

‘That There May Be Equality’: The Contexts and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal

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The purpose of this essay is to illuminate the character of Paul’s appropriation of the ideal of ‘equality’ (ἰσότης) in 2 Cor 8.13–15 by exploring the meaning of the term in each of the contexts in the Greek world in which thinking about ‘equality’ developed: friendship, politics, and the cosmos. The essay traces a consistent tendency in Paul to reverse the ancient logic of inverse proportion as the means for achieving ‘equality’. The essay highlights the novelty of Paul’s attempt to create an economic structure—partnership in the collection—the goal of which was to achieve ‘equality’ between persons of different social classes through redistributive exchange.

Keywords: equality, poverty, patronage, friendship, politics, redistribution

I

In 2 Cor 8.13–15, Paul stipulates as the criterion and goal of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem the ideal of ‘equality’ (ἰσότης): ‘for the purpose [of the collection] is not that there [should be] relief for others and affliction for you, but rather [it should be] out of equality (ἐξ ἰσότητος). In the now time, your abundance should supply their lack, in order that their abundance may supply your lack, so that there may be equality (ὅπως γένηται ἰσότης). As it is written: “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little”.’¹

It has long been recognized by Pauline scholars that the source of Paul’s idea of ‘equality’ is not the Septuagint, where the term ἰσότης appears only twice (Job 36.29; Zech 4.7) and without a Hebrew equivalent,² but the Greek world, where

1 The translation slightly modifies that of Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (ed. George W. MacRae; trans. L. L. Welborn; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 37.

2 As noted by Hans Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief* (KEK 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924; repr. 1970) 258; Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984) 407. See also *Ep. Arist.* 263; *Ps.-Phoc.* 137; *Ps. Sol.* 17.41. Elsewhere in the NT, only in Col 4.1, together with τὸ δίκαιον, in reference to the way in which masters

thinking about 'equality' developed in three contexts: between friends, in the *polis*, and in the *kosmos*.³ Each context is relevant to an understanding of Paul's use of the concept, a fact likewise acknowledged by interpreters of Paul, and a source of considerable discomfort, since it locates Paul's concern in proximity to secular goals and threatens to compromise the perceived primacy of theological motives such as grace and justification by faith.⁴ The narrower purpose of this essay is to achieve sufficient immersion in the controlling logic of Greek thought in each of the areas mentioned above, so that the character of Paul's appropriation of the idea of 'equality' stands forth clearly. Greater clarity about Paul's notion of 'equality' as the ground and goal of Christian relations is a worthy aim in itself, since there is a demonstrable tendency to ignore the issue of economic inequality in the history of Pauline scholarship.⁵ But this undertaking is also justified from a historicist perspective, since it is now increasingly clear that the danger that hangs over our present moment in late capitalism is that the Judeo-Christian sense of social obligation will be entirely swept away by a resurgence of that structured inequality which was the basis of the political system of the Roman Empire.⁶

should treat their slaves; cf. Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (ed. Helmut Koester; trans. William R. Poehmann and Robert J. Karris; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 162.

- 3 Rudolf Hirzel, *Themis, Dike und Verwandtes: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Rechtsidee bei den Griechen* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1907) 228–320, 421–3; Gustav Stählin, 'ἴσος, ἰσότης, κτλ.', *TDNT* 3 (1965) 343–55; Klaus Thraede, 'Gleichheit', *RAC* 10 (1979) 122–64. For the recognition that the background of Paul's thought on ἰσότης is Hellenistic, see Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 258; Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992) 84–91; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 67–8.
- 4 In reference to Paul's appeal to ἰσότης in 2 Cor 8.13–14, see, e.g., Stählin, 'ἴσος, ἰσότης', 348: 'We may ask whether this is not a concession to secular, i.e., Greek *do ut des* thinking'; Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 88: 'On the basis of the Greek understanding of "equity"/"equality", the ideological foundation of the collection would be legal and juridical equity/equality. In other words, it must spring from ἰσότης in the true Greek sense... But it seems hardly plausible that Paul meant to recommend some kind of legal equity as ground and premise for the collection; this kind of mere formalism would hardly correspond to Paul's usual argument.'
- 5 On this tendency in the history of Pauline scholarship, see Petros Vassiliadis, 'Equality and Justice in Classical Antiquity and in Paul: The Social Implications of the Pauline Collection', *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 36 (1992) 51–9, esp. 52; Steven J. Friesen, 'Paul and Economics: The Jerusalem Collection as an Alternative to Patronage', *Paul Unbound: Other Perspectives on the Apostle* (ed. Mark D. Given; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010) 27–54, esp. 27–8. The major exceptions to this tendency are: Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998); Steven J. Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-Called New Consensus', *JSNT* 26 (2004) 323–61; Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).
- 6 G. E. M. de Ste Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquest* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1981) 189–91; Peter Garnsey and Richard Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley: University of California,

Yet, even if we succeed in constructing a rigorous differential comparison of Paul’s concept of ‘equality’ with that of Aristotle or Philo in each of the areas mentioned above, we will not yet have grasped the novelty of Paul’s application of this concept to relations between those who enjoyed ‘abundance’ in Corinth and those who experienced ‘lack’ in Jerusalem; for the category in which Paul seeks to conceptualize relations between the Corinthians and the Jerusalemites is recognizably ‘economic’, in the modern sense of the term, whereas precisely this conceptual category was lacking in pre-Christian Greek and Roman writers. As Moses Finley taught us more than a generation ago, Greeks and Romans ‘lacked the concept of an “economy”, and, *a fortiori*, they lacked the conceptual elements which together constitute what we call “the economy”’.⁷ Recently, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben has sought to elaborate a ‘genealogy of the economy’ by tracing the emergence of this category to the first tentative articulation of the Trinitarian doctrine in the form of an *oikonomia* in the early centuries of Christian theology.⁸ We will take the measure of the novelty of Paul’s thought in his organization of the collection, only when we have located Paul’s project at that moment in ancient history when the unity of the cosmos was broken, when being and acting, ontology and praxis, parted ways irreversibly, making place for a new category of thought and practice—the economic.⁹ We shall discover how fully Paul participated in this rupture by means of his belief in a deity who voluntarily ‘impoverished’ himself, thereby establishing a paradigm of economic relations under the sign of ‘equality’.

