

# Emotions in the Epistemology of Paul the Apostle

Robert C. Roberts  
Baylor University

**ABSTRACT:** According to Paul’s “epistemology,” the most important kinds of knowledge presuppose a certain formation of character on the part of the subject of the knowledge. The kind of character in question involves a caring or concern that is also a disposition to emotions. Not all knowledge is like this. Catechetical knowledge differs from richer and deeper kinds of spiritual knowledge, in particular wisdom, which is a kind of understanding, and a “perceptual” kind of knowledge that Paul describes as “seeing with the eyes of the heart.” These more spiritual kinds of knowledge depend on the virtues of faith and love, which in turn are ordinarily produced by concerted responsiveness to the activity of God. The emotions involved in this response are episodes of perceptual synthesis that reflect the epistemic values of perception and understanding. The paper expounds Paul’s spiritual epistemology against the foil of a recent virtue epistemology modeled on the concept of a performance.

## **Introduction**

Of course the apostle Paul does not have an epistemology in the modern sense of the word. He has no formula, long or short, for the conditions conceptually necessary and sufficient for any belief or perception being a case of knowledge, nor any systematic and general account of what it takes for a belief to have “knowledge relevant normativity.”<sup>1</sup> He has no view about whether, and if so how, knowledge as such and regardless of its subject matter has value, nor any response to blanket philosophical skepticism. Paul is a

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<sup>1</sup> I have this term from John Greco. Knowledge relevant normativity is the broader category to which epistemic justification or warrant belongs.

man of powerful intellect, no doubt, but he is a pastor, whose intellectual performances are quite directly in the service of sustaining and nurturing his churches.

Nevertheless, knowledge is extremely important to Paul in the course of his pastoral and missionary endeavors, and he frequently comments on it, employing a variety of epistemic concepts and expressing views about its conditions and value. Among the conditions that Paul associates with knowledge are certain personal virtues or excellences of character the possession of which involves dispositions to states of emotion. I will be offering an explanation of virtuous emotions' contribution to knowledge as Paul understands it. In thinking of virtues as, among other things, dispositions to emotions, Paul is in formal agreement with other ancient writers such as Plato and Aristotle and, in a partially reverse sense, Stoics like Seneca. Such philosophers may supply keys to our inquiry.

### **A recent contribution in virtue epistemology**

In the 1980s Ernest Sosa began to propose a virtue epistemology firmly within the context of contemporary epistemological debates about the nature of knowledge, epistemic justification, and skepticism. The latest and best formulation of Sosa's views is his *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge*,<sup>2</sup> a revision of his Locke Lectures, given at Oxford University in 2005. Sosa's theory will, I hope, provide an instructive backdrop for our study of Paul's epistemology.

According to Sosa, knowledge is a species of performance, and like other kinds of performance it can be evaluated by reference to three standards. First, performances have

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<sup>2</sup> Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. This is the first of a projected two volumes.

aims, and so can be assessed by reference to their success in achieving their aims. An archer meets the first standard by hitting his target. But second, in hitting the target, the archer may or may not exhibit skill. If he hits the target despite doing so clumsily, then his performance does not meet the second standard of excellence. And third, his success in hitting the target needs to be *because of* his skill. If he hits the target and does so while performing skillfully, but the cause of his hitting the target is the wind, which blew the arrow off target but then blew the target over in such a way that the arrow hit the bull's eye, then the archer's performance is still, over all, sub-par. The wind had too much to do with the success, the archer's skill too little. The archer doesn't get credit — or at any rate, not enough. Sosa calls these three aspects of a performance “the AAA structure: accuracy, adroitness, aptness.”<sup>3</sup>

The application to knowledge is that knowledge is always a belief, and a belief is a kind of performance. That is, an agent *forms* (or sustains) a belief. A belief's being true is its species of accuracy; it is adroit if it is formed by way of an epistemic virtue or competence; and it is apt if the accuracy (truth) of the belief is sufficiently attributable to the exercise of the epistemic virtue or competence. The agent's virtuous performance in forming or sustaining a belief is never the only cause of the belief's being true; the environment has to cooperate too, and some luck can be involved in getting the true belief (see p. 79). And so the criterion of aptness is a little vague, but can be formulated thus: for the agent's belief to be knowledge, his virtuous performance has to be a sufficiently dominant or significant cause of his getting the true belief. “...a performance

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

is apt only if its success is *sufficiently* attributable to the performer's competence" (p. 97, footnote 2, italics original).

### **Paul's conversion**

Paul's ministry begins when he acquires, suddenly and dramatically, a belief that he certainly regards as knowledge. Paul is speaking to king Agrippa about how he came to believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the messiah and that he (Paul) is Jesus' apostle:

“Thus I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It hurts you to kick against the goads.’ And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, delivering you from the people and from the Gentiles — to whom I send you to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me’” (Acts 26.12-18).

Clearly, Paul intends this story to explain causally his knowledge that Jesus is Lord, and the story says that Jesus gets the credit, not Paul. Paul was “kicking against the goads” (of

the evidence? of intimations of conscience? of intuitions that Jesus is actually Lord?). The appearance of Jesus overwhelms Paul and forces him, against his will, to see that Jesus is Lord. It is true that, after the overpowering appearance, Paul begins to cooperate cognitively, displaying a bit of epistemically virtuous behavior. “Who are you, Lord?” So he gets a bit of credit. And it’s plausible to suppose that without this modicum of virtuous behavior, Paul would *not* have known that Jesus is Lord. Also, later, after years of missionary and pastoral work, Paul exhibits a virtuous epistemic humility and caution in checking his version of the gospel with the church leaders in Jerusalem, “for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain” (Galatians 2.2b). But I think it is clear that, from the time immediately following the revelation, Paul knew that Jesus was Lord and had called Paul to be his apostle.

