

Divine Beneficence and Human Generosity in Second Temple Judaism: Reflections on John Barclay’s *Paul and the Gift*

BRADLEY C. GREGORY
The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

In his recent landmark book, *Paul and the Gift*,¹ John Barclay situates Paul’s theology of grace within the ancient understanding of gift giving. In order to do this, he outlines six ways that gift giving or grace can be “perfected,” understood in its “purest essence.” A gift may be “perfected” in terms of superabundance (size, importance, permanence), its singularity (it is *the* defining characteristic of the giver), its priority (it comes before any initiative by the recipient), its incongruity (the recipient is unworthy of such a gift), its efficacy (it accomplishes the purpose for which it was given), and noncircularity (it is given without any expectation of return) (66–78). These different dimensions of gifts/grace provide a helpful schema for understanding how both ancient authors and their interpreters throughout history have understood what grace is and what it is not. For example, the different understandings of Paul found in Augustine and Luther largely stem from each of the latter’s different conceptions of how grace is perfected.

The upshot of this approach to grace for the study of Paul is twofold. First, in examining the anthropology and history of gift giving from antiquity to the present, Barclay shows that the “disinterested gift,” one that is given with no expectation of return, is an almost exclusively modern, Western notion. In contrast, for the ancient person, gift giving always expected

¹ John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015). This work will be cited parenthetically by page number.

some sort of reciprocal exchange because gift giving was always embedded in an interpersonal dynamic of creating and developing social ties (11–65). Thus, it is no surprise that, in the second part of the book, when Barclay explores how different Second Temple Jewish authors perfect divine grace, not a single one perfects noncircularity. In each of the five works, some sort of return is expected, even if it is “only” profound gratefulness to God.

Second, by reading Second Temple works with these six different perfections in mind, Barclay shows convincingly that “grace is everywhere; but this does not mean that grace is everywhere the same” (319). For example, while *Wisdom of Solomon* and Philo do not perfect divine grace in terms of incongruity, the *Qumran Hodayot* and *Pseudo-Philo* do; yet all perfect grace in at least one way. In fact, each Second Temple Jewish author represents a different constellation of grace, perfecting it in different combinations of the six dimensions, and each perfection in different ways. In turning to Paul, then, it becomes quite clear that one cannot simply ask whether Paul agrees or disagrees with Second Temple Judaism on the topic of grace. Rather, the question is how his view of grace is situated among this diversity. On one hand, Paul is continuous with other ancient authors in *not* perfecting noncircularity. Like his contemporaries, he firmly believed that God’s grace creates a new relational dynamic and demands a response from the recipients. On the other hand, Paul’s view of divine grace as radically incongruous and centered on God’s gift in Christ was largely discontinuous with ancient views of (human) gift giving, though in different ways in comparison to Judaism and Greco-Roman culture. Key to this aspect of Barclay’s thesis is the claim that, for ancient authors, gift giving was routinely viewed as congruous in some way with the worth or status of the recipient, and then further, the question of how gift giving in early Judaism aligned with this broader Greco-Roman perspective. It is this aspect of Barclay’s work that I would like to engage for this symposium. I hope the following discussion will help to supplement Barclay’s treatment and to suggest some further ways that divine beneficence and human generosity are interrelated among some Second Temple Jewish authors.²

Social Worth and Well-Placed Gifts

One aspect of gifts in the ancient world that Barclay rightfully highlights is that the status or worth of a potential recipient was generally a significant factor in the decision to give: “What distinguishes the sphere of gift

² Barclay notes his hope to write a subsequent volume on social gift giving in Paul and early Christianity (63n172).

is not that it is ‘unilateral,’ but that it expresses a social bond, a mutual recognition of the value of the *person*. It is filled with sentiment because it invites a personal, enduring, and reciprocal relationship” (31). Because the proper context of gifts was friendship, whether created or continued, and involved an expectation of back-and-forth return, it was imperative that gifts be placed with those who would represent desirable social connections. For this reason, giving to those who would be unable or unwilling to reciprocate was considered a waste (see Theognis 105–12). For many Greek authors, the poor were simply unworthy of gifts and even their gratefulness was worthless. Notably, Aristotle thought it was unbecoming of a great person to give money to those of no importance, and he criticized Odysseus for giving alms to the poor for this reason (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1122a26–27; see Homer, *Odyssey* 17.420).³ As Barclay aptly summarizes it: “Nobody wants to think that they have voluntarily tied themselves to people who degrade their social capital” (39).

