

Drinking, Teaching, and Singing: Ephesians 5:18-19 and the Challenges of Moral Instruction at Greco-Roman Banquets

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The progression of ideas in Ephesians 5:18-19 has puzzled commentators.¹ The author moves from general paraenetic instruction regarding living wisely (in vv. 15-17) to a specific warning against drunkenness (v. 18a). The warning against becoming drunk is contrasted with an exhortation to be filled with the spirit (v. 18b). Spirit-filled people are then characterized as persons who “speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (v. 19a).² Why raise the issue of drunkenness? And how does one account for the cluster of ideas that include moral instruction, drunkenness, and singing?

Some have sought to explain the progression by reference to literary connections. There is a rich tradition of Jewish texts (both biblical and extra-biblical) dealing with warnings against drunkenness.³ There are similarities to other places in the Pauline corpus as well. Paul connects light/dark imagery with drunkenness in 1 Thess 5:6-8 and Romans 13:12ff. Such observations can account for the warning against drunkenness but not easily for its relationship to singing.

Others attempt to locate the admonitions in a particular social context. These interpreters connect the reference to drunkenness to the letter recipients’ Gentile past—particularly to the cult of Dionysus.⁴ Such scholars suggest that the author of Ephesians may have been attempting to ensure that believers in no way partook in behavior that emulated the activities of these cults. The suggestion of a connection to Dionysus has more to do with the relationship of this god to wine than to anything distinctive in the text that would relate its recipients to this particular cult. In any case, wine was not limited to the cult of Dionysus.

Still others have suggested that the author writes to address a problem internal to the church. Perhaps the recipients of the letter are acting out in drunken disorder at the Lord's Supper like those in Corinth whom Paul writes against in 1 Cor 11.⁵ However, one finds nothing in Ephesians similar to Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians: "For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk" (1 Cor 11:21 NRSV).

Or, charismatic activity of various kinds might well have been associated with drunkenness so that some believers resorted to wine in order to produce such activity.⁶ The problem with these suggestions is that, apart from the warning against drunkenness, the exhortations in Ephesians operate at such a general level. There is very little in the letter to suggest that the author is writing to address specific issues in a particular church.⁷

There was a context in the ancient world where moral instruction, wine, and music were joined together: the Mediterranean banquet.⁸ The banquet provided an occasion for eating, for drinking, and for entertainment. Moral philosophers used these occasions as opportunities to instruct and to explore questions regarding character formation.

I want to take up a suggestion published several years ago by Peter Gosnell and refine his discussion.⁹ Gosnell pointed to this banqueting background to help explain the contrast between drunkenness and being filled with the spirit in Ephesians 5:18-19. He briefly called attention to the presence of music, combined with the warnings against drunkenness and moral instruction as suggestive of a meal context.¹⁰ I want to provide a fuller discussion of the ways the meal context helps us understand what lies behind the language in these verses.

I am not suggesting that the author of Ephesians is addressing the specific banqueting practices of the recipients of the letter. Rather, I am proposing that, given the fact that Christians frequently (if not always) shared meals as part of their assembly, it should not be surprising that that context might influence how certain ideas entered the discussion.¹¹

In what follows, I first remind the reader of the dangers banquets presented to a successful philosophical discussion. I then turn to an examination of Plutarch's *Convivial Questions*.¹² In this text, Plutarch has assembled samples of his own conversations at banquets around the Roman Empire and offers reflections on banqueting

practices. Because he has an interest in moral formation in a banquet context, his work will serve as a useful guide into the challenges of philosophical discussion in that environment.

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Symposia

Banquets were an important part of the Mediterranean social world. They consisted in communal habits, the repetition of which formed and reformed the structure and cohesion of a group.¹³ Men aspiring to status were obliged to offer lavish dinners.¹⁴ The host of the banquet invited friends (normally social peers) who assembled at the house of the host (or at a dining hall in a temple). They reclined on couches from which they ate their meal. After the meal, the tables were removed and a time of drinking and entertainment ensued (called in Greek, a symposium). Banquets were a prominent part of the day.¹⁵

By the fourth century BCE, the symposium had become identified in Greek literature as a location for philosophical conversations.¹⁶ By the Roman period, it was an especially common assumption that the symposium should be accompanied by particular types of speech, usually an examination of scholarly questions and problems that would often derive from the circumstances of the meal itself.¹⁷ So there was within the Greco-Roman literary tradition by the time that Plutarch wrote a strong connection between the banquet and philosophical discussion.

