
How is it possible for Paul to enjoin his Philippian addressees to work out with fear and trembling their own salvation while simultaneously asserting that ultimately God is at work in them both with regard to will and to do for his good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13)? Traditionally, the juxtaposition of these two notions within the same passage—of which there is ample evidence in other Pauline texts, too—has constituted one of the cruces of Pauline scholarship. It is enigmatic how Paul on the one hand may urge his audience to take individual responsibility for salvation while, on the other hand, ascribing salvation to God alone.

One may, of course, argue that the seemingly paradoxical nature of this combination of ideas did not represent a contradiction to Paul. Either he did not think of these conceptions as incompatible or he simply did not accord value to the incompatibility leaving the two notions to stand irreconcilable with each other. Another possibility, however, is to go against the grain of time-honoured scholarship by asserting that the seemingly contradictory nature of the notions owes more to the reception of Paul than to the texts if they are interpreted in light of the context of their origin. To substantiate such a claim, one may turn to modern theory-building or establish a historically more plausible context for understanding the Pauline texts. In both cases, the idea is to disentangle oneself from the previous Wirkungsgeschichte of interpretation by creating a more adequate framework for analysis. Both approaches aspire to avoid the pitfalls of the previous tradition by situating the Pauline texts in a more appropriate context.

The present volume pursues the second possibility. The idea is, as underlined by the title of the book, to situate the Pauline ideas of divine and human agency within Paul's cultural environment. Even though one essay by Troels Engberg-Pedersen focuses on Paul and Epictetus and, therefore, discusses the Pauline understanding in light of comparable notions within Stoicism, the over-all perspective of the book is clearly “Jewish.” Apart from a lucid and thought-provoking introduction by John Barclay, Gabriele Boccaccini in the first essay examines the way of presenting the problem from the perspective of Second Temple Judaism in general. In the next essay, Philip Alexander narrows the discussion in order to highlight predestination and free will in the Dead Sea Scrolls with a particular emphasis on 1QS 3.13-4.24. In the following contribution on “Tensions between God’s Command and Israel’s Obedience,” F. Avemarie moves the perspective forward to rabbinic literature. He finds that the rabbinic literature witnesses a clearly dialogical interaction where God and his human counterpart remain two neatly distinguishable personal subjects (70).

The next four essays focus more specifically on various aspects of Paul pertaining to the over-all topic of the book. Whereas S. Westerholm examines “Paul’s
Anthropological ‘Pessimism’ in its Jewish Context,” F. Watson discusses Paul’s construction of an antithesis (works vs. grace) by using 4QMMT, 4 Maccabees and Galatians to illuminate each other. Watson makes the observation that “in each of the possible readings of two texts from the standpoint of a third, one particular element is asserted as fundamental—faith in the case of Paul, halakhah in the case of 4QMMT, philosophy in the case of 4 Maccabees—with the result that the opposing texts are characterized by its lack. Thus texts that appear to be very different from other perspectives come to look similar. Only from a Pauline perspective does the issue of divine in relation to human agency come to the fore” (116). This assertion, obviously, makes it incumbent to bring up the question to what extent the subject of the book is a reverberation of a Pauline construct rather than a general problem of the era, see below.

As already mentioned, Engberg-Pedersen compares divine and human agency in Epictetus and Paul. He comes to the conclusion that the distinction between divine and human agency has no grip in either thinker. They both pay witness to an “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).

J. Barclay compares Paul with Philo and reaches among other conclusions the point that they both emphasise the priority of divine grace as the originating cause of salvation, including human virtue (156). The last Pauline essay by S. Gathercole discusses the way of setting the problem by highlighting—based on Romans 1 and 7—some aspects of Paul’s presentation of sin.

In an epilogue, J. L. Martyn revisits the various essays in an attempt “to reread in their light some of the sources on which they themselves draw” (174). Even though Martyn touches upon several of the contributions his (critical) comments appear to be directed mainly towards Engberg-Pedersen’s essay and in addition those contributions that from Martyn’s perspective overemphasise the similarities between Paul’s Judaism and other forms of Judaism of the day. With regard to Engberg-Pedersen’s essay, the discussion boils down to the question to what extent it is legitimate to interpret Paul from the perspective of contemporary Graeco-Roman philosophy and thereby—from Martyn’s view—to tone down the apocalyptic framework of Paul’s thought. Unlike Engberg-Pedersen, Martyn underlines the apocalyptic tenor of Paul’s thinking and claims that it cannot be reduced to a matter of understanding on the part of the Christ-believers. Superhuman forces are part of the game: “Far from allowing the human agent to stand alone at the road fork, this invasive God powerfully meets both the incompetent, enslaved agent and the powers that enslave him in their own orb” (180). The same discussion is touched upon by Barclay in his introduction (3) and subsequent essay (153-6).

As indicated by Barclay in his introduction and elaborated by Watson in his essay, the topic of the book is closely related to a problem that has come to the