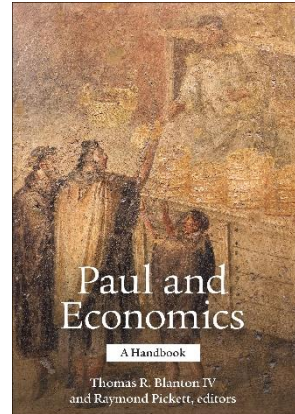


Thomas R. Blanton IV and Raymond Pickett, eds. *Paul and Economics: A Handbook*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017. Pp. Xxxvi + 437. ISBN 978-1506406039. Paperback. \$39.00

Paul's social world, often thought to be buried or irrelevant, has begun to rise to the very top of New Testament scholarship. And the issue of the ancient economy is not simply an issue of monetary policy. Rather, in the case of *Paul and Economics* (hereafter *P&E*), we have explorations of slave labor, the reality of the scarcity of resources, Paul's collection, and the variegated characteristics of ancient methods of travel.



The stated goal of the editors of *P&E* is aptly and succinctly stated:

Taken together, the essays in this volume aim to lay a foundation and a framework for further exploration of the role of economic factors in the interpretation of Paul's letters and the formation and development of the assemblies (xxxv).

As with all edited volumes, there are essays of great value and essays of lesser value; such is the natural order of things in scholarship where more than two minds are brought together. I will first offer a brief survey of the work as a whole by focusing on each individual essay, followed by commendations and criticisms of the work as a whole, focusing specifically on several key areas that I believe to be either under-developed or over-stated in the book.

David B. Hollander, after his survey of various economic factors within the ancient Roman economy, concludes that the profits of the Roman economy were largely beneficial to Roman citizens. To those who were further away from Rome, there was greater paucity within the population. Hollander's detailed survey of labor and supply and demand

add to the credibility of his conclusion: “the Roman economy disproportionately benefited Roman citizens rather than the population of the empire as a whole” (p. 21). In a comparable manner, John T. Fitzgerald explores the activities of eating and drinking Roman social perspective. More precisely, Fitzgerald details the types of food and drink available to the poor among the various parts of the Roman Empire, which opens up several fresh interpretive avenues for the classic discussion in Rom 14-15 between the “strong” and the “weak” (pp. 241-242).

Jinyu Lui explores the nuances between “urban” poor and “rural” poor in the Roman Empire, with a precise emphasis on the ancient Roman diet and what was needed for survival. Her work explores various types of food and analyzes what was needed for a person to survive hard labor in the ancient setting of Rome. This includes various ways to alleviate Roman impoverishment including begetting children, and begging and reliance upon “the generosity of the passers-by to delay starvation” (p. 53). In essence, the life of the average citizen of Rome may be characterized in terms of “deprivation” (p. 54), and Lui invites scholars to consider further research on the “middling group” and the “poor,” as it relates to upward/downward mobility between socio-economic classes (p. 54-55).

In discussing various aspect of epistemology as it relates to interpreting ancient data, Timothy A. Brookins chapter on the economic profiles Paul's early communities spends a substantial amount of space on the methodology of interpreting facts. He writes, “facts do not speak for themselves, but interpreters speak for the facts” (pp. 58-63, 60). Brookins' assessment of the various “poverty tables” of the ancient world—where various social groups such as the “elites” and other less influential social classes are calculated according to the percentage of the population—is a helpful overview of the various proposals set forth by Peter Oakes, Walter Scheidel, Steven Friesen, and Bruce Longenecker (p. 67-80). The dynamic shifting of these scalar models remains a constant topic of debate amidst those who would desire to rigidly concretize the percentages of these various ancient groups. After Brookins concludes that most of the

population was at “near (at or above) subsistence level” (p. 81). That is, a majority of the population was teetering near, above or below the level of subsistence in the Roman Empire. He then briefly explores where early Pauline co-workers like Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2) and Erastus (1 Cor 16:14-16) would appear in his scalar model, believing that Paul’s churches had a “complete cross-section of society” (86) versus models that would argue that the Pauline churches were enmeshed entirely in poverty. Similarly, Zeba A. Crook contends in his essay “Economic Location of Benefactors in Pauline Communities” that there were perhaps membership fees in the Pauline churches. His work is based on various ancient inscriptions that illuminate his key point, and his essay coincides rather nicely with editor Thomas R. Blanton IV. Blanton’s essay centers on “the economic functions of gift exchange in Pauline communities,” however with minimal dialogue with John Barclay’s work *Paul and the Gift*. In any sense, Blanton’s argument for Paul’s theological reshaping of patronage/reciprocity into what can be called “fictive kinship” (304). Blanton highlights the interplay between theology and mutuality and reciprocity rather starkly and passionately—to sound effect.