However, the conducting of philosophical conversation at a symposium was not an obvious activity. Greek and Roman literature is filled with illustrations of symposia devolving into drunkenness, sexual excess, and violence. Wine and brawling at symposia had long been a theme for Old Comedy and satyr plays. For example, in Sophocles' satyr play *Syndeipnon*, Achaean warriors engage in a comically undignified dispute that results in the contents of a chamber pot being emptied on the head of one of the disputants.¹⁸ Lucian, in his *Symposium*, satirizes the hypocrisy of philosophers misbehaving at a wedding banquet: they argue over who gets the best seat; they argue over food distribution; they become drunk, and throw food and wine; one leaves with a concussion, another leaves with a broken jaw, and one leaves with his eye gouged out and his nose bitten off.¹⁹ Philo also draws on this caricature when he contrasts Jewish eating practices with Greek and Roman ones:

Perhaps some of those who are perversely minded
and are not ashamed to censure excellent things will

say, ‘What sort of a feast is this where there is no eating and drinking, no troupe of entertainers or audience, no copious supply of strong drink nor the generous display of a public banquet, nor moreover the merriment and revelry of dancing to the sound of flute and harp, and timbrels and cymbals, and the other instruments of music which awaken the unruly lusts through the channel of the ears?’ (*Spec.* 2.193).²⁰

While these literary illustrations play to stereotypes, the evidence from inscriptions indicates that there must be some truth on which the stereotypes were based. The regulations for the association of Zeus Hypsistos in Philadelphia warn against arguing over genealogies or verbally abusing one another at banquets.²¹ The regulations for a guild of sheep and cattle owners imposes a fine (to be determined) against those who behave badly as a result of being drunk or who push to get a better seat at the table.²² Similar concerns about disrupting a banquet as a result of drunkenness and fighting over seats is reflected in the regulations of the worshippers of Diana and Antinoüs.²³

The social capital at stake in these events contributed to the problem. Banquets were arenas in which guests competed for honor. They put on display their literary and musical skills as well as teased their fellow dining companions. Each guest was expected to demonstrate his skill either in solo performance or as part of a choral group. Poems or songs could be improvised or composed before and memorized for the symposium. These activities exhibited the individual artistic and intellectual abilities of the guests but also exposed them to the sanction of the group.²⁴ A prominent feature of sympotic gaming and poetic performance was teasing one’s peers.²⁵ Ideally, the exchanges worked for the good of all the assembled friends. But in practice, the games played could turn ugly.²⁶ For example, Lucian depicts a scene where a clown, brought in as entertainment, begins to poke fun at the guests. Most of them receive the teasing as good fun but one guest takes offense and a fight breaks out (*Symp.*, 19). Because the evenings combined these competitive activities with an expectation of joking and teasing, the influence of wine might help move a comment from critique to criticism—or to insult.

The literary sources, then, suggest a fragile ecosystem bringing together ingredients that, when mixed, could result in two widely different experiences by the end of the evening: just the right

amount of wine, the right amount of teasing, and the evening could be fulfilling and perhaps philosophical. A little too much wine, the wrong word spoken at the wrong time or with the wrong tone of voice, and the evening could devolve into a brawl or worse.²⁷ Moderate drinking fueled and energized the competitive spirit at symposia, but excessive drinking could push the teasing beyond what was tolerable; it then gave offense, and when attempts at reconciliation failed to appease tempers, the situation degenerated into violence and brawling.²⁸

Convivial Questions

In his *Convivial Questions*, Plutarch offers insight into this delicate environment. Scattered among his more mundane references to the kinds of conversations he has had at banquet are references to an appropriate philosophical experience. In fact, the very first question in the *Convivial Questions* is whether philosophy is an appropriate activity at a symposium. Yet even as he emphasizes the importance of philosophical conversation at a symposium, he knows that philosophical conversation might not succeed at a symposium.

Some argued that the purpose of the symposium was to have fun and that philosophy was too serious for such an occasion (613A). Apart from the mood of the event, the presence of wine presented certain dangers. Wine stirs the emotions and makes judgment unstable (714D-E). It makes the less intelligent person less likely to follow the prudent (714F). So the presence of wine and drinking would inhibit the ability of the guests to explore philosophical topics.