I shall be arguing that Paul’s epistemology is a kind of virtue epistemology, in the sense that *normally*, spiritual virtue with an emotional aspect is necessary for spiritually significant knowledge. But Paul’s own conversion suggests that virtuous performance is not a strictly or logically necessary condition for knowledge. In his conversion, Paul is too passive in the process of acquiring his true belief to count as having acquired *knowledge* on Sosa’s account. The performance model of knowledge acquisition seems wrong for Paul’s case; his acquisition of this central belief of his life was not exactly a *performance*. He acquired knowledge under the heavy influence of the vision whose implications Paul had resisted up to the moment of acquiring the belief.

Though Paul does not get credit for his newly acquired knowledge, that knowledge is nevertheless creditable to *some* “virtuous” epistemic process. The truth in question becomes Paul’s by way of a communicative act of God. One can hardly ask for

a more virtuous epistemic process than that. If Paul had come to the true belief that *Jesus is Lord, and Paul will be his apostle* by way of an epileptic seizure a week prior to the time that Jesus was planning to meet him on the road, then perhaps we would have to say that Paul's true belief was not knowledge at that time; and the explanation would be that the belief did not have a virtuous causal history.

Sosa notes that knowledge acquired through testimony is an apparent problem for his theory. After all, if I form a true belief about carnivorous plants as a result of reading a popularized account by the pre-eminent experts in the field, the overwhelming balance of credit for the truth of my belief goes to those experts, not to me. In response to this problem, Sosa points to the many cases in which a successful performance must be credited to a team rather than an individual.

Seated in the group collectively is a competence whose complex exercise leads through testimonial links to the correctness of one's present belief.

The correctness of one's belief is still attributable in part to a competence seated in oneself individually, but the credit that one earns will be partial at best (94f).

Since my epistemic competence may consist in little more than my ability to read the book, it seems a stretch to think of me as a member of the epistemic team. The causal role of my "virtue" is indeed "partial *at best*." To allow my comparatively miniscule contribution to the getting of the truth about carnivorous plants to count as "sufficient" to satisfy the demands of the theory seems to reduce the demand for sufficiency to below that of the spirit of the theory. Overwhelmingly the credit for the truth of my belief is due to the virtues and virtuous practices of the researchers.

Still, we might see here an avenue for Sosa to accommodate the case of Paul. Maybe Paul can be thought of as a minor player on Jesus' epistemic team. The group performance consists of Jesus revealing the truth to Paul and Paul receiving the revelation. By a stretch we might say that I temporarily join the team of carnivorous botanists by picking up their book and reading it willingly and intelligently. The problem with applying this construal to Paul is that, since the case is one of conversion, at the point of the "performance" (or just before it), Paul and Jesus are decidedly not on the same team. The story tells of Paul's transition to Jesus' team. Paul does not so much *cooperate* in the getting of the truth, as *succumb* to it.

I conclude that the general phenomenon of truth getting by testimony presents a more significant problem for Sosa's virtue epistemology than he admits, and that the particular case of Paul's conversion is even more troublesome than ordinary testimony. Paul's succumbing to the truth about Jesus and himself is hardly a "performance," and certainly not an apt one; but in the Christian tradition it is regarded as a very important case of knowledge.

### **An Epistemological Proposal**

I want to offer a tentative proposal for a "theory" of knowledge. I put 'theory' in scare-quotes because the proposal is not in the tradition (to which Sosa belongs, along with the vast majority of contemporary epistemologists) of trying to find universally necessary and sufficient conditions for anything's being a case of knowledge. My idea is that knowledge always involves a subject's ownership of some kind of epistemic content, but there are diverse media of ownership. Some of the media drop out in some of the

cases, and different media have differential importance across cases. Sosa's view makes the subject's ownership of the content crucial, but he seems to err in trying to make that ownership always a matter of competent performance on the part of the knowing subject. Virtuous performance is *one* way subjects come to own epistemic content, but it is not a way that is shared by all cases of knowledge. Another way one might become the owner of an epistemic content is to have it given to one (as a gift) or forced upon one. Belief itself is a way of owning a proposition, of the proposition's being one's own. A person might have a pretty deep understanding of a scientific hypothesis, and be aware of the evidence for it, without thinking it is true; and in the absence of believing it, he might be said not to know it.

Mere true belief is usually insufficient for knowledge. The belief will need to be owned in a particular way; some beliefs, no matter how firmly held and despite being true, are not knowledge unless the subject has some evidence for them; others need only be formed in a proper way (say, by way of some virtuous epistemic process). But some knowledge does not even require belief, or at any rate belief is not a characteristic way of owning the content. Here we have the many kinds of "knowing what it is like": knowing the flavor of a fifty-year-old brandy; knowing what it's like to be in love for the first time; knowing how a two-week-old baby's skin feels to the touch; etc. Here the ownership involved in knowing is a matter of direct perceptual experience or impression, or (more weakly) the memory thereof. You can, of course, stretch the concept of belief to warrant saying that, as I touch the baby's skin, I form the belief *baby's skin feels like this*. But the warrant seems to be of little interest other than to save an epistemological model.