Ulrike Roth’s essay “Paul and Slavery: Economic Perspectives” contends that the early Pauline mission was built upon the back of slave labor, prompting what John M.G. Barclay has called “the dilemma of Christ Slave-Ownership” in an influential *New Testament Studies* article. Roth summarizes: “Paul’s approach to the economic exploitation of slaves, and the ways in which the apostle sought to benefit from the slave-system at large, is likely to have been a systematic feature behind his missionary success” (p. 179).

Other contributors include Richard A. Horsley who investigates Paul’s motivations for declining or accepting financial assistance, believing that Paul was inconsistent in how he applied his trade (pp. 120-121), but this was often on the basis of “community formation” (p. 121). In a more direct socio-exegetical manner, Neil Elliott focuses in on the Lord’s Supper in 1 Cor 11:17-34. He writes in the end, based on other elements

woven throughout *P&E* and liberation theology (pp. 246-252), that Paul “wishes to safeguard in the Corinthian assembly a meal practice that embodies a shared mutuality among its participants” (p. 274).

Annette Weissenrieder, in an exceptional essay, digs into the archeological strata of the ancient Roman Empire—particularly in Corinth—and offers a resolution that perhaps the early Pauline communities met in the Appolloneion in Corinth (p. 149). She directly challenges the notion put forth by Edward Adams that the early Pauline communities met in houses, suggesting an alternative point of view that the *ekklesia* was more civically located rather than domestic.

Two further essays are linked thematically later on in *P&E*: John S. Kloppenborg explores Paul's collection for Jerusalem and Cavan Concannon fixes on the elements of ancient travel in the Pauline communities. Kloppenborg argues that “Paul's project” (the collection for the poor) “is transgressive” rather than “subversive” (p. 330). The fact that Paul's collection was ethnically and geographically particularistic underlies the issue of giving to others. For Concannon, the difficulties of intercity travel (pp. 341-344) and the problem of an “objective” Pauline chronology (pp. 338-339, n.25) results in possibilities and only possibilities: that is, “unless we find ways to account for the costs of connectivity, an accurate picture of the diffuse and shifting networks [documented in 2 Cor 9-13] of early Christians will elude us” (p. 358). Hence, Concannon's essay is centered more on epistemology and a critique of “objective” readings.

When it comes to various issues involving colonialism and critiques of capitalism, L.L. Welborn's essay on “Marxism and Capitalism in Pauline Studies” is perhaps the most philosophically dense of the book as a whole. Welborn critiques the capitalist reading of Paul (p. 365) extensively, desiring that an engagement with Marxist thought (typified by the work of Rancière) “may finally make it possible to reclaim from the clutches of capitalist interpreters” (p. 395). Finally, Ward Blanton's concluding essay on “A New Horizon for Paul and the Philosophers” is

attentive to areas of economic distress (9/11; the economic crisis in the United States in 2008: p. 399ff) from a philosophical perspective.

There are several key essays that rise above the rest in terms of quality of argumentation and intellectual investigation. For those desiring a wealth of archeological data, Weissenrieder's essay on various aspects of ancient housing yields substantial results: her idea of potential meeting places for the Pauline churches presses heartily against the notion of the "assembly" being confined to various houses. Similarly, Fitzgerald's work on ancient diets and the economic realities of food in the Roman Empire is worthwhile and sobering, especially for Pauline scholars. Timothy Brookins and his essay on epistemology is also the highlight for this reviewer as he seeks to reorientate epistemology with Pauline studies and human bias, yielding fresh results that press interpreters to recognize their own bias. When he writes, "despite their helpfulness...models cannot substitute for evidence, for they are based on evidence...models are tentative and revisable, and the interpreter must exercise the discipline not to force particularized data through too generalized a grid" (p. 61). More to his point, one ought to exercise a sufficient epistemological humility in relation to this difficult debate.