While cautions about the recipients of gifts can be found in early Judaism (e.g., Sir 12:1–6; 20:10, 14), the poor are viewed quite differently. Barclay is certainly correct to note that the Torah’s legislation and the demands of Jewish piety grounded care for the poor in religious obligation, and therefore that those who gave to the poor could expect to be blessed by God (see 41–44). Yet, we can press the point further to note that these religious obligations derived from a more profound theological understanding of the relationship between the poor and God. Throughout the Old Testament, there is the conviction that Israel’s God stands in solidarity with the poor (e.g., Exod 22:20; 1 Sam 2:8; Isa 11:4; Sir 4:4–6; 11:12–13; 35:20–22). For this reason, how a person treats the poor was understood to have a corresponding “double effect” toward God. For example, Proverbs 14:31 says:

Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him.⁴

Since God has a special relationship with the poor, God responds to the treatment of the poor as though the action had been done to himself. Distinctively, this “nexus” between God and the poor is actually intrinsic to Israel’s self-understanding as God’s people. For, their origins as a people are to be traced to their redemption from being poor, marginalized,

³ These ancient authors are cited in support of this point by Barclay (34).

⁴ Unless noted otherwise, all translations of the Bible are from the NRSV.

oppressed slaves in Egypt (see: Exod 22:21–23; Lev 25; Deut 15:1–10).⁵ Thus, unlike much Greco-Roman thought, early Judaism did not view gifts to the poor as a “waste,” but as an affirmation of the special status of the poor, both as specially loved by God and as emblematic of Israel’s own identity as God’s elect.

This recognition of the poor’s theological status provided one important motivation for giving to those in need that was, to a degree, independent of the social dynamics of reciprocity: in doing so, one was understood to be imitating God.⁶ For example, in Deuteronomy we read:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. (Deut 10:17–19)

Here God’s care for the poor and Israel’s own past as poor are linked as the foundation for Israel’s obligation both to render justice to the poor and to provide for their material needs. Similarly, the claim in Psalm 68:6 that God is a father of orphans and protector of widows is appropriated by both Job (31:16–18) and Ben Sira (4:10) to describe the ethical obligations of each Jewish person. In this way, human acts of charity mirror the way God cares for the poor and even can serve as God’s designated means of caring for the poor. Importantly, gifts to the poor are often unconditioned: the poor are to be helped simply because they are in need, not necessarily because they are righteous, worthy, or a potential social benefit to the giver in some way.⁷ In particular, Second Temple Jewish literature attests the view that giving to the poor *qua* poor is predicated on the fact that God is also good and merciful to all (see, e.g., *Aristeas* 207, 227; *T. Benj.* 4; cf.

⁵ On this see Bradley C. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Series 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 172–81.

⁶ This motif is not completely absent from Greco-Roman society, but it is less common there. For an example of generosity being understood as godlike, see Brad Inwood, “Politics and Paradox in Seneca’s *De beneficiis*,” in *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy; Proceedings of the Sixth Symposium Hellenisticum*, ed. André Laks and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 241–65, at 241–42.

⁷ The alternate view that it is better to give to the righteous poor than to the wicked poor can also be found (e.g., Sir 12:1–6; Tob 2:2; cf. b. B. Bat 9b).