But others argued that the nature of philosophy—as the “art of life”—required it to be present at symposia. Philosophical discussion should be a part of all life’s encounters. One can, after all, distinguish between “drinking” and being “drunk” (715D). Drinking actually facilitates good conversation (645B). Wine drives out the timidity that is the greatest inhibition to deliberation (715E-F). One need not fear wine as a stimulus to passions (716A-C). Plutarch even argues that the conversation actually helps distribute the wine through the body and thus philosophical banquets contribute to the prevention of the complete dissipation of the drinker’s mind under the influence of wine (660C).

So how, according to Plutarch, might one create a symposium that would be conducive to philosophical discussion and avoid drunken excess? If the host can attend to three variables for the evening, philosophical discussion can more likely take place: 1) the selection of

guests, 2) the choice of topics for discussion, and 3) the choice and use of music. I provide brief illustrations of each.

Choosing Guests

Plutarch discusses two concerns with respect to inviting guests: 1) getting the right people to the banquet, and 2) seating them in the best arrangement. About the guests, Plutarch writes:

A dinner party is a sharing of earnest and jest, of words and deeds; so the diners must not be left to chance, but must be such as are friends and intimates of one another who will enjoy being together. Cooks make up their dishes of a variety of flavors, blending the sour, the oily, the weak, and the pungent, but you could not get good and agreeable company at dinner by throwing together men who are different in their associations and sympathies (708D).²⁹

Because of the combination of serious conversation and jesting, guests must be carefully chosen. This statement depicts the ideal that symposia are made up of a group of friends who are essentially social equals; these guests share similar social standing and values. If that kind of banquet can be constructed, the chances of having an evening informed by philosophy improve and the chances that the jests turn to insults diminish. But, as we will see in a moment, Plutarch was fully aware that on certain occasions people with different associations and sympathies did share meals.³⁰ A clever host could manage those as well.

But whether the guests were social equals or drawn from a variety of different social or ethnic contexts, once the guests arrived, they needed to be arranged around the dining room. This challenge is the second problem in book 1 of the *Convivial Questions*: Should one let the guests seat themselves or should seats be assigned (615C). Plutarch's brother hosted a banquet at which he let the guests seat themselves (against Plutarch's recommendation) and the event did not go well.³¹

One could seat guests according to their social rank but the result of that strategy would not reflect the ideal of an assembly of friends but would be nothing more than a replication of the wider society. However, if the guest list includes people who should be

respected because of age or who are visitors from other countries, their status should be respected. By not showing honor to such guests, one risks giving offense. He writes:

“Now if, I said, we are entertaining young men, fellow citizens and intimates, we must accustom them, as Timon says, to take for themselves without ostentation and vanity whatever places they happen to find, taking good humor as a fine viaticum to friendship; but when we are occupied with learned talk in the company of foreigners or magistrates or older men, I am afraid that, if we shut vanity out at the court-yard gate, we may seem to be letting it in by the side gate, and with plenty of non-distinctions” (616F-617A).

The more complicated the guest list in terms of social status, the greater danger that the evening could end in insult and possibly violence.

A host who can manage his guests, both in terms of selection and in terms of arrangement at tables, improves the odds that philosophical conversation can take place.

Choosing Topics

Plutarch recommends that at those banquets where the guests are capable, philosophical discussion is the ideal sympotic activity (713D). He is quite insistent that words and rational discussion are of chief importance. Other forms of entertainment might be present but they ought not interfere with this activity. If the guests include persons who are less philosophically inclined, though, the entertainment should be something more appropriate to the interests of those guests present (613E-F). But even in these situations, Plutarch states, “The height of sagacity is to talk philosophy without seeming to do so and in jesting to accomplish all that those in earnest could” (613F-614A). A clever host can work philosophy into any conversation with humor.

But whether the topics are explicitly philosophical or not, the engaging in conversation is crucial to the success of the evening. Plutarch states:

Sympotic talk prevents the complete dissipation of the drinkers’ minds under the influence of the wine.

Conversation steadies those who drink, adding through relaxation an element of gaiety and —yes— of kindly sociability, if people go about it in the right way, since the wine makes the company pliable and ready to take an impression, as it were, from the seal of friendship (660C).

The combination of the talk and the wine can reinforce each other if each is properly treated. The wine can help prepare people for good conversation; the conversation can help keep the person drinking from becoming drunk.