What gives me ownership of the content is the experience; belief is not really in the picture.

Another kind of ownership that is often required for knowledge is understanding. Presumably one can't know a proposition without understanding it at all; but one can, so to speak, come more and more into the possession of it by understanding it more deeply and widely. In this sense a person can know a hypothesis without believing it: he knows what it amounts to, which is a kind of understanding. This is one of the ways in which knowledge is, as Sosa notes, a matter of degrees. On the road to Damascus, Paul seems to have acquired a belief, and along with it a bit of understanding, and the acquisition of it seems to have been characterized by an immediate experience of a rather overwhelming kind that Paul never forgot. All of this seems to have put Paul enough into possession of the content to constitute his knowing it, yet without much contribution of his intellectual virtues. As he grows in understanding of what he has come to believe, he comes more and more into possession of the content, thus knowing better what he has believed. It is plausible to think that such growth in knowledge (understanding) will be a consequence of growing intellectual virtues.

My "theory," then, is that knowledge is the owning, by a subject, of some epistemic (knowable) content; and that such ownership can be mediated in a variety of ways, none of which is universally necessary for knowledge. I turn now to Paul's writings, where we see that he speaks of various kinds of knowledge; and I shall point especially to the ways in which, for the kinds of knowledge that are most important for Paul, emotions play a crucial role in forming the subject's ownership of the content. I am going to argue that certain properties of emotions — in particular their synthetic charac-

ter, their concern-based character, and their perceptual character — fit them to be an important way of owning epistemic content.

### **Catechetical Knowledge**

When a person enters an orthodox Christian community, he or she picks up certain propositions elemental to the new way of life. These propositions can be acquired in a formal catechism, or merely “along the way” as the convert joins in Christian practices with more seasoned members of the community. This knowledge is pretty easy to acquire, so Paul can say rather casually, “Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge (οἶδαμεν ὅτι πάντες γινώσκουσιν ἔχομεν)” (I Corinthians 8.1). In verses 4-7, Paul goes on to explain what this knowledge is that virtually every member of the community can be expected to have: idols are not really gods; only one God exists, the creator of all, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created and in whom we live. So meat that has been “sacrificed” to these idols is nothing to be afraid of or feel guilty about eating. It’s just plain meat; Christians are perfectly free to eat it. But two groups within the church have not assimilated this basic knowledge emotionally.

The first group, though they know “intellectually” that idols are bogus gods, still feel qualms about eating meat that has been “sacrificed” to them. Perhaps they are afraid of eating it, or feel guilty or defiled if they eat it. Here we could say that, despite justifiably *judging* the meat harmless, clean, permitted, and completely unspooky, these people, when confronted with some such meat, *see or experience* it as dangerous, defiled, polluted, prohibited, supernatural, or in some such terms. Despite their knowledge, it

appears to them in such a light. Paul speaks a bit paradoxically, for after saying in verse 1 that we all have knowledge (about food “sacrificed” to idols), he goes on,

But this knowledge is not in everyone (οὐκ ἐν πᾶσιν ἡ γνῶσις). Some remain so accustomed to idols that they eat [the meat] as sacrificed to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled (vs.7).

To see that Paul is really consistent when he says that we all have this knowledge, yet some don't have this knowledge, let's distinguish two kinds of knowledge. The members he worries about have the catechetical knowledge that *idols are harmless fictions* and *meat sacrificed to idols is just plain meat*, but they lack a kind of perceptual knowledge that ought to match the catechetical, an ability emotionally to *see* the food *as* perfectly clean. People who have this second kind of γνῶσις don't know any more propositions than their less knowledgeable brethren; in fact the propositional content of their knowledge seems to be identical with that of the people who know that *meat sacrificed to idols is just plain meat* but still have a bad conscience about eating it. People who have perceptual knowledge are more mature than ones whose catechetical knowledge is not integrated emotionally.

But it is interesting that Paul (and this is typical for him) regards the greater maturity as involving a kind of *knowledge*. It is not proper emotions *in addition to knowledge* that constitutes the greater maturity. To be able to eat meat sacrificed to idols with a clear conscience and, even more, with gratitude to the one God who created all things, is itself to have a kind of knowledge: a perception of the meat in the perspective of God's lordship and providential goodness. Being perspectival, this emotional perception is also a kind of understanding. It is an epistemic “performance” that satisfies

Sosa's criterion for knowledge: The emotional orientation of the mature is such that when they perceive the "sacrificial" meat as perfectly good food for which God is to be thanked, their perception is accurate, adroit (caused by a virtue), and apt (the virtue is an important cause of the *accuracy* of the perception).

But this kind of maturity is not Paul's main burden in I Corinthians 8, which he addresses to some people who have knowledge of the above-described sort, but who are missing another emotional-epistemic implication of the catechism. Of the more mature of the two kinds of knowledge that I just distinguished, Paul notes that it "puffs up": ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῦ. By contrast, love "builds up." What does love build up? People. Which people? Both the people who have the love, and people in touch with the people who have the love. If you have a perfectly clear conscience about eating meat sacrificed to idols, in this respect you are superior to your brother who knows that idols are nothing but still feels qualms about eating the stuff. If you then parade this superiority as making you something especially worthy of admiration in the community, your greatness of size is empty; if you look bigger to yourself (and perhaps to a few others), it is at the cost of making yourself less solid. Like a strutting turkey cock, you're mostly air. But worse perhaps than decreasing your own moral density, in the present case you risk tearing down others as well. Objectively speaking, it's perfectly fine to eat meat sacrificed in a pagan temple, but if you do so in the presence of someone to whom partaking will feel like a salute to the evil spirits, it's an expression of your thoughtlessness or indifference to your brother's spiritual health. If you love your brother, you will be careful to do what builds him up.