Matt 5:38–48).⁸

A particularly vivid example of unconditioned gifts in early Judaism was the obligation to show kindness to the deceased. Consider two examples. The first is from Ben Sira:

And also to the needy stretch out your hand
in order that your blessing may be complete.
Give a gift to anyone alive
and even from the dead do not withhold kindness. (Sir 7:32–33)

The second is from Tobit:

In the days of Shalmaneser I performed many acts of charity to my kindred, those of my tribe. I would give my food to the hungry and my clothing to the naked; and if I saw the dead body of any of my people thrown out behind the wall of Nineveh, I would bury it. (Tob 1:16–17)

In the first passage, Ben Sira employs a merism to advocate generosity to anyone, whether living or dead, and there is no sense that the person should be worthy in some way. What is meant by “kindness [*hesed*] to the dead” is not completely clear, but it likely means the provision of a proper burial.⁹ This is precisely what is in view in the passage from Tobit. Alongside gifts of food and clothing to the needy, Tobit’s charity is exemplified by burying the dead. It is highly significant that, in this story set in the Assyrian exile, such actions pose a great personal risk to Tobit because they contravene the king’s decree and subject him to his neighbor’s taunts. Nevertheless, he continues to provide this kindness to the slain, and the concern for proper burial is one of the most important elements in the unfolding narrative. By focusing on the burial of the dead as the preeminent act of charity, the book of Tobit is able to encourage the faith required to trust God as the only one who can give a reward in return. Francis Macatangay observes, “that the dead cannot reasonably be expected to repay favors or reward any good deeds may have constituted the practice of burying the dead as

⁸ See David Flusser, “Love Your Fellow Man,” in *Judaism of the Second Temple Period: The Jewish Sages and Their Literature*, trans. Azzan Yadin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 156–61.

⁹ Another possibility is the providing of assistance to the family of the deceased. See Georg Sauer, *Jesus Sirach/Ben Sira: Übersetzt und erklärt*, Das Alte Testament Deutsch 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 94.

a paradigmatic act of charity,” and he goes on to quote Israel Abrahams: “Charity to the dead is the type and acme of disinterested love, of disinterested love which, by the strange ways of Providence, does find its reward.”¹⁰ Abrahams aptly characterizes a central point of Tobit, though as we will see, such charity is disinterested only with respect to the human recipient and not in the absolute sense found in modern Western understandings of the “pure gift” (see Barclay 43–44 and 51–63). The inability of the dead to reciprocate obviously eliminates any motivation based on forging or furthering social bonds with them and points to the conviction among early Jewish authors that the ultimate guarantor of reward for charity was God. The argument of these authors is that God can be trusted to repay such gifts both because of God’s faithfulness and because of God’s special relationship with the poor.

Reciprocity: Gifts to the Poor, Loans to God

Given the differences between Greco-Roman gifts, which were embedded within social reciprocity, and the Jewish view that generosity to the poor should be unrelated to their status or “worth,” the question arises as to whether gift giving in Judaism was wholly different from that of the larger Mediterranean world. A recent and influential answer to this question has been proposed by Seth Schwartz in his book *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?*¹¹ He argues that, in contrast to the reciprocity of the rest of the Mediterranean world, with its concomitant systems of power and dependency, the Jewish ideal expressed in the Torah is a society based on solidarity, equality, and love. Examining key sources from the Second Temple period, Schwartz finds that these two antithetical systems (reciprocity and solidarity) are often mixed, creating an inherent tension. Here Barclay objects to Schwartz’s characterization of assistance of the poor in Judaism as “pure, unreciprocated gift” that stands in stark contrast to reciprocity. He rightly argues that “the Torah’s legislation regarding care for the poor is best seen not as a rejection of ancient assumptions regarding gifts, but as a Jewish *modulation* of those assumptions, wholly dependent on the expectation of reciprocity—in a different form” (41; italics original). Barclay goes on to describe care for the poor as an obligation of Jewish

¹⁰ Francis Macatangay, *When I Die, Bury Me Well: Death, Burial, Almsgiving, and Restoration in the Book of Tobit* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 47; Israel Abrahams, “Tobit and Genesis,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 5 (1892–1893): 348–50, at 350.

¹¹ Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

piety and a requirement of the legislation of the Torah whose fulfillment will be rewarded by God.

While I agree with Barclay's critique of Schwartz on this point, there is an additional aspect of this "modulation" of reciprocity that should not be missed and, in light of Barclay's discussion, is all the more striking. A straightforward modulation of the reciprocity dynamic would simply incorporate God into the circle of gift and counter-gift: one would give to the poor and then God would return some favor to the giver and it would all remain in the conceptual sphere of gift giving. But, interestingly, the way early Jewish authors actually describe this repayment by God is not so much in language of gifts and counter-gifts, but in the dual language of gifts, on the one hand, and loans and debts, on the other. The classic verse in this regard was Proverbs 19:17:

Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and will be repaid in full.