But not every topic is appropriate. Plutarch provides some general guidance regarding such topics. He writes:

[Suitable subjects] are supplied by history;³² others it is possible to take from current events; some contain many lessons bearing on philosophy,³³ many on piety;³⁴ some induce an emulous enthusiasm for courageous and great-hearted deeds, and some for charitable and humane deeds. If one makes unobtrusive use of them to entertain and instruct his companions as they drink, not the least of the evils of intemperance will be taken away (614A-B).³⁵

Here Plutarch provides a variety of topics—some that could lend themselves to philosophy but any of which, if used well, will help keep the symposium from becoming problematic.

But the success of the symposium depended not just on the topics chosen, but also the vocabulary and tone of the words employed. He writes: “Subjects of discourse, like friends, should be admitted to dinners only if they are of proved quality. . . . Let us make a practice of speaking only such words as may be divulged by anyone to anyone, as they may if the topics involved license, no profanity, no malice, and no vulgarity” (697E).

So, in an ideal symposium, the entertainment will consist in philosophical discussion. But if the guests are not capable of that kind of activity, topics should be chosen with care because some topics are better than others. And a skilled host will be able to accomplish the goals of philosophical conversation even without his guests suspecting. And whatever topics are taken up should be discussed with an appropriate tone and without intent to cause harm.

Choosing Music

Music was an integral component of banqueting activities. Singing games were frequently played by participants.³⁶ Musical instruments were a prominent component of the evening activities. The aulos and kithara were regularly present; sometimes played by the participants in the banquet, sometimes by performers brought in by the host.³⁷ The presence of music at the symposium worried Plutarch. He writes:

Hence we must be especially wary of these pleasures; they are extremely powerful, because they do not, like those of taste and touch and smell, have their only effect in the irrational and 'natural' part of our mind, but lay hold of our faculty of judgment and prudence (706A-B).

Music is dangerous because unlike a sense such as taste that affects only the irrational or natural part of the mind, it agitates that part but also the component that affects decision making.

Even though Plutarch worried about the effects of the music, he believed its presence at the symposium was too enmeshed to be eliminated (712F-713A). So one needed to attend to the effects of music on each component of the soul.

The primary contribution that music brings to a banquet is the potential to calm the irrational aspect of the soul.³⁸ That component, once agitated, could lead to strife and rivalry (713f). If a guest list has not been well chosen, or the conversation has turned to insult or profanity, Plutarch insists that music, properly used, can calm agitated persons.³⁹

The best occasion for musical entertainment is a party where the waves of strife or rivalry are rising toward a crest. There it can drown out verbal abuse; it can check a discussion that is deviating into an unpleasant squabble or a contest in sophistry; or if the discussion is moving in the direction of political and legal controversy, it can keep it in hand until the company settles down to a fresh start quiet and free from gales of eloquence (713E-F).

Music could also have an impact on the decision-making component of the soul. Here the focus was on the presence of words with the music. So, Plutarch cautioned against using musical instruments apart from song—words must be part of any musical activities (713B). He writes, “. . . Let us not answer the voice of the lyre or flute when it knocks at our ear on its own; but if it comes in company with words and song, providing a feast to delight our rational part, then let us usher it in” (713C-D).

The singer will be invited into the banquet because songs bring words that can interact with a person’s capacity to reason. But the singer must choose carefully the song he or she sings. They must avoid dirges and laments and choose more cheerful songs (712F).

So, the person who wants to increase the odds of having a symposium at which philosophical conversation and instruction can take place, and reduce the odds of a symposium devolving into a drunken brawl, will 1) carefully choose the people invited to the banquet; 2) carefully choose the topics raised in conversation (and be mindful of the vocabulary used and the tone of voice); and 3) carefully choose the music played and sung during the evening.

Ephesians

While the author of Ephesians is not attempting to construct a philosophical banquet, he is concerned with appropriate behavior in community. To varying degrees, the three variables Plutarch sought to control in his banquets are present either in 5:18-19 or in its near context. I take up these variables in the opposite order that I introduced them from Plutarch.

Music

As I have illustrated, one of the ways Plutarch sought to control the symposium was through the use of appropriate musical practices. For the author of Ephesians, music does not control the assembly but becomes the expression of inspired participants.⁴⁰

That the author considers music important is indicated by his piling up of synonyms associated with the idea of singing. He begins by characterizing the desired kind of speech with three musical nouns: they are to “speak” to one another “in psalms, hymns, and songs.” He then uses two synonyms for singing (ᾄδοντες [*adontes*] and ψάλλοντες [*psallontes*]). It would be hard to emphasize the idea any more.

