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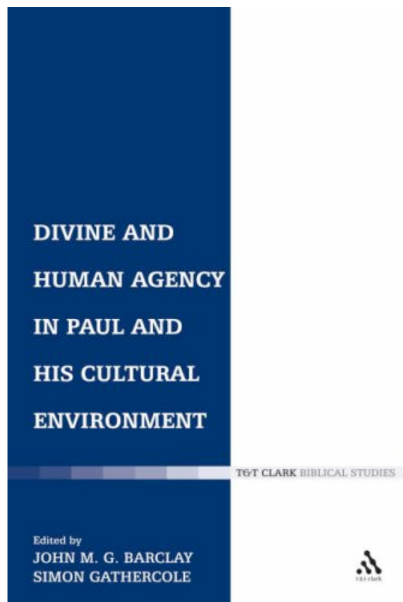

Barclay, John M. G., and Simon Gathercole, eds.

Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment

New York: T&T Clark, 2008. Pp. x + 208. Paper. $44.95.
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This book consists of papers presented at a colloquium held at the University of Aberdeen in August 2004. The goal of the colloquium, as John Barclay indicates in the book's introduction, was "to [better] understand agency as a structural element in Pauline theology, by placing him within select features of his cultural context" (5). The method involves the adoption of a "well-tuned comparative approach" (2) in which constructions of agency in Second Temple and early rabbinic literature, as well as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, were juxtaposed with those in Paul's letters. Inasmuch as the collection takes as a point of departure E. P. Sanders's critique of the grace/works dichotomy (and the particular views of agency that this implies) that previous generations of scholars took to characterize the difference between Christianity and a homogeneous Judaism, it falls within a growing number of collections of essays stemming from colloquia, seminars, and related venues that seek to critique or refine aspects of the "new perspective" opened up by Sanders (e.g., James Dunn, ed., *Paul and the Mosaic Law* [1996]; D. A. Carson et al., eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism* [2 vols.; 2001, 2004]; the forthcoming volume signaled by Reimund Bieringer and Didier Pollefeyt (http://www.theo.kuleuven .be/page/projects/419/).

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Following Barclay's introduction, an essay by Gabriele Boccaccini seeks to reconstruct a genealogy of views of divine and human agency within Second Temple Judaism. The working assumption throughout the essay is that human agency exists in inverse proportion to the influence of external, demonic or angelic agencies. Systems that find no role for such entities (e.g., early Zadokite Judaism) allow an expansive view of human agency, whereas those systems that entertain the notion of outside influence by the devil or demonic beings (i.e., Enochic and Essene Judaism, early Christianity) evidence a corresponding reduction in the scope allowed for human agency. Humans, subject to hostile demonic forces, suffer a double loss of agency; in order to be freed from demonic influence, they must rely on divine grace. In these systems, outside agencies provide both plight and solution. This finding, however, is contradicted by Stephen Westerholm's contribution in the same volume. Westerholm finds no dimunition of human moral agency in texts that make reference to demonic activity. Conversely, "in the texts that are most pessimistic about human moral performance … demonic powers are not a factor" (98).

The second essay, by Philip Alexander, focuses on the Sermon on the Two Spirits in 1QS 3.13–4.24. On the basis of "echoes and similarities" to the Sermon's dualistic and deterministic worldview in 4Q502, 4Q186, Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice, CD 2.2–13, and the War Scroll, Alexander concludes that 1QS was an influential rule-book used by the Maskil for the instruction of new members of the Qumran community. The Sermon expresses a deterministic worldview according to which God is depicted as a "cosmic puppet-master who pulls everyone's strings. There is, apparently, little room for independent human agency…. Divine agency is all" (48). Even so, a tension runs through the scrolls. Even with this emphasis on predestination, the scrolls include numerous examples of halakic/ethical exhortation, which apparently presume an anthropology of responsible moral agency. Alexander concludes that this tension "inevitably leaves the modern reader with a sense of unfinished theological business" (48). The same tension may also leave the reader of Alexander's essay with the sense that posing divine and human agencies as mutually exclusive categories may overly simplify a more complex interaction (esp. in light of the essays by Engberg-Pederson, Avemarie, and Barclay in the same volume). Nevertheless, Alexander's argument that the Sermon on the Two Spirits creatively reinterprets themes derived from the creation story of Genesis (*creatio ex nihilo*, the knowledge of good and evil) rewards close reading.

