

Troels Engberg-Pedersen

Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit.

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Cosmology & Self in the Apostle Paul is a ‘sequel’ to the author’s earlier *Paul and the Stoics* and builds on the investigation of philosophical underpinnings of the Pauline letters which was begun there. The first book offers a carefully laid out argument for St. Paul’s adherence to Stoic ethical theory, albeit an adherence modified within the context of the Christ event. The new volume continues this argument, showing St. Paul’s adoption of Stoic materialism in his own doctrines of *pneuma* and resurrection. In both volumes, Engberg-Pedersen takes great pains to come to terms with the Apostle’s own expression of his understanding of the Christ event and the Christian life without reference to modern theological concerns and commitments which may or may not have been shared by St. Paul. All in all, *Cosmology & Self* is part of a bold attempt to reconstruct the details of St. Paul’s worldview just as he presents it in the letters.

In making his case, Engberg-Pedersen makes use of a wide range of current and older landmark scholarship on both the Pauline letters and Stoicism. He is acutely aware of the resistance on the part of modern biblical scholars both toward recognizing an affiliation between St. Paul and his pagan contemporaries and toward recognizing in St. Paul’s writing a consistent philosophical worldview. Engberg-Pedersen’s treatment of Pauline studies in particular is sensitive, fair and respectful, even when he is criticizing a particular scholar’s methodology or assumptions—a virtue which is perhaps especially difficult to maintain when dealing with interpretations of Pauline doctrine which are often guided by interpreters’ personal commitments. Whenever possible, Engberg-Pedersen recognizes the value in each of the interpretations which he examines and incorporates their insights into his own argument. In this reviewer’s opinion, this method of proceeding results in a scholarly work which is at once bold and established on a solid foundation, one which does not shy away from those aspects of the Pauline worldview which are untenable for modern Christians.

Engberg-Pedersen’s writing style exhibits a number of virtues. Considering the difficult ideas approached in this book, it is remarkably easy to read since the author has striven for clarity and has achieved it to a high degree, sometimes in despite of the texts with which he is dealing. He has made a wise decision to relegate supplementary material to endnotes—giving textual citations only within the body of the text—since the supplementary material is quite extensive, and oftentimes only directed toward those readers who are interested in the thorny details of various scholarly debates. Thus, for those who are content to simply read a well-thought out and challenging account of St.

Paul's worldview, they need not be distracted from the argument. That said, for those who are interested in the details should find the supplementary material to be quite thorough in scope. I have not found any grammatical errors, typos or awkward formulations which would be serious enough to report or to detract from the qualities of the text which I have just described.

Engberg-Pedersen seems to be skating on thinner ice when, toward the end of the book in Chapter Five, he introduces three modern concepts of self—Pierre Bourdieu's *habitus*, the notion of *religious experience* and Michel Foucault's *subjectification*—in order to tease out the details of St. Paul's own self-reflections. I find his use of the third concept particularly problematic, as though he is over-reaching in his attempt to apply it to St. Paul's description of his own converted self. Engberg-Pedersen uses Foucault as filtered through Nicholas Rose, a British sociologist, who presents subjectification as 'all those heterogeneous processes and practices which human beings come to relate to themselves and others as subjects of a certain type' (as quoted by Engberg-Pedersen, 145). These processes and practices are human technologies of the self intended to govern human conduct (145); they 'constantly refer to various authorities as warrants for the conduct that is being enjoined' (146). He then applies this concept to the conversion which is occasioned in the Apostle by God's action upon him (159). One might reasonably question whether divine action ought to be understood in terms of human processes and practices, or at least whether such an understanding would make sense to St. Paul. Indeed, it is questionable whether St. Paul would have considered the discipline and way of life which resulted from this conversion as a human process which only finds its 'warrant' in an outside authority. The way that Engsborg-Pedersen applies the concept, in this case at least, seems either to contradict the parameters of the concept of subjectification within which he is working, or to reduce divine action to human process and the need for external authority as justification for this process. Whatever the case may be, it is reasonable to wonder whether the use of Foucault's concept is of greater help or harm to the author's argument. That said, the author seems to be on more solid ground with his application of the other two concepts. Despite my own stated reservations, I still found this attempt to use modern concepts in the service of explicating ancient thought fascinating and well worth taking the trouble to consider.

One final remark is in order. From this reviewer's point of view, *Cosmology & Self* was a welcome addition to the work begun in *Paul and the Stoics* precisely because of its focus on St. Paul's adaptation of the Stoic *pneuma* as the physical vehicle of individual and collective conversion to the Christian life. In *Paul and the Stoics* I was frequently left wondering, in the absence of direct references in the Pauline letters to any Stoic philosophers, why Paul's ethical reflections could not have been based on a (Middle) Platonic model, rather than a Stoic one. After all, the Hellenistic Platonists (as far as to the last Neoplatonists in the seventh century) attached great value to Stoic ethics (and even to Stoic logic) and they happily adopted many Stoic formulations. On the other hand, what they did not accept was the Stoics' materialism. With *Cosmology & Self*, by

showing St. Paul's adherence to a doctrine of *pneuma* on the Stoic model, Engberg-Pedersen would finally sweep aside the need to posit a relation on St. Paul's part to a Platonic model. The similarities between the Apostle's Stoic way of thinking and the Platonic way would, of course, provide ample opportunity for later Christians like St. Augustine, Origen, the Cappadocians and many others to interpret the Pauline letters in a Platonic way.

In brief, then, this book should be of enormous interest to wide range of readers, and not just those involved in biblical or New Testament studies. First and foremost, for anyone interested in the meetings and cross-fertilizations of Ancient cultures—in this instance the philosophical worldviews of Ancient Christian and pagan Greek and Roman Stoics—this is a must-read. Of course, this book should be of interest to scholars of Ancient philosophy in general, as well as to scholars of Church History and of early Church doctrine. Whether or not one agrees with the author's argument in its entirety, this book goes a long way toward contributing greater detail to our knowledge of the complex interrelations between the dominant modes of thought and worship in the Ancient Mediterranean.

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