As Gary Anderson has shown, this verse reckons *gifts* to the poor as simultaneously *loans* to God: "What one does toward the poor registers directly with God. It is as though the poor person was some sort of ancient automatic teller machine through which one could make a deposit directly to one's heavenly account."¹² In fact, as he goes on to demonstrate, the metaphor of a "heavenly account" is not just a vivid, contemporary illustration; it emerged already in the Second Temple period. Once the word for righteousness, *ṣēdāqāh*, came to have the meaning "almsgiving," it was quite natural to read verses like these in a particular way:

Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death. (Prov 10:2)

Wealth is of no avail on the day of wrath,
But righteousness saves from death. (Prov 11:4)

If one simply reads *ṣēdāqāh* (righteousness) in these two verses as "almsgiving" (natural, since the contrast in each is with other uses of wealth), then these verses speak of a contrast between wealth put to evil use and wealth put to good use, with the latter understood as a stored up treasure that

¹² Gary A. Anderson, "Redeem Your Sins by the Giving of Alms: Sin, Debt, and the 'Treasury of Merit' in Jewish and Early Christian Tradition," *Letter & Spirit* 3 (2007): 37–67, at 47.

provides deliverance from death.¹³

The ideas of generosity to the poor as a loan to God in Proverbs 19:17 and of accrued credit that can deliver from death in Proverbs 10:2 and 11:4 are combined in the book of Tobit. In the fourth chapter, on his deathbed, Tobit gives a series of admonitions to his son Tobias, among which is the following:

Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the Darkness. (Tob 4:7b–10)

If Anderson is correct that Tobit is integrating these concepts from Proverbs, and it is difficult to resist this conclusion, then the language of the (heavenly) treasury explicitly refers to credit generated by gifts to the poor that can be “drawn upon” for future benefits.¹⁴ This shows that Proverbs’s notion that gifts to the poor were simultaneously understood as loans to God was not restricted to Proverbs 19:17, but had begun to gain wider currency in the Second Temple period.

Further confirming Anderson’s observations is the fact that the same language of a treasury funded by almsgiving and its resulting future deliverance occurs in Ben Sira’s discussion of giving to the poor:

However, with the poor person be patient and do not keep him waiting for alms. For the sake of the commandment help the poor and according to his need do not turn him away empty-handed. Lose (your) money for a kinsman or a friend and do not place it under a stone to go to ruin. Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High and it will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury and it will deliver you from every calamity. More than a strong shield and robust spear it will fight for you against an enemy. (Sir 29:8–13)¹⁵

¹³ Avi Hurvitz, “The Biblical Roots of a Talmudic Term: The Early History of the Concept ‘tzedaka’ [Hebrew],” *Language Studies* 2–3 (1987): 155–60; Anderson, “Redeem Your Sins,” 48–49.

¹⁴ Anderson, “Redeem Your Sins,” 49–50.

¹⁵ Translation is my own. For the textual criticism and a more extensive discussion of

While many of the same elements from Tobit 4 are found here, what is particularly notable is that this passage is spliced in between a discussion of lending in 29:1–7 and one on going surety in 29:14–20. In both sections, Ben Sira acknowledges that most people are rightfully cautious about lending to humans because they so often do not repay. The disjunction at the beginning of verse 8, “however,” suggests that giving to the poor is like a loan, but one in which such caution (in vv. 6–7) does not apply. The reason is that, in giving to the poor, a person is lending to someone who is sure to repay: God. The placement of the discussion of almsgiving in the midst of a discussion of lending and surety, but in a way that contrasts its sure repayment with the riskiness of “normal loans,” makes sense only on the presupposition that the treasury that is funded by almsgiving is backed by God, not by fickle humans. To put it another way, if a person’s peers are unlikely to repay (29:6–7, 18), someone who is poor must have been judged an even bigger risk, if what is in view is human reciprocity. The overwhelming and sure benefit of almsgiving in 29:12–13, especially when viewed alongside Tobit 4 and Proverbs 19:17, makes it very likely that, in Second Temple Jewish texts, the language of “stored up treasure” from almsgiving refers specifically to credit with God, not to human return or reciprocity, as is sometimes thought (contra Barclay 44).