1987) 125; Geza Alföldy, *The Social History of Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1991) 135; G. Storey, ‘*Cui bono?* An Economic Cost-Benefit Analysis of Statuses in the Roman Empire’, *Hierarchies in Action: Cui Bono?* (ed. M. W. Diehl; Carbondale, IL: Illinois University, 2000) 340–74; Willem M. Jongman, ‘The Roman Economy: From Cities to Empire’, *The Transformation of Economic Life Under the Roman Empire* (ed. Lukas de Blois and John Rich; Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 2002) 29–32.

7 Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973); updated edition with foreword by Ian Morris (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) 21. See more recently Paul Cartledge, ‘The Economy (Economies) of Ancient Greece’, *The Ancient Economy* (ed. Walter Scheidel and Sitta von Reden; New York: Routledge, 2002) 12–16; Scott Meikle, ‘Modernism, Economics and the Ancient Economy’, *The Ancient Economy* (ed. Scheidel and von Reden) 235, 245–7.

8 Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (trans. L. Chiesa; Stanford: Stanford University, 2011).

9 Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 22–3, 39, 65–7. Agamben does not discuss 2 Cor 8.13–14, but identifies the deutero-Pauline texts Col 1.24–15 and Eph 3.9 as crucial moments in the development of the sense of *oikonomia*.

II

The first context in which we shall explore the development of Greek thought about ‘equality’ is that of friendship. Aristotle attests the antiquity of the proverb ‘Friendship is equality’ (ἰσότης ἢ φιλότης).¹⁰ Again, according to Aristotle, the true friend is ‘equal and alike’ (ἴσος καὶ ὅμοιος).¹¹ To be sure, Aristotle recognizes that few friendships qualify as the best kind, in terms of equality and likeness.¹² Yet Aristotle insists that ‘equality’ remains the goal of unequal friendships,¹³ and he elaborates ratios for achieving it.¹⁴ Aristotle explains that ‘there are two sorts of equality’, corresponding to the two species of friendship.¹⁵ In a friendship between equals, whether in wealth or virtue, equality is ‘numerical’ (κατ’ ἀριθμόν), ‘as it is measured by the same standard’.¹⁶ But in a friendship between unequals, such as that between benefactor and beneficiary, ‘equality’ must be ‘proportional’ (κατ’ ἀναλογίαν), ‘since it is just for superior and inferior to have not the same share but proportional shares’.¹⁷ That is, between two unequal persons, justice divides benefits in proportion to their deserts, so that the two shares are not equal to each other, but each equal to its recipient’s merits.¹⁸ In the Aristotelian calculus, this means that ‘the superior party claims by inverse proportion—the contribution of the inferior to stand in the same ratio to his own as he himself stands to the inferior, his attitude being that of ruler to subject’.¹⁹ Thus, in order to restore balance and secure equality, the inferior party must render a larger share of affection and honor to his benefactor, ‘such as belongs by nature to a ruler or a god’.²⁰ Without the operation of this inverse proportion, Aristotle judges, ‘it would seem that the superior comes off worse, and friendship is a charity and not a partnership’.²¹

Roman social historians analyze unequal friendships under the category of patronage.²² As defined by Richard Saller, patronage is an asymmetrical personal

10 Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 8.5.5; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 8.7.2–4, 9.8.2; *Eth. Eud.* 7.6.9, 7.9.1.

11 Aristotle *Pol.* 3.16; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 8.1.6, 8.8.5: ἢ δ’ ἰσότης καὶ ὁμοιότης φιλότης.

12 Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 8.3.8.

13 Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 8.6.7; *Eth. Eud.* 7.9.1.

14 Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 8.6.7; *Eth. Eud.* 7.9.5. Cf. Lorraine Smith Pangle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003) 57–64.

15 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.9.5; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 8.6.7.

16 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.9.5; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 8.6.7.

17 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.9.5.

18 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.3.2; *Eth. Nic.* 8.7.2. Cf. Michael Pakaluk, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics Books VIII and IX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 92–4.

19 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.10.10; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 8.14.2.

20 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.10.13.

21 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.10.12.

22 Richard Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982) 4–9, 11–15, 17–18, 24–5; Saller, ‘Patronage and Friendship in Early Imperial Rome’, *Patronage in Ancient Society* (ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill; London:

relationship involving reciprocal exchange.²³ Andrew Wallace-Hadrill penetrates to the core of this system when he observes that patronage was a means of social control through manipulation of access to scarce resources: ‘the patron’s power over the client derives not from generous and regular distribution, but from keeping him on tenterhooks with the prospect of access to resources which is never fully granted’.²⁴ The operation of Aristotle’s inverse proportion, by which the beneficiary renders a larger share of honor to the benefactor, is impressively illustrated by an inscription from Roman Corinth dated between AD 54 and 55, in which the tribesmen of the tribe Calpurnia lavishly honor their ‘patron’, Gaius Julius Spartiaticus, ‘because of his virtue and eager all-encompassing munificence toward our colony’.²⁵

How might Paul’s appeal to ‘equality’ as the principle of relations between Christians have resonated in the context of Greco-Roman thought about unequal friendships? It is the thesis of Stephan Joubert’s monograph *Paul as Benefactor* that Paul understood the collection as a benefaction through which he and his assemblies could assist the Jerusalem saints.²⁶ According to Joubert, the Jerusalem church had already established itself as Paul’s benefactor by endorsing his work in Antioch and his mission to the Gentiles.²⁷ Thus, Paul’s organization of the collection for Jerusalem was a reciprocal gift within the framework of a benefit exchange.²⁸ One may criticize Joubert’s description of benefaction as a relationship in which the parties were benefactors to each other: this construction misses the fundamental asymmetry of such relationships, frankly acknowledged

Routledge, 1989) 49–61; David Konstan, ‘Patrons and Friends’, *CP* 90 (1995) 328–42, esp. 328–9; Konstan, *Friendship in the Classical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997) 135–7, 143–5. See further, Peter White, ‘*Amicitia* and the Profession of Poetry in Early Imperial Rome’, *JRS* 68 (1978) 74–92, esp. 81–2; White, *Promised Verse: Poets in the Society of Augustan Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1993) 27–34.

23 Saller, *Personal Patronage*, 1; Saller, ‘Patronage and Friendship’, 49.

24 Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, ‘Patronage in Roman Society’, *Patronage in Ancient Society*, 73.