Most interpreters conclude that we cannot draw firm distinctions between the terms.⁴¹ In the final analysis, whatever subtle distinctions might exist between the terms does not affect my proposal. My interest is that the author includes musical “speech” as part of a divinely inspired assembly—the opposite of (or in contrast with) drunkenness.

The choice of song in Plutarch does two things: it can calm someone in an agitated state; but it can also affect, for better or worse, the decision making of an individual. The author of Ephesians offers no insight to his views of either of these possibilities.⁴² He finds it sufficient only to emphasize that his audience should sing. Plutarch also worries about the place of music in moral formation. The author of Ephesians shows no obvious reluctance to use music; he does not warn of its dangers. This concern regarding the kind of music appropriate for Christian worship does appear in the third and fourth century among some authors.⁴³

Topics

With respect to choosing topics, the author of Ephesians clearly shows a concern for the topics his audience discusses. In 5:18, the author exhorts his audience to sing by means of a more general participle referring to speaking; they are to speak to one another. The kind of speech, though, is musical (and inspired). In the larger context of this passage, the author also shows concern for appropriate topics of conversation. To take just a few examples, the author writes: “But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, *must not even be mentioned* among you, as is proper among saints” (5:3). Or in 5:10-12: “Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For *it is shameful even to mention* what such people do secretly.”⁴⁴

The author also calls attention to the kind of language the audience should use. In 5:4, he states: “Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk . . .”. A few verses later he states: “Let no one deceive you with empty words” (5:6). So, like Plutarch, the author pays attention not only to appropriate topics for discussion but also to vocabulary.

Guests

Because the author of Ephesians does not explicitly address banqueting behavior, he does not really address the topic of “guests.” But he does show strong interest in the formation of a particular kind of people. He writes, “Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people” (5:15). Earlier in the chapter, he provides guidance on proper topics “among saints” (5:3). In chapter 4 he cautions them, “you must no longer live as the Gentiles live” (4:17). This last verse calls to mind the lengthy exhortation back in chapter 2 where he contrasts the audience’s previous existence as Gentiles with their current status. The whole of vv. 11-19 is relevant but note the following statements in particular:

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called “the un-circumcision” by those who are called “the circumcision”—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world (vv. 11-12).

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God (v. 19).

The author connects Christian moral behavior to a certain sense of identity. For moral formation to take place the audience must understand they are no longer one kind of person but have become another. Once that identity is understood, moral formation can progress.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while the author of Ephesians is not addressing the dining habits of his audience, the noteworthy combination of general moral instruction with a concern regarding drunkenness and the

encouragement to sing particular kinds of songs is at home in the context of the Mediterranean banquet and symposium. Like moral philosophers who were interested in forming well-lived lives, the author of Ephesians reminds the hearers of his text that life in the Spirit centers on sound conversation—words that build up community. This goal is aided by well-chosen music—such as hymns, psalms, and spiritual songs; music appropriate for children of God. By using these songs, in contrast to drunkenness, and by paying careful attention to their speech, they will live up to the expectations to which members of the household of God are held.

Endnotes

¹ For example, Andrew Lincoln writes: “[verse 18’s] more specific force introduces a change from the more general nature of the preceding exhortations which at first appears quite surprising” (*Ephesians*, WBC 42 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990], 343). The relationship of this passage in Ephesians to Colossians 3:16 is complex. There are some strong similarities but also some significant differences. The actual relationship between the two texts does not affect my proposal.

² All quotations of Ephesians are from the NRSV.

³ The wording of the statement against drunkenness might derive from Prov 23:31 (but it is also similar to T.Jud. 14.1). More generally, warnings against drunkenness occur frequently in Second Temple Jewish literature. Cf., T.Jud. 14.1; T.Iss. 7.3; Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.195; 2.204; Philo *Spec.* 2.193. Philo devotes an entire treatise to the topic of drunkenness: *De ebrietate* (and Philo connects the material in this treatise to a discussion which he began in the second part of *De plantatione* where he addresses the question of Noah’s drunkenness).