So Paul says that if someone like our strutter “thinks he knows something,” he doesn’t yet know *as he ought to know* (καθὼς δεῖ γινῶναι, 8.2). Paul seems to suggest that there is a right way to know spiritual things, and some wrong ways. In some way, being able to eat meat sacrificed to idols without qualms and with gratitude to the one God is right; it is better than merely to have the catechetically justified true belief that such meat is harmless, combined with religious scruples about eating it. But one can have even the perceptually clear knowledge about the status of such food *in a wrong way*, if it becomes a point of invidious pride and issues in behavior detrimental to other members of the Christian community. Here we have a case of spiritual *misuse* of knowledge that also, perhaps, indicts the knowledge itself as defective. What kind of gratitude or clarity of conscience is it, that can be taken by its possessor as grounds for such a swollen ego that one becomes unmindful of the spiritual wellbeing of one’s brothers and sisters in Christ? The clarity of one’s conscience about food, if it’s distinctively Christian, as Paul supposes, is a consequence of believing that God has done something unspeakably wonderful for us in Jesus Christ, that he has graciously taken us into his family, overcoming our sin and reconciling us to himself and to one another. It is hard to think that this understanding is really what’s behind one’s clarity of conscience and gratitude to God for one’s food, if one then, reflecting on this clarity of conscience and gratitude, sees it as proof of one’s comparative importance in the Christian community and as warrant for trampling rough-shod on the delicate conscience of one’s brethren. We are tempted to think that the “clarity of conscience” and “gratitude” did not in fact originate in a serious heedfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul contrasts the knowledge that puffs up with the love that builds up. What kind of love might Paul have in mind here? Since the topic of I Corinthians 8 is loving attention to weaker Christians, it is plausible to suppose that he is commending compassion as the particular variant of love that is immediately relevant. Compassion entails so appreciating as lamentable the defective state of some fellow creature as to be disposed to ameliorate his condition, or at least cautiously to forbear making it worse. This appreciation is a kind of knowledge, an understanding or grasp or apprehension of the brother's lamentable defect in the light of the good. This is the kind of knowledge lacking in the Corinthians who have emotionally appropriated the catechetical knowledge of Hebrew monotheism to the extent of eating meat sacrificed to idols with a clear conscience, yet without knowing "as they ought to know." Because they do not have compassion on their relatively ignorant brethren, Paul seems to suggest, they fall short in their knowledge of God.

"Anyone who loves God is known by him" (v.3). This is the *right* manner in which to have knowledge. But what is it to be known by God, and what does it have to do with our own knowledge? A few verses later Paul says that food doesn't "make us present" (NIV: "bring us near") (παραστήσει) to God (v.8), implying that love, by contrast, does have this function. To be known by God is to be admitted to his presence (see Matthew 25.12), and being admitted to God's presence is necessary for knowing him as one ought. This kind of knowledge is fellowship with God (II Corinthians 13.13, Philippians 2.1), a being in touch with God. Proper knowledge (of God), knowledge καθὼς δεῖ, is contact with God; mere catechetical knowledge is not, though in many cases it may be a required preliminary. And love is necessary for this contact.

In I Corinthians 8, then, we find a threefold division of knowledge into what I have called catechetical knowledge, emotionally appropriated catechetical knowledge, and knowing as one ought to know. These are different kinds of knowledge, with different conditions. One has catechetical knowledge if one can say “yes” with conviction to the propositions of the catechism and has learned them in an appropriate way (say, from a reliable teacher of the Christian tradition). One has emotionally appropriated catechetical knowledge if belief in the propositions of the catechism affects one’s emotions in some appropriate way. But one knows as one ought to know only if the bits of emotionally appropriated catechetical knowledge are ordered by a deep practical understanding of the import of the central Christian teachings in their bearing on one’s love of God and one’s neighbor. The second and third of these kinds of knowledge have emotional conditions; they cannot be had without a proper emotional formation of the knower. Putting the matter in the terms of my proposed “theory” of knowledge, emotions are crucial to the subject’s ownership of the content. The last of the three kinds belongs in a category that has been called wisdom (σοφία, φρόνησις).

### **Wisdom**

Wisdom is a cognitive orientation by the compass of importance, an understanding of other knowledge (say, more narrowly propositional or perceptual input) that takes its bearings from an encompassing end. Thus Aristotle thinks of φρόνησις as a power of discerning the bearing of possible courses of action on one’s own wellbeing or that of one’s community. The properly formed human being not only discerns what is important, but desires it or aims at it; in fact, to discern it *as* important (for oneself or

one's community) *is* to care about it. So, as Aristotle suggests, φρόνησις combines correct reasoning (or perception) with correct desire (See *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.2.3, 1139a23-26). Similarly, Paul calls on his readers in Rome not to let the schemata of their thinking and living be co-opted by the present age, but to be transformed by the renewal of their minds (τῆ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός), “so that you may discern (δοκιμάζειν) what the will of God is, what is good and pleasing and perfect” (Romans 12.2).

