *Rhet. Alex.* 36.1442a.11–14; 38.1447b.5–6.


7 Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 160. Stoics treated “every psychological phenomenon… as some form of understanding or misunderstanding” (ibid., 168). Others are more skeptical on philosophic language influencing earliest Christianity; cf. Wojciechowski, “Philosophical Vocabulary.” Most of these virtues are also biblical; see e.g., Matera, *Galatians*, 213. Many note that Paul's virtues address qualities that were widely commended in antiquity but these scholars also note differences (e.g., Betz, *Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, 286; de Boer, *Galatians*, 363).

8 Neurochemical studies show that mind, body, and emotions are linked much more inextricably than our common verbal differentiation of such terms acknowledges.

9 Arios Didymus 2.7.5–6, (30.18–19). Their distinction of virtues from activities (30.21–22) is more rigidly analytical than Paul's approach.