⁴ Cf. Martin Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (London: SCM Press, 1983), 188, n. 7; Stanley E. Porter, “Ephesians 5:18-19 and its Dionysian background,” in *Testimony and Interpretation: Early Christology in its Judeo-Hellenistic Milieu: Studies in Honour of Petr Pokorný*, ed. Jiří Mrázek and Jan Roskovec (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 68-80; Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., “The Dionysian Background of Ephesians 5:18,” *BSac* 136 (1979): 249-257.

⁵ E.g. Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1957), 246; Joachim Gnilka, *Der Epheserbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1971), 269; James L. Houlden, *Paul’s Letters from Prison:*

Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), 328; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM, 1975), 238; Jacob Adai, *Der heilige Geist als Gegenwart Gottes in den einzelnen Christen, in der Kirche und in der Welt* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1985), 223, 226.

⁶ Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (New York: T & T Clark, 1998), 508. The warning against drunkenness might be a response to a perception on the part of outsiders that behavior on the part of Christians inspired by the Spirit was the result of inebriation (note the impression recorded in Acts that believers filled with the Spirit were drunk; cf. Acts 2:4, 13, 15) (Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians*, SP 17 [Liturgical Press, 2008], 318). See also Philo *Ebr.* 147-149 who compares the person inspired by God to a person drunk with wine. The God-filled person's physical appearance changes in a way not unlike the person drunk with wine so that the outside observer cannot tell the difference between these two states. The physical characteristics of the person inspired by God are similar to the physical characteristics of the person drunk with wine. It is the sort of comparison found in Philo between inebriation and being possessed by God that Lincoln is persuaded lies behind the thought of the author of Ephesians (*Ephesians*, 344).

⁷ Of the various options, it seems to me least likely that the recipients of the text are numbing themselves to the evil days of the end time (e.g. Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, 508, Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-8*, AB 34 [New York: Doubleday, 1974], 580-81).

⁸ For a discussion of the difficulties in choosing the most appropriate term to use when describing this kind of ritualized dining, see Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 22-23. I choose the term "banquet" to help indicate that these formal meals did not necessarily occur with every evening meal.

⁹ Peter W. Gosnell, "Ephesians 5:18-20 and Mealtime Propriety," *TynBul* 44 (1993): 363-371. The response to Gosnell among commentators has been mixed. Harold Hoehner rejects Gosnell's suggestion (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002], 701-02). Clinton Arnold suggests that the banqueting context is too specific (*Ephesians*, ZECNT 10 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010], 348-49). Frank Thielman is open to Gosnell's suggestion (*Ephesians*, BECNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

Academic, 2010], 358). Ernest Best is intrigued by the suggestion but asserts that Plutarch and Dio Chrysostom belong to, or are concerned with, the elite of society and therefore do not truly serve as a parallel to the people likely to be reading the document. He suggests that trade guilds and burial clubs are a better analogy (*Ephesians*, 509). While Best's concern about the social status of the authors that Gosnell (and I) use is well taken, the values and practices described in these elite authors were inculcated by the non-elite in associations (trade guilds and burial clubs). For discussions that illustrate non-elite appropriation of elite values and practices, see Ramsay MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations: 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 76; John S. Kloppenborg, "COLLEGIA and *THIASOI*: Issues in Function, Taxonomy, and Membership," in *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World*, ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson, (London: Routledge, 1996), 18, 27; Joseph H. Hellerman, *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi: Carmen Christi as Cursus Pudorum*, SNTSMS 132 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 100.

¹⁰ Gosnell's discussion of Greco-Roman practices observes that singing was a part of banqueting practices and that Plutarch was concerned about the kinds of singing that took place but does not include a discussion of the ways in which music was integral to Plutarch's understanding of the banquet ("Mealtime Propriety," 366-368).

¹¹ On meals and Christian assembly, see especially Dennis E. Smith *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003) and Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern TANZ 13* (Tübingen: Franke Verlag, 1996). Gosnell uses the work of Berger and Luckmann to suggest that language conveys social structure (364). He states that the language in 5:18-20 reveals traces of meal practices (370-71).

¹² He composed this text in nine books, totaling approximately 95 "questions" (problems) for his friend Sosius Senecio.

¹³ Pauline Schmitt Pantel, "Collective Activities and the Political in the Greek City," in *The Greek City*, ed. Oswyn Murray and Simon Price (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 206; also, "Sacrificial Meal and *Symposion*: Two Models of Civic Institutions in the Ancient City?" in *Symptica: A Symposium on the Symposion*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 24. See also, Stanley K.