Friedrich Avemarie finds in early rabbinic literature a complex interplay between divine and human agency. The divine will for humanity is expressed in the Torah. The human ability either to obey or to reject this will, however, entails a "considerable self-restriction of God's control" (50), which introduces uncertainty and instability into the notion of God's rule. Avemarie deftly deals with the problem for human agency posed by God's

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foreknowledge. Through an interpretation of Sifre Numbers 115, he concludes that divine foreknowledge does not negate human responsibility or free will; human action that corresponds with that which is foreknown is nonetheless contingent on the consent of the human being. Finally, Avemarie notes that, according to Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana 12.6, God's ability to be God (i.e., to act as sovereign over creation) itself depends on human willingness to obey the commandments. "God and Israel depend on each other mutually. Agency and recipiency unfold in argument and reciprocity" (70).

Steven Westerholm tests Timo Laato's argument that Paul, in comparison with other early Jewish writers, had a more pessimistic view of the human capacity to act in accordance with the dictates of divine justice. Westerholm rapidly surveys a range of Second Temple and rabbinic literature and finds that, in general, this literature does impute to humans the ability to follow God's laws, whereas Paul does not impute to humans the same ability. For Paul, humans are incapable of following the law. Paul's differences with other Jewish texts, however, are not to be attributed to his Jewish context but to his conviction that "Christ died for our sins," thus redeeming sinful humanity (i.e., Paul reasoned from solution to plight). The methodology employed in the essay is not unproblematic. In his survey of (non-Pauline) Jewish literature, Westerholm often takes the presence of ethical exhortation as a sure indication of an optimistic view of the human ability to keep the law (e.g., 83, 86, 94), while downplaying contrary evidence (e.g., 85, 86, 89, 90, 94–96). In his assessment of the Pauline literature, he takes the opposite approach, downplaying the implications of Paul's ethical exhortations for his construction of human agency (see 75–76) and highlighting instead Paul's most "pessimistic" statements on the subject (e.g., Rom 3:10, 19–20). It is only in view of this methodological double standard that Westerholm is able to conclude that "our survey of the literature supports the notion that Paul's anthropology, in corresponding to his 'soteriology', is a good deal more 'negative' than the anthropology typical among his contemporary Jews" (97). The texts surveyed suggest a spectrum of views of the human capacity to keep the law, ranging from optimistic to pessimistic, and cannot be simplified into the Paul/Judaism typology that Westerholm proposes. Paul should be classified, not in opposition to a "typical" Jewish view, but alongside other texts that espouse a similarly "pessimistic" view of the human capacity to keep the law, such as the Thanksgiving Hymns and, to a lesser extent, 4 Ezra.

Francis Watson compares the role played by law (Torah) in Galatians, MMT, and 4 Maccabees. Watson finds that the latter two texts exemplify "a soteriology in which law-observance leads to life" (i.e., either individual, postmortem life or corporate, political/economic well-being). The soteriology of MMT and 4 Maccabees indicates that the tendency of the "new perspective" to downplay any suggestion that early Jewish literature might impute a salvific role, rather than an essentially boundary-marking role

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(as per James Dunn), to "works of the Torah" is misguided. More important, by showing the ways in which each of these three texts constructs arguments and utilizes scripture to outline three diverse perspectives on the role and function of the law, "these texts make it clear that Pauline antithesis [between divine and human salvific agency] is an interpretative construct intended to serve the exposition of the gospel, not a neutral report about the theology of Second Temple Judaism" (116).

Troels Engberg-Pedersen argues that the clear distinction between divine and human agency, such that these could be pitted against one another, is a construct of the Enlightenment battle between religion and humanism. Based on a detailed exegesis of Epictetus's *Dissertationes* and excerpts from Paul's letters, Engberg-Pedersen argues that neither of the two sharply distinguished divine and human agency; both viewed these agencies as intertwined. Both writers work with the "idea of a self which is able to reject the world because in being directed towards and aligning itself with God it has the self-sufficiency—and indeed, power—of God" (139). Engberg-Pedersen concludes the essay by indicating with a note of regret that, due to limitations of space, he was unable to contextualize the material, social, and political aspects of Paul's and Epictetus's discourses through the application of a sociological analysis such as that developed by Pierre Bourdieu. This reviewer also regrets that space prevented Engberg-Pedersen from carrying out his intention and hopes to see him publish such a study in the not-too-distant future.