Δοκιμάζειν can refer either to the activity of testing or examining, or to the mental result of such an activity, namely a discerning or discovering or understanding (interpreting). It can also mean “approve,” thus a discerning *as* worthy or excellent. In addition, it can mean “prove” or “demonstrate.” The context suggests, by virtue of this rich word, pretty much all of the above. Thus critical activity, the activity of testing, but also the successful outcome of that activity in judgment or perception; and since what is successfully discerned is “the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect,” the word suggests approval on the part of the discerner, an *appreciation* of these wonderful things. But in addition to all this, the person who has this discernment and appreciation is able to show or demonstrate or prove it to others. Such showing might be by explicit verbal teaching, including correction of error; but it might also be by modeling. So this δοκιμάζειν includes what we call “transmission” of knowledge and understanding. This passage belongs clearly and solidly in the territory of virtue epistemology, inasmuch as these epistemic powers and accomplishments are consequent on a transformation by the renewal of one's mind (νοῦς). Thus we have something very similar to the epistemic activity of the Holy Spirit, or the enlightenment of the eyes of the heart (Ephesians 1.15-23). (Noûs and καρδία are often interchangeable in Paul's vocabulary.)

Paul elaborates at greater length on the variants of wisdom (now σοφία) in I Corinthians 1.18-2.16. To those who are perishing, he says, the word of the cross is foolishness, an utterly misguided aim, a pursuit of the worthless instead of the valuable. What is valuable, according to the wisdom of this age (1.20)?<sup>4</sup> No doubt there are many variants of worldly wisdom, but judging from verses 26-28 we can guess that the wisdom of the age often amounts to the judicious pursuit of social prominence, wealth, and power. The world's wise are those who uncompromisingly conceive their wellbeing in terms of such goods, and are reliably astute at discerning and exploiting opportunities to acquire them. This thought-desire disposition can characterize a person, systematically affecting his judgments, actions, and emotions. People with this orientation of their concern, and given to this way of thinking about success in life, will find the gospel of Jesus Christ foolish. It appears as a distortion of true values, a formula for personal disaster. When someone of this character closely confronts a person of the Christian orientation — when he sees a living exemplar of Christian wisdom or vividly imagines living that way himself — he may react with characteristic emotions: disgust, contempt, or amusement at the grotesque (folly to the Hellenists and a stumbling block to the Hebrews). Each of these emotions is a perception, in somewhat different terms, shaped by the subject's understanding and based in his concern for the good as he conceives it.

Before we look more closely at these wisdom-emotions, let's briefly review their object. What is it about the wisdom embodied in the gospel message that appears so twisted and preposterous, so grotesque and ugly and stinking, to the wisdom of this age?

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<sup>4</sup> Paul uses several expressions for this “wisdom”: σοφία ἀνθρώπων (2.4); σοφία τοῦ κόσμου (1.20); σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα (1.26); σοφία τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦτου (2.6); σοφία τῶν ἀρχόντων τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦτου (2.6).

At the center of the gospel message is the God who humbles himself, becoming a servant of all, including people of little “importance.” This God, incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, bids us follow him, helping people and loving them without regard to their status, their wealth, or their power to repay us. In following him we would be aspiring to a world, a society, that he governs in his style of treating each individual person as worthy of our time, attention, and energy. We would be seeking to exemplify that order of values in our own behavior, thought and feeling, as we also promote the Lordship of the one we imitate and obey. This state of things, this rule and “kingdom,” would be the object of our desire, the aim that orients our practical deliberations and our discernment, in the particular situations of our lives, of what is good and what is the contrary of good.

We seldom meet a real, thoroughgoing practitioner of this wisdom; and if we do in some sense encounter one, we don’t usually get a vivid impression of what he or she is. But if we do, and we are oriented by “the wisdom of this age,” it will be an emotional experience. If our own entrenched version of wisdom involves an aim that contradicts the wisdom of which Paul writes, we will perceive its exemplar with some such emotion as disgust, repugnance, contempt, resentment, outrage, or hatred. The intentional objects of some of these emotions (say, disgust, repugnance, contempt) fit better the folly (μωρία) model, while others (say, resentment, outrage, or hatred) fit better the offense or scandal (σκάνδαλον) model. Christopher Hitchens or Friedrich Nietzsche seem to express many of these emotions in their diatribes against such manifest partisans of Christian wisdom as Saint Paul, Billy Graham, and Mother Teresa. Each of the emotion types I have

mentioned has its own distinct grammar or logic<sup>5</sup>: each sees the object in a somewhat different “light.” But in the case of all the types, the light is a depreciating, de-valuing, one: the perception is evaluative, and negatively so.

Consider just one pair, contempt and resentment, for comparison. To feel contempt that depends on the wisdom of the present age is to see, say, Mother Teresa as *disgraceful* by the standard of the proper end, as one who *ought to be ashamed of* herself, as one who in a pretty extreme way brings *dishonor* on herself and her associates. It is to look *down* on her from the height of some supposed eminence, to see her as an *uppity unworthy*. If someone’s perception is based on caring about what he or she takes to be the true end of life, then contempt is a construal of Mother Teresa in such terms as I have specified, based on the concern for that *telos*. The concern for the *telos* contributes the peculiarly evaluative character of the perception.