25 A. B. West, *Corinth VIII: Latin Inscriptions 1896–1926* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1931) 50–3 no. 68. On this inscription and the career of Gaius Julius Spartiaticus in general, see L. R. Taylor and Allen B. West, ‘The Euryclids in Latin Inscriptions from Corinth’, *AJA* 30 (1926) 389–400, esp. 393–400; K. M. T. Chrimes, *Ancient Sparta: A Reexamination of the Evidence* (Manchester: Manchester University, 1952) 169–87; Glen W. Bowersock, ‘Eurycles of Sparta’, *JRS* 51 (1961) 112–18, esp. 116; Paul Cartledge and Anthony Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta: A Tale of Two Cities* (London: Routledge, 2002) 97–104, esp. 100–103.

26 Stephan Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor: Reciprocity, Strategy, and Theological Reflection in Paul’s Collection* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

27 Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 111–15.

28 Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 150–2.

by Aristotle's comparison of the benefactor to a ruler or a god.²⁹ Nevertheless, I suggest that it is instructive to read Paul's appeal to 'equality' in the context of Greco-Roman thought about unequal friendships, because this reading approximates the way in which a few Corinthian Christians with surplus resources would have approached Paul's argument in 2 Cor 8.³⁰ Believers such as Crispus and Gaius, who had been raised in a society of 'benefits', and who daily encountered statues and inscriptions honoring patrons in the public spaces of Roman Corinth, would have been all too familiar with the theory and practice of unequal friendship, even if their own resources did not approach those of civic benefactors.³¹

Moreover, the success and magnitude of Paul's collection at Corinth would have depended upon his friendships with men of substance such as Crispus and Gaius. To be sure, Paul gave instruction to the whole community for the weekly accumulation of monies: each should set aside what he or she could, in accordance with gains (1 Cor 16.1–2).³² But for the majority of the Corinthians, who lived at the subsistence level, this could hardly have been more than the widow's two mites.³³ In a vertically organized society like Roman Corinth, only persons with surplus resources could have ensured that the collection would be 'considerable' (ἄξιος), as Paul says that it must be, if he is to accompany it to Jerusalem in person (1 Cor 16.4).³⁴ In approaching men such as Crispus and

29 Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.10.13. For this criticism of Joubert's account of benefaction, see already Friesen, 'Paul and Economics', 48.

30 Cf. Luke Timothy Johnson, 'Making Connections: The Material Expression of Friendship in the New Testament', *Interpretation* 58 (2004) 158–71, esp. 165–7.

31 On the social status of Crispus, the former 'synagogue president' (Acts 18.8) and Gaius, 'the host of the whole *ekklesia*' (Rom 16.23), see Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982) 73–4; Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983) 57–8, 221 n. 7; Peter Lampe, 'Paul, Patrons, and Clients', *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. J. Paul Sampley; Harrisburg: Trinity, 2003) 496; Friesen, 'Poverty in Pauline Studies', 365, observing that Gaius must have had 'a larger house than others, which makes him perhaps the wealthiest person we know of from Paul's assemblies'.

32 Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 364–6.

33 Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 75–6, 96; Steven J. Friesen, 'Prospects for a Demography of the Pauline Mission: Corinth Among the Churches', *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth* (ed. Daniel D. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2005) 351–70, esp. 367.

34 For the sense of ἄξιος as 'worth' or 'value', see the papyri adduced by James H. Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament Illustrated from the Papyri and Other Non-literary Sources* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1930) 50–1 s.v. ἄξιος. For this interpretation of the phrase ἐὰν δὲ ἄξιον ᾖ in 1 Cor 16.4, see Johannes Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief* (KEK 5; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1910) 382: 'Wenn es der Mühe wert ist; also ἄξιον ἐστὶ wie 2 Thess. 1.3;...nur wenn eine glänzende Sammlung zusammengekommen ist, will er es tun'.

Gaius, the relational category that would have been available to Paul within Greco-Roman society was that of friendship.³⁵ The vocabulary that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians in discussing the collection and the conflict that it generated—κοινωνία, βέβαιος, ἀπλότης, πίστις, πλεονεξία, ἄδικον, λύπη—are so regularly associated with friendship in ancient literature as to warrant the hypothesis that friendship is the proper category in which to conceive of Paul’s appeal to certain donors in the church at Corinth.³⁶

Several aspects of Paul’s argument in 2 Cor 8 may have encouraged such readers to interpret his appeal to ‘equality’ in the context of the theory of unequal friendship. First, there is Paul’s characterization of the relationship that he seeks to promote between the Corinthians and the Jerusalemites as a κοινωνία (2 Cor 8.4), a term constantly associated with friendship by Aristotle, the Pythagoreans, and Greek writers generally.³⁷ Second, there is Paul’s repeated designation of the collection as a χάρις or ‘gift’ (2 Cor 8.4, 6), evoking the notion of reciprocation.³⁸ Third, Paul’s sententious observation (2 Cor 8.12) that a gift is ‘acceptable according to what one possesses, not what one does not possess’ (καθὸ ἐὰν ἔχη εὐπρόσδεκτος, οὐ καθὸ οὐκ ἔχει) might be seen as an endorsement of the principle of ‘proportionality’, as indeed it often is by commentators.³⁹ Finally, there is Paul’s frank acknowledgment of the unequal status of the parties to the relationship (2 Cor 8.14): at present, the Corinthians enjoy ‘abundance’ (περίσσευμα), while the Jerusalemites suffer ‘deficiency’

35 Credit for this insight belongs to Peter Marshall, *Enmity in Corinth: Social Conventions in Paul’s Relations with the Corinthians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987) 232, 245, 345; see further L. L. Welborn, *An End to Enmity: Paul and the ‘Wrongdoer’ of Second Corinthians* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011) 380–91. More generally, John T. Fitzgerald, ‘Paul and Friendship’, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. Sampley) 319–43.