Stowers, "Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Do Not: Toward An Anthropology of Greek Religion," in *Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 293-333.

¹⁴ Christopher P. Jones, "Dinner Theater," in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 196.

¹⁵ These formal meals did not necessarily occur with every evening meal and, of course, one's social location impacted the frequency with which one might participate. Cf. Euripides *Ion* 1177-78; Plato *Symp.* 174e; Xenophon *Symp.*, 1-3, 7, 9.

¹⁶ Jason König, *Saints and Symposiasts: The Literature of Food and the Symposium in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 11.

¹⁷ König, *Saints and Symposiasts*, 15. Plutarch, for example, asks the following questions that obviously derive from the banquet context (one might also add to this list): "Why the place at banquets called the consul's acquired honour" (Book I, Question 3); "What sort of man the symposiarch must be" (Book I, Question 4); "What the subjects are about which Xenophon says people, when they are drinking, are more pleased to be questioned and teased than not" (Book II, Question 1); "Why women are least liable to intoxication and old men most quickly liable" (Book III, Question 3).

¹⁸ Dana F. Sutton, "The Satyr Play," in *Greek Drama*, vol 1.2 of *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, ed. P. E. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 96.

¹⁹ *Symp.*, 17-19; 43-46. König, *Saints and Symposiasts*, 18. For a discussion of satire and banquets, including Lucian's *Symposium*, see Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, 62-64.

²⁰ All translations of Philo, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Loeb Classical Library. Compare also his discussion of the Therapeutai: ". . . contrasting them [Therapeutai] to the banquets of other people. When others drink strong wine, it is as if they had been drinking not wine but some agitating and maddening drink, or even the most dangerous drink that can be imagined for driving a man out of his mind. They shriek, rage, and tear things to pieces like ferocious dogs. And they rise up and attack one another, biting and gnawing each other's noses, ears, fingers, and other parts of their body. . ." (*Vita*, 40).

²¹ “It is not lawful for any one of them to . . . to argue about one another’s genealogies at the banquet (*symposion*) or to abuse one another verbally at the banquet, or to chatter or to indict or accuse another, or to resign for the course of the year, or to be absent from the banquet, or . . . , or to steal the wife of another member, or to obstruct the leader (?)” (*PLond VII 2193* = Roberts, Skeat, and Nock 1936, 39-88 = *NewDocs I 5* in Richard S. Ascough, et. al., *Associations in the Greco-Roman World: A Sourcebook* [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012]), 177).

²² “. . . If a member behaves badly owing to drunkenness, he shall be fined whatever the association (*koinon*) decides. . . . Anyone who shoves in front of another at the banquets and takes his seat shall pay an extra three obols to sit in his own place . . .” (*PMich V 243* in Ascough, et. al., *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, 183).

²³ “It was further voted that any member who moves from one seat to another so as to cause a disturbance shall be fined four sesterces. Any member, moreover, who speaks abusively of another or causes an uproar shall be fined twelve sesterces. Any member who uses any abusive or insolent language to a president at a banquet shall be fined twenty sesterces” (*CIL XIV 2112* = *ILS 7212* = Bendlin 2011 in Ascough, et. al., *Associations in the Greco-Roman World*, 197-198).

²⁴ Pellizer, “Outlines of a Morphology of Symptotic Entertainment,” in *Symptotica*, 179.

²⁵ Derek Collins, *Master of the Game: Competition and Performance in Greek Poetry* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2005), 63.

²⁶ Pellizer, “Outlines of a Morphology of Symptotic Entertainment,” 183; Collins, *Master of the Game*, 63.

²⁷ Collins, *Master of the Game*, 73.

²⁸ Collins, *Master of the Game*, 71.

²⁹ A little later, he adds: “. . . if ignorance and lack of culture keep company with wine, not even that famous golden lamp of Athena could make the party refined and orderly” (716D-E). Translations of Plutarch are taken (and occasionally slightly modified) from the Loeb Classical Library.

³⁰ The Roman convivium tended to be more often associated with an assumption of inequality among guests, because of its status as a vehicle for Roman structures of patronage (König, *Saints and Symposiasts*, 26).

³¹ Lucian's host, for example, debates whether the elder philosopher should be seated in a more honorable place than the Epicurean who is a priest from an aristocratic family (*Symp.* 8-9).

³² Plutarch deals with Alexander's excessive drinking in Book I, Question 6.