Resentment is also a negative evaluative perception, but the manner of negative evaluation is quite different from contempt. Here the emphasis is on harm suffered because of the actions (or perhaps inaction) of the resented one, either by the person feeling resentment or by those he cares about. Judging from his books and media interviews, Christopher Hitchens appears to resent Mother Teresa, and the wisdom that she embodies. He seems to feel that his world has been harmed by Mother Teresa’s actions, and to want to defame her, and punish her admirers by defaming her, as just retribution for her malfeasance against him and those he cares about. Again, we have a strongly evaluative perception in certain terms characteristic of the emotion type, based on concern for an end or set of ends. Partisans of Hitchens’s kind of “wisdom” (plausibly

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<sup>5</sup> I have detailed the grammar of all these emotion types in chapter 3 of *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

enough termed a wisdom of this age) will regard it as wisdom pure and simple, and the perceptions it gives rise to as in many cases veridical.

From Paul's perspective, the resentment and contempt and emotions of the other types that are based in the concerns and allied conceptions of the "wisdoms" of this age are not veridical perceptions of value, nor is the "wisdom" that gives rise to them wisdom proper. Real wisdom is the wisdom imparted by the Holy Spirit in conjunction with the revelation of God's nature and will in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The emotions in which this wisdom is perceptually manifested are those that are associated with the work of the Holy Spirit: joy in the Lord and in the work he is doing in the world, the hope of glory, gratitude for what God has done in Christ, distress at one's own shortcomings as a disciple, grief over the failure of one's people to accept the gospel and join the effort. In Paul's words about what God's revelation has done to the "wise" boasting of the world, one can even detect something like contempt: "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, the weak things of the world to shame the strong, the ignoble things of the world and things that were not, so as to nullify what was, so that no flesh might boast before God" (I Corinthians 1.27-29). All of these Christian emotions, including Christian contempt, go back to an aim, a goal, an orienting object of ultimate concern which is desired, yearned for, sought after by the subject of the emotions. In this, Pauline wisdom fits the Aristotelian model. One will not know, with the particular kind of knowledge that Paul calls wisdom, unless one's will is aimed at the requisite end, unless one is "seeking" the kingdom (Luke 12.31), unless one has an appetite ("hunger" and "thirst") for what Jesus calls "justice" or "righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) (Matthew

5.6). We could call this the passion basis of wisdom, and it comes out in the perceptual events that we call emotions.

But wisdom has another aspect. It is after all an “intellectual” virtue and so involves a refinement of judgment, a disposition to distinguish well among the particular situations of life that bear, positively or negatively, on the end that wisdom presupposes. It is an understanding of *how* such situations bear, positively or negatively, on the end, and an ability to explain their bearing. Jesus offers a simple illustration in his parable of the ten maidens (Matthew 25.1-13). All ten had the same end in mind: to meet the bridegroom and see him to his nighttime wedding feast. Five of the maidens were wise (φρόνιμοι) and five were foolish (μωραί). The wise saw that they might need extra oil for their lamps, in case of emergency, and brought some along; the foolish didn’t. The difference between the wise and the foolish was not a difference of end, but a difference in their capacity to read the present circumstances in the light of the end. The foolish didn’t notice that being without extra oil might be detrimental to the fruition of their end; the wise did. To bring this judgment back to the emotions, we can imagine that one of the wiser maidens, on the verge of leaving the house to meet the bridegroom, might have felt a twinge of anxiety upon thinking about the possible need for lamp oil, and turned back to get some. She might have said to one of her foolish comrades, “you’d better get some oil too; you never know.” And that foolish one, feeling no anxiety, replied, “Oh, I can’t bother; everything will be all right.”

A rather different angle on the relation between the emotional and judgmental aspects of wisdom is provided by another parable in the same chapter of Matthew (25.31-46). The scene is the final judgment. The king divides the people into two groups and

says to those on his right that they have served him well, because they fed him when he was hungry, gave him drink when he was thirsty, showed him hospitality when he was a stranger, clothed him when he was naked, nursed him when he was sick, and visited him in prison. They're floored to hear this, and he explains to them that when they showed mercy in various ways to the needy, they were actually succoring his brothers and sisters, and so were succoring him. These people have a passion similar to the one presupposed by what Paul calls the wisdom of God, but they lack the wisdom that Paul speaks among the mature<sup>6</sup> (I Corinthians 2.6), which explicitly names the King and specifies how the least ones can represent him. They desire "justice" (δικαιοσύνη, Matthew 5.6), and their success at implementing it suggests that they have some understanding of what they were doing; but in an important sense they didn't know what they were doing, and are not able to explain their actions. At the final judgment they learn what they've been loving and what they've been doing all along. Plausibly, the emotion from which their actions sprung was compassion, an uncomfortable construal of human suffering and deficiencies, based on a desire that their fellow creatures flourish. This perception is correct as far as it goes, but not complete enough to qualify as a deliverance of wisdom.

Wisdom, according to Paul's epistemology, is a kind of understanding, a perspective- or orientation-giving conception. The orientation is provided by central theological concepts and propositions, integrated with a lively concern for the end or ends

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<sup>6</sup> In an important respect, these folks *are* mature, ripe for the explanation that the King here communicates to them; but they need the communication to complete their wisdom. In an interesting parallel Aristotle, speaking of the kind of discourse that he develops in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, says that it will be of little use to those who are not emotionally mature (1.3.5-7, 1095a7-12). But presumably that kind of discourse can, in persons well prepared for it, add intellectual, and thus moral competence, eventuating in full φρόνησις.

specified in the theology. This combination is a set of virtues — in particular faith, hope, and love. In the particular situations of life, the concept-molded passion yields a variety of emotions, concern-based perceptions of those situations in terms of the kind of value they bear.