36 For this vocabulary in the literature of friendship: κοινωνία (2 Cor 1.7; 8.4; 9.13; Rom 15.26), cf. Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 8.9.1–2, 8.12.1, 9.12.1; βέβαιος, βεβαιόω (2 Cor 1.7; 1.21), cf. Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.2.39, 7.5.3; *Eth. Nic.* 8.8.5; ἀπλότης (2 Cor 1.12; 8.2; 9.11, 13) cf. Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.5.2; πίστις, πιστός (2 Cor 1.18; 1.24; 8.7), cf. Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.2.40; πλεονεξία, πλεονεκτέω (2 Cor 2.11; 7.2; 9.5; 12.17–18), cf. Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 5.2; Menander *Mon.* 259, 366; Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 17.7; ἀδικία, ἄδικον, ἀδικέω (2 Cor 7.2; 7.12), cf. Aristotle *Eth. Eud.* 7.1.3, 7.2.19; *Eth. Nic.* 8.9.3; λύπη, λυπέω (2 Cor 2.1–4, 5; 7.8, 9, 11; 9.7), cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 2.2.8–9, 15; *Eth. Eud.* 7.6.8; *Eth. Nic.* 9.11.4; Menander *Sent.* 456; Plutarch *Mor.* 460D–464C. This list might easily be expanded, e.g., πεποιθήσις (2 Cor 1.15), cf. Aristotle *Eth. Nic.* 8.3.8–9. See the discussion in Welborn, *An End to Enmity*, 381–5.

37 Stählin, ‘ἴσος, ἰσότης’, 347; Johan C. Thom, “‘Harmonious Equality’: The Topos of Friendship in Neopythagorean Writings”, *Greco-Roman Perspectives on Friendship* (ed. John T. Fitzgerald; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997) 77–104.

38 James R. Harrison, *Paul’s Language of Grace in its Greco-Roman Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003) 289–332.

39 C. F. G. Heinrici, *Der zweite Brief an die Korinther* (KEK 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900) 283; Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 257; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 66.

(ὑστέρημα).⁴⁰ Why should a reader whose consciousness had been shaped by the ideology of benefaction have understood Paul's appeal for 'equality' as anything other than the restitution of a balance within an unequal friendship?

If these are the expectations that Paul's argument evoked in readers of a certain class, then it is likely that his appeal to the principle of 'equality' in encouraging participation in the collection would have appeared as a dangerous attempt to reverse the established social relations of power within Greco-Roman friendship. Let us see how this understanding of Paul's purpose might have arisen, by following the logic of his argument in 2 Cor 8.1–15, in order to draw out what is implicit. Paul begins the letter now preserved in 2 Cor 8 by calling attention to the success of the collection among the churches of Macedonia, as the occasion for requesting that the Corinthians fulfill their commitment to the project. Paul emphasizes the 'abysmal poverty' (ἡ κατὰ βάθους πτωχεία) of the Macedonians which has 'overflowed into the wealth (τὸ πλοῦτος) of their generosity' and praises the Macedonians for acting 'on their own initiative, petitioning...for the favor of partnership in the gift' (2 Cor 8.1–5).⁴¹ Noteworthy in this exordium is Paul's paradoxical assertion that the *poverty* of the Macedonians has become the source of *wealth* for the Jerusalem Christians. Paul develops this seemingly absurd proposition in the first of three proofs, appealing to the example of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 8.9): 'For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that on account of you he became poor (ἐπτώχευσεν), although he was rich (πλούσιος), in order that by means of his poverty (πτωχεία) you might become rich (πλουτήσητε) (2 Cor 8.9). Doubtless, Paul alludes here to the idea of the *kenosis* of the divine son, best known from the 'Christ hymn' of Phil 2.6–11.⁴² But unique in 2 Cor 8 is the economic vocabulary, which evokes the image of Jesus living in circumstances of beggary (πτωχεία) and attributes a soteriological function to Jesus' poverty.⁴³

Paul's surprising description of material poverty as the source of spiritual wealth in the paradigmatic instances of the Macedonians and Jesus sets the parameters within which the Corinthians are encouraged to conceive of their relationship to the poor saints in Jerusalem, and so to embrace the principle of 'equality'. Paul is arguing implicitly that the poor Jerusalem saints are in the position of the superior party, by virtue of spiritual wealth, which has alleviated the Corinthians' deficiency; so now, as the beneficiaries, the Corinthians are obliged, by the logic of inverse proportion, to make an extraordinary gift to the

40 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 68.

41 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 41–9; cf. Harrison, *Paul's Language of Grace*, 315; David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 131–4.

42 Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 417–18; David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2005) 237–8.

43 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 62.

Jerusalem Christians, in order to restore ‘equality’. This argument, advanced somewhat elliptically in 2 Cor 8.1–15,⁴⁴ is articulated explicitly in Rom 15.26–27, after the success of the collection was guaranteed: ‘for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do this, and indeed, *they owe it to them*: for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things.’⁴⁵ It is not difficult to imagine how perverse this argument must have seemed to anyone shaped by the conventional notion of obligations between benefactors and beneficiaries, when Paul first advanced it in 2 Cor 8.

III

The second context in the Greek world in which Paul’s use of the term ἰσότης would have resonated is that of politics.⁴⁶ As the classicist Rudolf Hirzel stated long ago, there is hardly a term which is so common in Greek discussions of law and politics as ‘equality’ (ἰσότης and its cognate τὸ ἴσον).⁴⁷ Aristotle explains that ‘because a state essentially consists of a multitude of persons,...reciprocal equality is the necessary preservative of states’.⁴⁸ In the Greek state, the legal equality of persons before the law came to be differentiated from the social inequality of persons by nature.⁴⁹ Equality was the basic principle of democracy: Aristotle states that equality is most fully realized in a democracy where ‘all alike share equally in the government’.⁵⁰ But equality was also the stated goal of oligarchy, according to Aristotle, only that, in this case, ‘equality

44 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 68.

45 See the discussion of the relationship between 2 Cor 8.14 and Rom 15.26–27 in Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 259–60; Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 62–7; Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 68–9; Downs, *Offering of the Gentiles*, 137–8.

46 For the political context of the concept, see Hirzel, *Themis, Dike, und Verwandtes*, 228–320; Stählin, ‘ἴσος, ἰσότης’, 345–6;

47 Hirzel, *Themis, Dike, und Verwandtes*, 228.

48 Aristotle *Pol.* 2.1.4.

49 Hirzel, *Themis, Dike, und Verwandtes*, 251–3, and esp. 421–3 (Excursus VII) on the relation between ὁμοίος and ἴσος. See also Stählin, ‘ἴσος, ἰσότης’, 346.