³³ Plutarch discusses Platonic ideas in Book VII, Questions 1 and 2; in Book VIII, question 2; and in Book IX, 5. He discusses Pythagorean ideas in Book VIII, Questions 7 and 8.

³⁴ Plutarch introduces questions about Judaism in Book IV, Questions 5 and 6; in Book VIII, Question 2, he asks why God is always doing geometry.

³⁵ Plutarch was concerned not only with the choice of topics but that they have an order to them: "One who permits conversation in a drinking-party, but makes no move to see that the conversation is orderly and profitable, is much more ridiculous than the man who approves of serving wine and dessert at dinner, but pours the wine unmixed and sets on food unseasoned and uncleaned. For no drink or food is so disagreeable or unwholesome, for lack of the right treatment, as is conversation that drifts about randomly and foolishly at a party" (716E-F).

³⁶ For a thorough discussion, see Collins, *Master of the Game*.

³⁷ For a discussion of musical practices at banquets and 1 Corinthians 14:26, see Richard A. Wright, "The Sounds of Silence: Hearing the Music in Pauline Assemblies," in *The One Who Sows Bountifully: Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers*, ed. Caroline Johnson Hodge, et. al., Brown Judaic Studies 356 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2013), 341-49. For an extensive collection of primary texts plus discussion, see Andrew Barker, *Greek Musical Writings*, Cambridge Readings in the Literature of Music (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). For a discussion of music in the context of the city of Athens, see Penelope Murray and Peter Wilson, eds., *Music and the Muses: The Culture of 'Mousike' in the Classical Athenian City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). The most thorough treatment of Greek music is M. L. West, *Ancient Greek Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). For a good discussion that includes both Greece and Rome, see John G. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

³⁸ There was considerable discussion among moral philosophers regarding the place of the musical arts (which, in addition to the activity we call music, included poetry and dance) in moral

formation. For those interested in moral formation of individuals, music presented certain problems. Plutarch's approach toward music is clearly influenced by Plato. Music shapes a person's character through repeated exposure to melodies and rhythms; both rhythm and melodies actually deliver character traits to the soul. In this ethical function, training in music is frequently compared to training the body—like lifting weights (*Resp.* 410a-412b). See Robert W. Wallace, "Music Theorists in Fourth-Century Athens," in *Mousike: Metrica Ritmica e Musica Greca in Memoria di Giovanni Comotti*, ed. B. Gentili and F. Perusino (Pisa and Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 1995), 17-39.

³⁹ Gosnell also points to something similar in Dio Chrysostom: ". . . the man that is gentle and has a properly ordered character, easily endures the rudeness of the others, and acts like a gentleman himself, trying to the best of his ability to bring the ignorant chorus into a proper demeanour by means of fitting rhythm and melody. And he introduces topics of conversation and by his tact and persuasiveness attempts to get those present to be more harmonious and friendly in the intercourse with one another" (*Or.* 27.3-4; in "Mealtime Propriety," 367-68).

⁴⁰ That being said, musical behavior does in a sense "control" the way people act in assembly: people expressing themselves in these musical ways will not become drunk.

⁴¹ Some scholars comment on the likelihood that these songs might have been accompanied by instruments on the basis of the term ψάλλοντες (*psallontes*). John Muddiman insists that the term refers strictly to song accompanied by stringed instrument (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, BNTC [New York: Continuum, 2001], 248; so also Barth [*Ephesians* 4-8, 584]). Best suggests that the term does not necessarily require instrumental music (*Ephesians*, 512-13). MacDonald indicates the term more likely refers just to singing (*Colossians and Ephesians*, 319). Hoehner argues that connecting the verb to instruments reads too much of the earlier meaning into the Ephesian context. He equivocates stating that the context does not require instrumental playing but neither does it rule instruments out (*Ephesians*, 711-12). Best, Hoehner, and MacDonald all point to the entry in BDAG 891 in support of their conclusions. For a brief critique of the consensus reflected in the entry in BDAG, see Wright, "Sounds of Silence," 342.

⁴² Perhaps, like Philo, the author of Ephesians is characterizing the presence of the spirit as a kind of inebriation: do not be filled with drink but be filled with spirit.

⁴³ See, for example, the discussion in Charles H. Cosgrove, "Clement of Alexandria and Early Christian Music," *J ECS* 14 (2006): 255-282.

⁴⁴ Emphasis added.