John Barclay compares constructions of agency in Philo and Paul. In Philo's view, God as creator is the gracious cause of all that exists. A key passage occurs in *Legum allegoriae*, book 4, in which Philo states that Moses "ascribes the powers and causes of all things to God, leaving no work for a created being but showing it to be inactive and passive" (145–46). What, then, is one to make of Moses' legal/ethical injunctions? Such injunctions serve merely as a "useful rhetorical pretense" designed for those who have not been, in Philo's words, "initiated into the great mysteries" about the sole sovereignty of God and the "exceeding nothingness" of that which God has created, in that the latter lacks independent agency (146). Paul's view of agency is exemplified in passages such as Gal 2:19–21. There Paul describes himself as crucified with Christ, with the result that the human "self" "is reconstituted in such a fashion that one has to speak thereafter of dual agency, and not simply of one operating in partnership with the other, but of Christ operating 'in' the human agent. But this new power is clearly non-coercive: Paul entertains the real possibility … that one can *reject* the grace of God" (152). In a finely nuanced reversal of the usual grace/works dichotomy, Barclay concludes, "If the ideal for Philo is the resting sage, who approaches the vision of God in pure passivity [i.e., by accepting the vision as gracious gift], Paul's is the obedient Adam, Christ" (157). Paul's view requires that human agency be located within the noncoercive agency of the Spirit

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by which it is transformed. Both “grace” (divine agency) and “works” (human agency) are simultaneously operative.

Simon Gathercole compares Paul’s “histories of sin” in Rom 1:18–32 and 7:7–25. In Rom 1, Gathercole identifies two responses to the revelation of God’s glory, which Paul construes as implicit within the structure of the natural world. These include inactivity and active suppression of the truth of that revelation. Both responses are to be attributed to human agency. By way of contrast, in Rom 7 the scope of human agency is restricted: “because the ‘I’ has been taken captive [by Sin], it has very little in the way of agency” (167). Sin exerts a perverse effect on the human mind such that the transgression of the law, that is, sin, is no longer recognized as such. Despite the dissimilarities between Rom 1 and 7 however, there is a “deep structure” common to both. In both cases, God uses sin within a history of salvation perspective for revelatory purposes. In Rom 1, the “meta-sin” of idolatry and its corollary, sexual immorality, serve to reveal God’s wrath. This revelation of God’s wrath is only a prologue to the revelation of God’s righteousness in the preaching of Paul’s gospel. Similarly, in Rom 7, “through the activity of Sin in bringing death, Sin … becomes visible” (171). The agency of Sin in effect operates to serve the ultimate purposes of God within the history of salvation. Sin effects a situation characterized by the condemnation and resultant death of humans who defy the commandments, with the result that “Christ and the Spirit [could] bring life where the law [had] failed” (171).

J. Louis Martyn sketches two dominant images of the human agent evident in the Hellenistic period, those of the competent and the incompetent human agent. The former image assumes a human actor endowed with the capacity to make moral choices; the latter assumes an actor under the thrall of hostile external forces (i.e., the “evil impulse,” the devil, etc.). Paul’s letters seem to present both views side by side. These divergent views of the human agent need not be viewed as contradictory, provided they are set within the context of a “history” in which the state of human agency undergoes development. Paul describes such a history in which (1) an Adamic agent is endowed with moral competence; (2) a humanity, the actions of which are characterized by disobedience, issues from Adam; (3) this disobedient humanity is subsequently delivered into the power of hostile nonhuman agencies, whose influence exacerbates the human incompetence that was already viewed as implicit in postulate 2; (4) this situation subsequently motivates God to intervene to provide succor for the incompetent human agent. Consequently, (5) God introduces the “word of the cross” (i.e., preaching about the death and resurrection of Jesus), a message through which God is able to reconstitute a body of addressable agents whose moral competence has been restored. This restoration is accomplished through the agency of the Spirit. The constitution of this newly restored community, however, is to be distinguished from the original state of Adamic humanity in that within the “new Spirit-

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led community," the human agency is augmented by the presence of an indwelling divine agency. The end of this refashioned humanity is to participate in an "ultimate apocalyptic victory" in which the human agent is conformed to the image of Christ.

The schema envisioned in Martyn's essay is characterized by a remarkable clarity, albeit one that is predicated on a false assumption. Martyn's view of the incompetence of the human agent in the face of hostile agencies is assumed rather than argued. In rabbinic literature, one is quite capable of resisting the baneful influence of the "evil impulse" (so Avemarie), and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, humans are granted the capacity to resist demonic influence: "You do these [pious actions] as well … and every spirit of Beliar will flee from you" (cited by Westerholm, 90). In either case, humans retain full moral agency in spite of the possibility of influence by hostile powers.

Despite my occasional quibbles, most of the essays in this volume repay careful consideration, and several (esp. those of Avemarie, Barton, and Engberg-Pedersen) provide important new insights into the complex interactions envisioned between divine and human agency in the literature of the Hellenistic period. With its inclusion of a brief bibliography and indexes of ancient and modern authors, the volume will be of value to researchers interested in the relationships between divine and human agency, Second Temple Jewish literature, and Pauline studies.

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