50 The entire context of Aristotle *Pol.* 4.4.2 is relevant: ‘The first kind of democracy therefore is the one which receives the name chiefly in respect of equality (κατὰ τὸ ἴσον). For the law of this sort of democracy ascribes equality to the state of things in which the rich have no more prominence than the poor, and neither class is sovereign, but both are alike (ἀλλ’ ὁμοίους ἀμφοτέρους): for assuming that freedom is chiefly found in a democracy, as some persons suppose, and also equality (ἰσότης), this would be so most fully when to the fullest extent all alike share equally in the government.’ Cf. the formulaic descriptions of democracy in the inscriptions, e.g., Dittenberger, *SIG* 254,6: πολιτεία ἴση καὶ ὁμοία; 312,25: πολιτεία ἐπ’ ἴση καὶ ὁμοίη.

is according to worth', which is to say, 'by proportion'.⁵¹ Now, we should make clear that equality in Greek politics was always a matter of rights and status, and was never extended into the economic sphere.⁵² Indeed, the failure to extend equality into the economic domain threatened to undermine the basis of Athenian democracy, as acknowledged by Demosthenes in a bitter complaint: 'Where the rich are concerned, Athenians, the rest of us have no share in our just and equal rights. Indeed we have not. The rich can choose their own time for facing a jury, and their crimes are stale and cold when they are dished up before you, but if any of the rest of us is in trouble, he is brought into court while all is fresh.'⁵³

In his *Hermeneia* commentary on 2 Cor 8 and 9, Hans Dieter Betz argues that Paul's collection for the poor in Jerusalem should be understood in a political context: 'A financial contribution which involves Greeks as donors and Palestinian Jews as recipients was certainly a political matter'.⁵⁴ Betz acknowledges that in 2 Cor 8 the political idea remains largely at the presuppositional level, but 'as the apostle explained in greater detail in 2 Cor 9.6–15, he regards the collection for the poor in Jerusalem as a means of bringing about unity within the church between Jews and Greeks'.⁵⁵ What is known about the origin and ethnic composition of the early Christian community at Corinth supports Betz's suggestion that Paul's appeal for partnership in the collection would have had a political resonance. The majority of believers in Corinth were clearly non-Jews, as demonstrated by Paul's reference in 1 Cor 12.1–2 to a past in which 'you were Gentiles...and were led astray to dumb idols'.⁵⁶ Yet, the author of Acts attributes sensational importance to the conversion of the synagogue president Crispus in his account of the growth of the followers of Jesus to a 'large people' (Acts 18.10): 'many of the Corinthians believed and had themselves baptized when they heard [of it]—that is, of the conversion of Crispus (Acts 18.8).'⁵⁷ Greater

51 Aristotle *Pol.* 5.1.7. See the discussion of 'proportionale Gleichheit' in Hirzel, *Themis, Dike, und Verwandtes*, 277–81.

52 Hirzel, *Themis, Dike, und Verwandtes*, 251–3, 421–3; Stählin, 'ἴσος, ἰσότης', 346; Vassiliadis, 'Equality and Justice in Classical Antiquity and in Paul', 53–4.

53 Demosthenes *Or.* 21.112; cf. Stählin, 'ἴσος, ἰσότης', 346 n. 19; cf. Vassiliadis, 'Equality and Justice in Classical Antiquity and in Paul', 54.

54 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 68.

55 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 68.

56 Cavan W. Concannon, 'Ecclesia laus Corinthensis: Negotiating Ethnicity under Empire' (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010).

57 For this interpretation, which takes the report of the conversion of Crispus as the unexpressed object of the participle ἀκούοντες, see Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 535; C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (2 vols.; ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2004) 2.868–9; Gerd Lüdemann, *Early Christianity according to the Traditions in Acts: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 203–4.

plausibility accrues to Luke’s account of the influence of Crispus from Philo’s reference to a Jewish ‘colony’ at Corinth, which must have been of significant size and vitality, since it is one of only two Greek cities whose Jewish inhabitants Philo mentions by name.⁵⁸ That Paul made an exception to his custom of not baptizing new converts and personally administered baptism to Crispus (1 Cor 1.14) is further indication of the prominence of this Jewish leader in the Christian community.⁵⁹ In 2 Corinthians, when Jewish-Christian apostles arrive, and boast of their ethno-religious heritage as ‘Hebrews, Israelites, seed of Abraham’ (11.22), they receive a hospitable welcome among the Corinthians, even though they preach a gospel that differs from Paul’s (11.4).⁶⁰ Thus, unlike Paul’s Macedonian assemblies, which seem to have been entirely non-Jewish, the church at Corinth was a mixture of Jews and Greeks, where ethnic identity was constantly negotiated.⁶¹ In Corinth, it seems likely that Paul’s appeal for partnership in the collection would have been seen as a political matter.

Precisely in this case, it must be emphasized how anomalous Paul’s appeal to the principle of ‘equality’ between Jews and Greeks would have seemed. A careful examination of edicts and petitions, together with the relevant passages in Philo and Josephus, provides no grounds for thinking that Jews enjoyed equal rights identified with citizens in any of the Greek cities of the Roman east.⁶² When Josephus speaks of the *ἰσοπολιτεία* of the Jewish community in Alexandria and elsewhere, he intends to describe an equal (or similar) organizational status of the Jewish *πολίτευμα* as a parallel body, separate from the *polis*.⁶³ The Jewish rights mentioned by Josephus are the right to keep ancestral laws and the right to maintain their own organizations, with a well-defined Jewish way of life.⁶⁴ In sum, the evidence does not suggest that the Jews enjoyed citizenship in the

58 Philo *Legat.* 281. Cf. Peter Richardson, ‘On the Absence of “Anti-Judaism” in 1 Corinthians’, *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*. Vol. 1, *Paul and the Gospels* (ed. P. Richardson and D. Granskou; Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University, 1986) 59–74, esp. 60–3.

59 Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 57; Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville: Glazier, 1999) 83.

60 Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) esp. 272–4.

61 John M. G. Barclay, ‘Thessalonica and Corinth: Social Contrasts in Pauline Christianity’, *JSNT* 47 (1992) 49–74; Richard S. Ascough, *Paul’s Macedonian Associations* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

62 Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt: The Struggle for Equal Rights* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985) 356–7 and passim; Miriam Pucci ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World* (Tübingen: Mohr siebeck, 1998) 1–356, 451–82.

63 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 280–2; cf. Pucci ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World*, 300; Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2002) 71, 74–5.