As for the rest of the book, most helpful are the select bibliographies at the end of each individual entry. Lacking any sort of scripture index and translation of German, however, makes navigating the handbook somewhat vexatious—the untrained audience will have a much more difficult time engaging with the material because of this. There is also significant conceptual and literary overlap, especially as it relates to the work of Steven Friesen. While perhaps unavoidable, it seems curious that Friesen himself—as often as his work is discussed and criticized—is not included as a contributor in this compelling handbook. Other voices like Justin Meggitt, Bruce Longenecker, and John Barclay are engaged with throughout and often critically, but the lack of response and interaction with the other contributors makes *P&E* a tonally narrow literary work.

The notion of an unbiased interpreter of ancient source materials has been rightly challenged; however, there is a rather overt lack of justification provided for Marxist readings of the New Testament by some of the contributors. Simply speaking and writing about power dynamics and issues of oppression does not make for a substantial commentary, nor does using the language excuse someone from providing justification for why he or she is using such language. Language, a major tool of ideology, requires exploration. For instance, Wellborn's essay attempts to draw a parallel between Marx's phrase "religion [is the] groan of the oppressed creature" (p. 365) with Paul's language in Rom 8:22: this parallel is asserted as one that "clearly echoes" (365) Paul's language. What makes this line of thought difficult to accept is the arguments from others in the book (Brookins, in some sense, Concannon in another)—both of whom are quite to criticize objective readings of a text. The assertion by Wellborn on the interpretive certitude reveals that objectivity is a notion some are clearly seeking—despite their own ideological critiques of other perspectives that attempt 'objectivity.'

It is also worth pointing out that the specter of the Capitalist boogeyman remains lodged within the definitional nebulae: the utter lack of providing sources and documentation for this "neoclassical" or "capitalist" reading of Paul suggests that at the heart of several essays is the ideological privilege of engaging with a straw man (c.f. Wellborn, 365ff; Horsley, 95-97). Another element of disagreement centers on the characterization of polar extremes: "neoclassical" economics versus "Marxist" theories. One is either one or the other: there is no room for crossover or nuance. However, just because someone takes theories of power and various dynamics into account (especially as these theories relate to gender and slavery) does not necessarily tie them to the Marxist option. Is a "capitalist" reader of Paul—whatever or whoever that is—unable to understand power dynamics as they relate to gender and class?

As a Christian Libertarian who rejects Marxism as an ideology, I believe my own conviction concerning economic justice and gender

equality is not in conflict. Horsley also argues stridently against what he believes to be the error of a “unified wheat market” and that “neoclassical” (a term Horsley never defines for us) economists “abstract the ‘economy’ from society” (p. 95). A few things should be noted: first, his argument finally concludes that the Roman economy was “political,” not a “market” (96). This assertion—which is a frequent talking point in Horsley’s other work,¹ appears to be a false dichotomy and needlessly separates politics from the market, assuming a static reality versus a more dynamic reality of the ancient Roman economy. It has also been recently refuted by Temin.²

P&E as a work is generally helpful and often incisive insofar as it attempts to propel Pauline scholars toward greater nuance and clarity in discussing the largely lost world of the New Testament—regardless of one’s conviction about Marxism or capitalism being the appropriate worldview for understanding Paul. However, the lack of a “capitalist” or “neoclassical” defender within the book suggests a lack of ideological inclusivity.

For those looking to understand the data and the contours of this discussion from a general Marxist perspective, one can scarcely find a better book. However, there is a general lack of methodological precision on display throughout the work that appears rather uncritical in accepting Marxist theories and talking points (Brookins forceful chapter notwithstanding). As but one example, several indeterminate criticisms are lobbed toward “Neoclassical economics” in a way that lacks nuance or substance (c.f. Horsley, p. 95): one is free to critique all things (and should critique everything!), but more substance would be helpful—not to mention less off-putting to some many readers. In any case, how much one can glean from this largely ideologically homogenous book is

¹ E.g., Richard Horsley, *Covenant Economics: A Biblical Vision of Justice for All* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

² Peter Temin, *The Roman Market Economy (The Princeton Economic History of the Western World)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

dependent upon his or her a priori ideology, which is both a robust commendation of the work and perhaps my greatest critique of the book as a whole.

Nicholas Rudolph Quient³
Pasadena, California

³ Nicholas Rudolph Quient (M.A. New Testament Studies, Fuller Theological Seminary) is Associate Pastor of First Baptist Church of Redlands (Pasadena, CA) and has been accepted into the PhD program at Ridley Theological College.