### **Eyes of the Heart Enlightened**

When Paul talks about knowledge of a spiritually deep kind, he often uses a language of immediacy or presence. The model is one of direct acquaintance between the knower and the thing known. The two are in some kind of contact.

Paul says, “as for knowledge ( $\gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$ ), it will pass away” (I Corinthians 13.8), and the reason he gives is that “our knowledge is imperfect” (v.9), and “when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away” (v.10). But a bit later he says, “Now I know ( $\gamma\iota\nu\acute{\omega}\sigma\kappa\omega$ ) in part; then I shall know ( $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\gamma\nu\acute{\omega}\sigma\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ ) fully, even as I have been fully known ( $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\epsilon\gamma\nu\acute{\omega}\sigma\theta\eta\nu$ )” (v.12b). So the claim that our knowledge will pass away means not that we will have no knowledge in our resurrected state, but that we will not have the limited kind of knowledge we now have. Our current knowledge is dim, like the image we see ( $\beta\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\pi\omicron\mu\epsilon\nu$ , v.12a) of ourselves in a poor mirror. Compared to this dim knowledge, our new knowledge will be like seeing “face to face.” These comparisons suggest that in Paul’s mind acquaintance is a higher kind of knowledge than mere justified true belief (which much, but not all, of our knowledge of God currently is).

I Corinthians 13.8-13 as a whole is not about knowledge, but about love. Paul considers  $\acute{\alpha}\gamma\acute{\alpha}\pi\eta$  to be a ground of the best kind of knowledge. He prays, for example, that his readers, “being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend

(ἐξισχύσητε καταλαβέσθαι) with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know (γινῶναι) the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ), that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3.17-19). Thus in I Corinthians 13.8ff Paul is saying that ἀγάπη, when perfected in eternity, will be the ground of this knowing “face to face.” Here knowing and loving virtually collapse into one another: to know is to love and to love is to know. “Face to face” indicates that this anticipated loving is not at a distance, but in the fellowship of the spirit, in intimate ongoing acquaintance with one another. Paul says to the Philippians, “And this I pray, that your love may overflow ever more in knowledge and all discernment (περισσεύη ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει), so that you may approve (εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς) what excels in value...” (Philippians 1.9-10a).<sup>7</sup>

Here as elsewhere in Paul’s writings (Ephesians 1, Romans 12) he strongly associates knowledge with character, with the personal transformation that characterizes the Christian who is genuinely in fellowship with God. The knowledge is a natural by-product of sanctification, while also being the ground of that sanctification. The two greatest Christian virtues, the faith by which Christ dwells in the Christian’s heart and the love that the Christian has for both God and neighbor, give the Christian the *power* to *comprehend* the greatness of the gospel and the glory of God and the love of Christ. This knowledge-as-acquaintance “surpasses knowledge.” That is, this sanctified knowledge is

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<sup>7</sup> The RSV of this passage seems prejudiced by the knowledge / emotion dichotomy. “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment...” thus translating ἐν as “with” and following ‘abounding’ with a comma, thus *not* suggesting, as the Greek does, that the ἀγάπη is a *cause* of the ἐπίγνωσις and the αἰσθησις.

far more important than any mere warranted true belief about God (say, catechetical knowledge) — which Paul “admits” *is knowledge*. Catechetical knowledge is far surpassed by the knowledge that is associated with the virtues and with the sanctifying presence of God in one’s life.<sup>8</sup> The knowledge that Paul prays the Ephesians may have is a knowledge of *measure*: τὸ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος; it is a knowledge of the measure of something surpassingly good. This kind of knowledge is essentially an understanding, a perspective, and an appreciation. It is a wisdom with a perceptual character.

### **Knowledge, Virtue, and Emotion**

I have distinguished three main concepts of knowledge that we encounter in the writings of Paul: catechetical knowledge, wisdom, and acquaintance. These kinds of knowledge interact. Wisdom requires the “information” that is supplied by catechetical knowledge, while wisdom deepens catechetical knowledge with understanding. Wisdom is also required for the deepest kind of acquaintance with God, because such acquaintance involves an appreciation (understanding) of the one with whom one enjoys acquaintance. Thus acquaintance is also enriched by wisdom and catechetical knowledge; we might say also that acquaintance (fellowship, willing and happy contact) with God is a perceptual instantiation of wisdom and catechetical knowledge. Wisdom issues in

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<sup>8</sup> In Ephesians 4, Paul formulates the negative side of the dependence of knowledge on virtue and fellowship. He warns his readers not to live as some pagans do: “they are darkened in their understanding (ἐσκοτωμένοι τῇ διανοίᾳ), alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of their hardness of heart (διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν τὴν οὖσαν ἐν αὐτοῖς, διὰ τὴν πώρωσιν τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν)” (Ephesians 4.18).

judgments and perceptions (at least some of the perceptions being judgments as well), and the perceptions have the character of acquaintance.