64 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 282; Pucci ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World*, 460–7.

polis by virtue of the reciprocity of civic rights. Indeed, the history of Jewish communities in the Diaspora is that of a continuous struggle to exist as separate organizations (πολιτεῦματα), while the Hellenistic πόλεις sought to destroy them and to impose their own laws and rule on the Jews.⁶⁵

We must remind ourselves that Paul's letters to Corinth were written in the aftermath of the Caligula crisis, when Jewish efforts to defend their ἰσοπολιτεία reached a flash-point of violence in Alexandria, Caesarea and elsewhere.⁶⁶ Philo records the declaration of Flaccus, the governor of Egypt, that the Jews of Alexandria were 'foreigners and aliens' in a city where they had resided for hundreds of years.⁶⁷ Claudius's letter to the Alexandrians advises that the Jews should 'enjoy what is their own in a city which is not their own'.⁶⁸ The anti-Jewish writers countered by Josephus in the *Contra Apionem* show us how some Greeks and Hellenized Egyptians perceived the Jewish struggle for equal rights: Manetho's revisionist history of the exodus was designed to emphasize the features of the Jewish people that marked it from its birth and ever after as a contemptible rabble of aliens, captives and slaves, who must be forcibly expelled in order to purify the city;⁶⁹ Apion contended that the Jews represented pure barbarism, because of their misanthropic, rebellious and conspiratorial propensities, and so should not be accorded social, legal, or political equality.⁷⁰

Paul's appeal to 'equality' as the principle that should govern relations between Greeks and Jews would be especially shocking, if Hans Dieter Betz is correct in his interpretation of Paul's subsequent statement in 2 Cor 9.13 about the effect of the collection as signifying the obligatory submission of the Achaians to the Jerusalemites.⁷¹ Betz argues that the key terms of 2 Cor 9.13 are derived from the realms of law and politics: ὑποταγή is 'submission' to a legal agreement or a political arrangement; ὁμολογία does not mean 'confession'

65 Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 282.

66 In the dating of Paul's Corinthian correspondence, I follow the early chronology established by Gerd Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 6–18, 157–77; supported by David G. Horrell, *The Social Ethos of the Corinthian Correspondence: Interests and Ideology from 1 Corinthians to 1 Clement* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 73–4. On the importance of the Caligula crisis, see Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 316–18; Andrew Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (New Haven: Yale University, 1990) 140–91; Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes Toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1998) 136–44.

67 Philo *Legat.* 350; cf. Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt*, 243–4; Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 140, 144.

68 PLond. 1912 in *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, vol. 2 (ed. Victor A. Tcherikover and Alexander Fuks; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1960) 41, 43, no. 153, Col. V, lines 94–5. Cf. Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 148–9.

69 Josephus *C. Ap.* 1.229–51. Cf. Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 19–23.

70 Josephus *C. Ap.* 2.73–102. Cf. Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 65.

71 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 122–5.

here, as it does elsewhere in the NT, ‘but is to be understood in its legal sense as a public act involving a document which codifies a transaction’.⁷² Thus the phrase ἡ ὑποταγή τῆς ὁμολογίας ὑμῶν means that ‘the donors have entered into a contractual agreement (ὁμολογία) by means of their donation, the substance of which is their submission (ὑποταγή) to Jerusalem’.⁷³ Betz’s translation of 2 Cor 9.13 successfully captures the technical quality of a legal contract: ‘Through the evidence of this charitable gift, they [that is, the believers in Jerusalem] praise God for the submission [expressed] by the contractual agreement for the [benefit of] the gospel of Christ, and [for] the generosity of the partnership benefiting them and all’.⁷⁴ Here, again, we encounter the dangerous reversal of the logic of inverse proportion: the politically superior inhabitants of a Roman colony must demonstrate their submission to conquered provincials in Jerusalem, in order to achieve ‘equality’.

IV

The third context for understanding Paul’s use of the term ἰσότης is supplied by philosophical speculation on the cosmos.⁷⁵ Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates a speech in praise of ‘equality’ as the power that orders the cosmos:

Wise men tell us, Callicles, that heaven and earth and gods and men are held together by communion and friendship, by orderliness, temperance, and justice; and that is the reason, my friend, why they call the whole world by the name of order (κόσμος), not of disorder or dissoluteness. Now you, as it seems to me, do not give proper attention to this, for all your cleverness, but have failed to observe the great power of geometrical equality (ἰσότης γεωμετρική) amongst both gods and men.⁷⁶

Similarly, in the pseudo-Aristotelian *De Mundo*, ‘equality’ is the force that preserves the cosmos: ‘In these greater matters, nature teaches us that equality is the preserver of concord, and concord is the preserver of the cosmos, which is the parent of all things and the most beautiful of all’.⁷⁷ Appropriating this philosophical tradition, Philo attributes great importance to ἰσότης, but as a Jew, he affirms that ‘equality’ is the ordering work of God the creator. In the treatise περὶ ἰσότητος, that makes up a significant portion of the writing ‘Who is the Heir of Divine Things’ (141–206), Philo asserts that God alone is perfectly just

⁷² Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 122–3.

⁷³ Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 122, finding the correct interpretation in Erasmus, *In Novum Testamentum Annotationes* (Basel: Frobenius, 1542) 578.

⁷⁴ Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 87.

⁷⁵ Hirzel, *Themis, Dike, und Verwandtes*, 308–11; Stählin, ἴσος, ἰσότης’, 346.

⁷⁶ Plato *Gorgias* 507d–508a.