It is worth pausing to consider how remarkable it is that Second Temple authors viewed gifts to the poor as *loans* to God. On one hand, the integration of these two concepts to describe what happens when someone gives to the poor is not surprising. As Barclay points out, even though loans and gifts were distinct kinds of transactions, the obligation to reciprocate a gift meant that “debt” language could be used of both and there was some overlap between the dynamics of the two, and in fact, in some cases, recipients of gifts could feel burdened by a gift, since the obligation to make a countergift felt like repaying a loan (27). Nevertheless, despite this, Seneca could still hold that gift giving should not be “reduced” to the level of loans or impersonal financial calculation (46–47).

Thus, to characterize almsgiving as a loan to God, who is then required to repay, is potentially scandalous. This point was not lost on the ancient rabbis, some of whom reacted with shock that God would be “in debt” to the almsgiver, since, according to Proverbs 22:7, “the borrower is slave to the lender” (see b. B. Bat. 10a and Lev. Rab. 34:2).¹⁶ Yet, by characterizing generosity to the poor as a loan to God rather than a gift, the Jewish tradition underscored the certainty that God would repay in kind. And

these verses see Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring*, 181–200.

¹⁶ Anderson, “Redeem Your Sins,” 47.

while Pericles observed that people tend to repay loans more slowly than they do gifts (see Sir 8:12–13; 29:1–7),¹⁷ it cannot be imagined that God would allow his debts to linger. Rather, God would be certain to be like the upright person who pays his debts on time (see Sir 29:2, 15), seeking to escape his indebtedness at first opportunity (see: Prov 6:1–5; 4QInstructionb 2 II, 4–6; 4QInstructionc 2 I, 21–24). Thus, the use of loan-debt imagery reinforces the virtue of generosity to the poor by presenting gifts to the poor as a “no-lose proposition” precisely because God is the indebted party and his righteousness prevents him from defaulting. It also releases the poor recipient from any pressure to try to reciprocate, and thereby alleviates the resulting social dependency that typically accompanies a patron/reciprocity system.¹⁸ Attention was instead redirected to God as the one under obligation.

There is a potential problem with conceptualizing gifts to the poor as a loan to God who is certain to repay. Despite the help that such gifts provide for the poor, is there not the possibility that this triangular relationship will result in the “instrumentalizing” of the poor as part of a shrewd calculation by the giver?¹⁹ I think the answer is “no” for a couple of reasons. First, as Anderson has argued, to accept the claim that gifts given to the poor will result in such a repayment (or reward) actually requires a great deal of faith, because it is, on the surface, not the “safest” (or maybe, “lowest risk”) way to use one’s money. To participate in this “triangular” relationship with the poor and God requires a view of life that is in many respects counterintuitive and that views oneself, like the poor, as entirely dependent on the goodness of God.²⁰ This is why, for example, before speaking of the heavenly treasure that would accrue through almsgiving, Ben Sira acknowledges that giving to the poor looks like a “loss” that is riskier than protecting one’s money and possessions (Sir 29:10).

Second, as discussed above, this theological framework is built on the convictions that God has a special relationship with the poor, endowing them with a unique dignity, and that care for the poor is an act of *imitatio Dei*. Since God does not depersonalize or instrumentalize the poor, neither

¹⁷ Cited in Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*, 27n65.

¹⁸ Barclay hints in this direction (44–45n121).

¹⁹ On this, see also Paul Veyne, *Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*, trans. Brian Pearce (London: Penguin, 1976), 26–33. My thanks to Gary Anderson for this reference. For Seneca’s worries about human giving becoming simply one of self-interested calculation rather than the fostering of friendship, see the discussion in Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*, 48–50.