What kind of knowledge does Paul acquire on the road to Damascus? Certainly Jesus briefly catechizes him, so that he learns who Jesus is and how he (Paul) is related to him. This is no doubt the beginning of wisdom, and the meeting, being a person-to-person encounter, does have the character of acquaintance. But it is perhaps better not to suppose that Paul was instantaneously infused with Christian wisdom, nor does the encounter on the road seem to be the happy intimacy with Christ that Paul later attests to having. I have proposed Paul's conversion as an example of a knowledge-relevantly normative true belief the acquisition of which is not sufficiently attributable to any of Paul's epistemic virtues (even taking 'virtue' in the very broad sense of performance-competency) to satisfy the intuitive requirements of Ernest Sosa's theory of knowledge. It seems to me that many cases of more ordinary testimonial knowledge are also counterexamples to the theory. But the more interesting kinds of knowledge that Paul mentions in his letters both seem to fit Sosa's theory very well. Both the wisdom that Paul is able to speak to the mature and the intimate acquaintance with God experienced by the person in whom the Holy Spirit dwells normally depend on the virtues of faith and love. So as long as we don't take Sosa's proposal as a *theory* of knowledge — that is, a general claim about the conditions necessary for all cases of knowledge whatsoever — it is a suggestive approach to understanding what Paul says about Christian knowledge.

I have emphasized the role of emotions in Paul's conception of the formation of knowledge. What is it about emotions that allows them to have such an important role in Christian knowledge? Since the early 1980s I have argued that emotions are concern-

based perceptions or “construals,” ways of “seeing” the situations of our lives in terms that impinge on our concerns — our desires, passions, attachments, and goals.<sup>9</sup> I have also argued that certain virtues — not all virtues — are “passional.” That is, they are centrally characterized by our fundamental concerns, cares, and interests.<sup>10</sup> For example, the virtue of justice involves a concern for justice: for just actions, just situations, just institutions, and anything else that can be just or unjust. Thus the just person takes joy (an emotion) in seeing justice done, doing justice, contemplating just institutions, and so forth; and he gets angry and frustrated and anxious and sad (as the particularities of the occasion warrant) when injustice prevails or is in the offing. Emotions that spring from the concern for justice express and give evidence of the virtue of justice. As perceptions of the justice or injustice of the situations they are about in their beauty (justice) or ugliness (injustice), these moral emotions are epistemic states. The person who does not tend to get angry (etc.) about injustice or rejoice (etc.) about justice is thereby missing something, epistemically, even if such a person is able to recognize and label situations and institutions as just or unjust. There is something he isn’t “getting.” He has a cognitive deficit. If this is right, then the capacity to have the right emotions about justice- and injustice-situations is an essential cognitive asset, an epistemic competence, to use Sosa’s language. And this competence is an important aspect of the virtue of justice.

In being passional, the virtues of faith and love are like the virtue of justice. They are, to a large extent, a matter of caring about God, caring about one’s neighbor, desiring the reign of God, thirsting for the relief from sin that God has offered in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>9</sup> The most complete statement of the view is in *Emotions*, chapter 2. See also *Spiritual Emotions* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See “Will Power and the Virtues,” *The Philosophical Review* **93** (1984): 227-247.

This passion is satisfied, for the believer, when he or she contemplates the gospel, considers with confidence the promises of God, or sees in the circumstances of his life some actualization of the kingdom. Some emotions of satisfaction are joy, gratitude, and hope. And the passion is frustrated when the gospel seems empty, when confidence in God's promises is low, or when the progress of the kingdom is blocked (Romans 9.1-2). The emotions of Christian frustration are grief, contrition, and despair. Faith and hope add to the passion for God and his kingdom the confidence that they are real and will be realized, making the Christian emotions predominantly positive. Thus Søren Kierkegaard, by the mouth of Johannes Climacus, calls faith "a happy passion,"<sup>11</sup> which is to say, a satisfied passion.

In addition to being based on concerns, and thus able to pick up and embody the concerns that are embedded in some virtues, emotions have a "synthetic" character that I try to suggest with words like 'construe' and 'perceive.' An emotion is a "construction" of a situation in some terms. It puts together the elements of a situation in a characteristic way. An episode of Christian hope, for example, might put together the power and promises of God (thus the happy future in some sense) with present suffering, even in a situation that seems otherwise hopeless. Here the "situation" is not just the immediate present, with its deprivations, threats, and dim prospects, but the power of perception or construal reaches out and incorporates God's past faithfulness and the future that only God can secure. Both 'construe' and 'perceive' suggest by their etymology such a grasping together of disparate elements in a way that orders and makes sense of them. Emotions thus embody understandings (or, of course, misunderstandings) of situations.

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<sup>11</sup> See *Philosophical Fragments*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 54.

So when they order the situations *rightly* in terms of *proper* concerns, they have the epistemic value of understanding, and potentially of wisdom.

But emotions are more than understandings; they are understandings with presentational content. When we perceive something, as in contrast with merely judging of it or believing it to be so, we have an *impression* of it in whatever respect we are perceiving it. Thus emotions qualify as potential vehicles of the kind of knowledge that I have called acquaintance. Just as visual perceptions can give us, by their perceptual presentations, acquaintance with the color-qualities of things, so our emotions can give us acquaintance with the value-qualities of things, and especially the qualities of their value *for us*. This claim or observation about emotions might help us to understand Paul when he says that he is praying for his readers “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know the hope to which he has called you, the wealth of the glory of his inheritance among the saints...” (Ephesians 1.18). If emotions are impressions of value, then for Paul’s readers to know in the most appropriate possible way, with the finest possible appreciation, the wonderful things that God has in store for them, it may be necessary for them actually to feel that wonderfulness in such emotions as joy, hope, and gratitude. No amount of merely justified true belief or understanding will be an adequate substitute for such acquaintance.