⁷⁷ Ps.-Aristotle *De Mundo* 5, 397a3–4.

and able to establish right balance: thus, ‘God alone is able to attain to sublime and perfect equality’.⁷⁸ According to Philo, the world that God has created embodies proportionate equality:

Nearly all things are equal as respects proportion, even all the little and all the great things in the whole world. For those who have examined the questions of natural philosophy with some accuracy say that the four elements are all equal in proportionate equality. And it is by proportion that the whole world is compounded together, and united, and endowed with consistency so as to remain firm forever, proportion having distributed equality to each of its parts.⁷⁹

In illustration of God’s equitable administration of the cosmos, Philo references the provision of manna in the wilderness, and even cites the text of Exod 16.18, the very passage adduced by Paul in 2 Cor 8.15.⁸⁰

The great commentator Hans Windisch was so impressed by the similarity between Paul and Philo in the treatment of ἰσότης that he posited that they drew upon a common tradition of Hellenistic-Jewish Torah interpretation.⁸¹ Dieter Georgi adopted this suggestion and took it to the extreme, largely assimilating Paul to Philo.⁸² A close reading of Georgi’s monograph on Paul’s collection for Jerusalem reveals that Georgi was trying to preserve the dialectical moment in Paul’s thought about ‘equality’, resisting, on the one hand, the notion that Paul made a concession to secular *do ut des* thinking, while, on the other hand, holding at bay the mystical dimension of a Gnostic understanding of ἰσότης, which Georgi identified as a tendency of the Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom tradition, and which Georgi suggested might have been on the minds of Paul’s Corinthian readers.⁸³ Consequently, Georgi proposed that Paul, like Philo, saw ἰσότης as a divine force, and that ‘Paul’s expression ἐξ ἰσότητος is practically interchangeable with ‘ἐκ θεοῦ’ or ‘ἐκ χάριτος’.⁸⁴ In other words, by appealing to ‘equality’, Paul wished to refer to the divine source of giving and receiving.⁸⁵ Georgi summarized: ‘The main point Paul clearly wishes to make is that the constant and all-encompassing movement of grace, which is and makes both righteous and equal, dwells permanently in its divine origin’.⁸⁶

78 Philo *Quis rer. div. haer.* 143.

79 Philo *Quis rer. div. haer.* 152. See the discussion of this text in John M. G. Barclay, ‘Manna and the Circulation of Grace: A Study of 2 Corinthians 8.1–15’, *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture and Theology in Honor of Richard B. Hays* (ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe and A. Katherine Grieb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 409–26, here 418.

80 Philo *Quis rer. div. haer.* 191.

81 Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 259; similarly, Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 407.

82 Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 85–7, 138–40.

83 Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 87–9.

84 Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 88–9.

85 Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 89.

86 Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 89 (emphasis mine).

With due respect for the force of Georgi's insights, I must dissent from this interpretation and insist that Georgi missed what is distinctive in Paul's understanding of the divine origin of equality. For essential to the philosophical view, whether the divine is conceived as a creator God or a personified force of nature, is the notion of perfection and immutability: because the divine is absolutely just, changeless and immortal, the divine is capable of establishing 'equality' in the cosmos.⁸⁷ It is precisely this conception of the divine that has been ruptured in Paul's thought by the Christ-event. Paul has come to believe in a deity who voluntarily 'impoverished' himself (2 Cor 8.9),⁸⁸ who abandoned plenitude (Phil 2.6–8), and by his self-emptying opened a space for human beings to pursue 'equality'.⁸⁹ The difference between Paul and the philosophers is best illustrated by Dio Chrysostom's commentary on the speech of Jocasta in Euripides, praising personified Ἴσότης, which ordained measures and weights for men, and set day and night in their yearly round.⁹⁰ Dio offers a rather free philosophical interpretation: "The poet says that there is no excess among divine beings, wherefore they remain indestructible and ageless, each single one keeping its own proper position night and day through all the seasons. For, the poet adds, if they were not so ordered, none of them would be able to survive."⁹¹

Precisely the point where Windisch and Georgi saw the greatest similarity between Paul and Philo—namely, the citation of Exod 16.18—exposes the novelty of Paul's conception of the way in which the divine objective is realized in human action. Philo cites the Exodus passage as an example of the perfectly equitable distribution accomplished by the divine λόγος: "Again this heavenly food of the soul, which Moses calls manna, the word of God divides in equal portions among those who are to use it, taking care of equality to an extraordinary degree. And Moses bears witness to this where he says, "He who gathered much had not too much, and he who gathered less was in no want".⁹² Paul, by contrast, does *not* quote the verse as an illustration of providential distribution, but rather as a paradigm of the equality that human beings can achieve through redistributive action.⁹³ Commentators generally assert that Paul quotes the Greek version of Exod 16.18 'almost verbatim'.⁹⁴ But closer attention to the

87 Plato *Leg.* 5, 741a; Philo *Quis rer. div. haer.* 143; cf. *Spec. Leg.* 231–37.

88 Similarly, Barclay, 'Manna and the Circulation of Grace', 420–1.

89 Cf. Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory*, 21–5, 50–2, 65–7.

90 Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 17.9–11, referencing Euripides *Phoen.* 528–49. Cf. G. Mussies, *Dio Chrysostom and the New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 178.

91 Dio Chrysostom *Or.* 17.11.

92 Philo *Quis rer. div. haer.* 191.

93 Similarly, Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 239–40; Barclay, 'Manna and the Circulation of Grace', 411–13, 419.

94 E.g., Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 420.

subtle changes that Paul makes in the Septuagint text (Exod 16.18 reads: οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν ὁ τὸ πολὺ, καὶ ὁ τὸ ἔλαττον οὐκ ἠλαττόνησεν)⁹⁵ reveals that Paul's interest in this text is not the same as Philo's, and indeed, is not entirely consistent with the point of the biblical story.⁹⁶ Paul reverses the order of subject and verb in the first clause, and changes τὸ ἔλαττον to τὸ ὀλίγον in the second clause: ὁ τὸ πολὺ οὐκ ἐπλεόνασεν, καὶ ὁ τὸ ὀλίγον οὐκ ἠλαττόνησεν.⁹⁷ The effect of these changes is to destroy the chiasmic structure of the Septuagint text, a structure which linguistically mirrors the miracle of divine equalization, and to emphasize the inequality of the parties, by the absolute contrast between 'the one who has much' and 'the one who has little' (2 Cor 8.15). Paul's linear sentence serves to advocate equality between persons of different resources through redistributive action. Yet again, we encounter the Pauline reversal of the ancient logic of inverse proportion: the divine and the human change places in respect to the realization of equality. The voluntary self-improvement of the divine opens a new space for human action—the economic.