²⁰ Gary Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 3–6.

should their human benefactors. This is not simply a point of morality, but a recognition that *God's presence is specially with the poor*.²¹ While Second Temple authors like Ben Sira and Tobit present almsgiving as an opportunity to “lay up treasure” for future benefit, they equally emphasize God’s love for the poor and the importance of treating the poor with dignity, of showing concern for their emotional well-being, and they even encourage positive social interactions with them. In Sirach 4:1–10, Ben Sira advocates prompt giving and warns his students against ignoring, turning away from, or failing to greet the poor. But more than that, they are to engender positive social relations with the poor through seeking justice for them and becoming like a father to orphans and a husband to widows. Later in the book, he says that gifts should be accompanied by kind words and that graciousness when giving to the poor is the most important part of giving (Sir 18:15–18; similarly, see b. B. Bat. 9b). In fact, the Talmudic tractate Ketubbot even encourages giving anonymously or as a loan (that may or may not be repaid), instead of as alms, if it helps to avoid shaming the recipient (b. Ket. 67b). Thus, to reduce this triangular theological structure to a crass financial calculation in which the poor are simply a means to an end would be to miss the larger theological understanding of the poor in early Judaism. For these authors, charity ought never to be simply a “drive-by” affair; to be charitable is to invest oneself in a worldview where the poor are deeply valued.

Divine Beneficence and Generosity to the Poor in Paul

Finally, I would like to suggest a couple of ways these features of Second Temple Jewish theology regarding gifts to the poor may help illuminate some passages in Paul’s letters. First, Paul’s notion of incongruous grace, which Barclay beautifully elucidates mainly in the epistles of Galatians and Romans, finds an analogue not just in works like the *Hodayot* and *Pseudo-Philo*, but also more broadly in the Jewish understanding of the poor as those who enjoy a special relationship with God irrespective of human systems of value and worth, especially insofar as the poor were considered emblematic of God’s chosen, favored people. The influence of this theological perspective on Paul’s understanding of Christ as the gift of God is especially clear in 2 Corinthians, where, in 9:8–9 for instance, Paul describes the abundance of God’s blessing to those at Corinth as a fulfillment of Psalm 112:9—“He scatters abroad, he gives to the poor, his

²¹ Gary Anderson (personal communication). For the sacramental character of helping the poor as those in whom God can be encountered see Anderson, *Charity*, 6–11.

righteousness endures forever.” Further, this generosity then enables the “poor” Corinthians to “share abundantly in every good work.” Here we see God’s kindness to the poor used as a theological template to characterize God’s beneficence to the Corinthians in a way that combines superabundance and incongruity (and possibly efficacy, to a degree), while excluding noncircularity. In the previous chapter, Paul states: “you know the generous act [τὴν χάριν] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). Here again, the idea of gifts to the poor is employed to describe grace, but the “poor” Corinthians are given the riches of *Christ’s* incongruous grace in his *own* sacrifice of his “riches” through the Incarnation and crucifixion (cf. Phil 2:6–8).

Second, the kind of “triangular” relationship of giving to the poor, loaning to God, and God’s certain repayment can also be found in Paul’s letters to describe his understanding of the ecclesial context of his apostolic mission. Perhaps the most striking instance comes at the end of the letter to the Philippians:

For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. I have been paid in full and have more than enough; I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:16–19)

What is most interesting in light of the above discussion is that Paul considers their financial gift (τὸ δόμα) to him as someone who was needy, to further his mission, as something that is “profit that abounds to your account” (τὸν καρπὸν τὸν πλεονάζοντα εἰς λόγον ὑμῶν). Although Paul does not speak of a “treasury” per se, this “credit” is clearly something that God will repay out of the heavenly resources of Christ’s riches to satisfy the Philippians’ needs. While the “triangular” dynamic is usually noted by commentators, the conceptual background of Second Temple Judaism’s development of Proverbs 19:17 rarely is.

In his discussion of the perfections of grace and the background of gift giving in the ancient world, John Barclay has brought greater nuance to the understanding of grace in Second Temple Judaism and Paul that has provided the scholarly world with a much deeper understanding of

the complex topic of God's grace. By exploring the way Second Temple authors understood giving to the poor and its relevance for Paul's theology, it is hoped that Barclay's already rich discussion may be extended in some fruitful ways.

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