V

We conclude with a few reflections upon Paul's application of the concept 'equality' to relations between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. I would suggest that, in this way, Paul contributes to the tentative emergence of a new category of thought—the economic. As noted above, Moses Finley argued that 'Greeks and Romans lacked the concept of an "economy"'.⁹⁸ Finley elaborated:

Of course they farmed, traded, manufactured, mined, taxed, coined, deposited and loaned money, made profits or failed in their enterprises. And they discussed these activities in their talk and their writing. What they did not do, however, was to combine these particular activities conceptually into a unit, into a 'differentiated sub-system of society'. Hence Aristotle, whose programme was to codify the branches of knowledge, wrote no *Economics*.⁹⁹

And the two treatises from antiquity which bear this title—one attributed to Xenophon and the other, wrongly, to Aristotle—are not analyses of a

95 Alan E. Brooke and Norman McLean, *The Old Testament in Greek*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1906) 208. Cf. Aemilius Fridericus Kautzsch, *De Veteris Testamenti locis a Paulo apostolo allegatis* (Leipzig: Metzger & Wittig, 1869) 19–20.

96 Similarly, Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 240; Barclay, 'Manna and the Circulation of Grace', 411–13, 419.

97 Cf. Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 259.

98 Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 21.

99 Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 21; similarly, Cartledge, 'The Economy (Economies) of Ancient Greece', 12–14; Meikle, 'Modernism, Economics and the Ancient Economy', 244–5.

sub-system of society, but are manuals of household administration for the education of the gentleman farmer.¹⁰⁰

Is there a precedent in the Greco-Roman world for Paul’s attempt to create an economic structure, the goal of which was to achieve an equality of possessions between persons of different classes through redistributive exchange? The parallels adduced by Windisch and other commentators are not relevant.¹⁰¹ Thus, according to Xenophon, the great king Cyrus ‘accepted that of which the givers had abundance, and gave in return that of which he saw that they were in need’.¹⁰² Plutarch rehearses the legend that the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus established a society in which ‘there was neither greed nor want, but equality in well-being’.¹⁰³ But Plutarch is not ignorant of the fact that such a society was only possible because the Spartans forced the Helots to till their ground.¹⁰⁴ There is no genuine point of comparison between the efforts of a king or a lawgiver to equalize the distribution of resources and Paul’s attempt to create a structure for direct exchange between persons of different social classes.

In my view, Steven Friesen has come closest to capturing the novelty of Paul’s collection through his proposal that Paul was promoting an alternative to patronage: ‘financial redistribution among poor people, Gentile and Jewish, in the assemblies of the eastern Mediterranean’.¹⁰⁵ But Friesen comes up short, because he circumscribes Paul’s appeal to ‘equality’ within the ethics of a single, modestly differentiated social group—poor people.¹⁰⁶ Whereas, Paul promotes something more radical: the equalization of resources between persons of *different* social classes through voluntary redistribution.¹⁰⁷ Friesen minimizes the evidence of social inequality, not only within the Corinthian congregation, where

100 Xenophon *Oeconomicus*; Ps.-Aristotle *Oeconomica*; cf. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 21–2.

101 Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 259; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 407–8, 419–20. The account of the sharing of possessions among the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem in Acts 2.44–45 and 4.36–37 does not qualify as a ‘precedent’ to Paul, contra Martin Hengel, *Property and Riches in the Early Church* (London: SCM, 1974) 31–4; Brian J. Capper, ‘Community of Goods in the Early Jerusalem Church’, *ANRW* II.26.2 (ed. H. Temporini and W. Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995) 1730–74, since Acts dates to the second century: see Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2006); Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009) esp. 88–91; cf. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 195: ‘the summaries [in Acts 2.44–45 and 4.36–37] appear to flow entirely from the pen of Luke’. See the discussion in S. Scott Bartchy, ‘Community of Goods in Acts: Idealization or Social Reality?’, *The Future of Early Christianity* (ed. Birger A. Pearson; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 309–18.

102 Xenophon *Cyropaed.* 8.6.23.

103 Plutarch *Lycurg.* 24.

104 Plutarch *Lycurg.* 24.

105 Friesen, ‘Paul and Economics’, 51.

106 Friesen, ‘Paul and Economics’, 50–1; similarly, Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival*, 155–78.

107 Similarly, Petros Vassiliadis, ‘The Collection Revisited’, *Δελτίον Βιβλικόν Μελέτων* 11 (1992) 42–8, esp. 44: ‘According to his argument in 2 Cor 8–9, the implication of that project was

a few believers, such as Crispus and Gaius, have more than ‘modest surplus resources’,¹⁰⁸ but also between the Corinthians and the Jerusalemites.¹⁰⁹ Paul speaks explicitly of the ‘abundance’ (περίσσευμα) of the Corinthians and the ‘lack’ (ὕστερημα) of the saints in Jerusalem. I see no reason to believe that this is rhetorical exaggeration.¹¹⁰ Through all stages of the Corinthian correspondence, Paul anticipates the crucial role that the Corinthians will play in the success of the collection on account of their greater wealth. At the earliest mention of the collection project in 1 Cor 16.1–4, Paul adds to the instructions for accumulating monies a promissory incentive: ‘if [the collection] is sufficiently large’ (ἐάν δὲ ἄξιον ᾖ), he himself will convey it to Jerusalem.¹¹¹ In 2 Cor 8.20, Paul seeks to reassure the Corinthians about ‘the large sum of money’ (ὀδρότης) which they are entrusting to his administration.¹¹²

I will concede that Friesen’s understanding of Paul’s purposes is modest and realistic.¹¹³ But I would contend that Paul reflects an awareness of the audacity of his proposal, by referencing the manna miracle as paradigmatic of the action he is asking the Corinthians to take.¹¹⁴ The moment in which such a revolutionary action is possible is ‘the now time’ (ὁ νῦν καιρός), which is not a mundane present, but the Messianic time, which is charged to the bursting point with hope.¹¹⁵

the social ideal of *equal distribution and permanent sharing* (κοινωνία) of *material wealth*’ (emphasis original). Cf. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 239–40.

108 Friesen, ‘Paul and Economics’, 40–4.

109 Friesen, ‘Paul and Economics’, 45, 50–1.

110 Cf. Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 43 n. 15, 68: ‘At the literal level, Paul certainly intended the material abundance of the Corinthians and the material poverty of the Jerusalem church’.

111 Cf. Weiss, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, 382.

112 Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 77, observing that ὀδρότης is a *terminus technicus*.

113 Friesen, ‘Paul and Economics’, 50–1. The same might be said of Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*.

114 Similarly, Vassiliadis, ‘The Collection Revisited’, 44.

115 Geogi, *Remembering the Poor*, 90, referencing the Jewish Apocalyptic tradition in 2 Bar 29.8.