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***Poor and Rich in James: A Relevance Theory Approach to James's Use of the Old Testament***

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In this book, Morales sets out to investigate “how James uses the OT in those passages where he deals with poverty and wealth” and, concomitantly, “how [James] builds his ethics of poverty and wealth” (1). He limits his analysis to Jas 1:9–11, 26–27; 2:1–13, 14–26; 4:13–17; 5:1–6, and 7–11. In terms of methodology, Morales adopts Relevance Theory, and especially important for his work are Relevance Theory’s notions of explicature, implicature, and metarepresentation, the last of these serving as the primary means of defining and explaining both context and intertextuality. In this review, I will highlight a number of weaknesses of the book that, in my opinion, impede a satisfactory fulfillment of its purpose.

First, despite the promising statement that “sociological approaches ... permit analyzing the concept of poverty and wealth from different angles” and that “the dynamics of honor, power relations, patronage, and benefaction in Greco-Roman and Jewish societies contribute to the analysis” (14), and despite the fact that Morales draws upon social-scientific criticism—although mediated through the work of Wachob, Batten, and Lockett—he does not do enough to ward off anachronism and ethnocentrism. The problem is that, because wealth and poverty, “rich” and “poor” are *social constructs*, they are likely to mean different things in different sociocultural contexts due to differences in social values, differences in the ways that social values become institutionalized, if at all,

and differences in the ways that values are symbolized or imbued with meaning. Economics is a prime example. Generally speaking, in the United States, the highest form of honor is *achieved* honor or “success.” Success in the U.S. context is “the outcome of free competition among individuals in an open market” (Pilch and Malina, *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*, xxxvi). It gets symbolized by way of amassing tangible or intangible resources primarily for oneself. People in U.S. society are then judged and categorized socially on the basis of *socioeconomic status*, which is a complex social categorization based on the composite “score” of one’s education, occupation, and total net assets. Given that success is valued so highly in the United States, economics has come to stand as a separate social institution alongside kinship, politics, and religion. However, social-scientific critics have shown that, despite any similarities, the ancients’ view of economics was quite different than that of the United States. In fact, Malina has argued convincingly from the standpoint of cultural anthropology that during the period in which the biblical writings were produced, there was no free-standing and formal institution of economics (or religion, for that matter) as we understand them in modern society (see Malina “Wealth and Poverty in the New Testament and Its World,” *Int* 41 [1987]: 354–67; and Malina, “Interpreting the Bible with Anthropology: The Case of the Poor and the Rich,” *Listening* 21 [1986]: 148–59; and *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010]—resources that are conspicuously absent from Morales’s bibliography). In the first-century Greco-Roman world, the economic dimensions of society were intertwined either with the institution of kinship or with the institution of politics; as a result, wealth and poverty were virtually meaningless “unless convertible into honor,” so economics had “no focus in and of itself” (Malina, “Wealth and Poverty,” 359). This major difference must be accounted for in studies of poverty and wealth or in defining “poor” or “rich” in James or anywhere in the New Testament. Morales does not offer any kind of thick description of the sociocultural world of James and his putative readers and thus does not contextualize in any appropriate way the meanings of wealth and poverty, rich and poor. Therefore, when he uses the descriptors “*socioeconomic poor*” and “*socioeconomic rich*,” the meanings of these terms remain susceptible to anachronism and ethnocentrism.

Problems of more substantial and troublesome nature crop up in chapter 2, “Overall Methodology.” Although there are several issues, I will discuss only two here. The first pertains to Morales’s claim that scholars utilizing a “code model of communication” “do not have a theoretical model that permits them to integrate [context] with their interpretation of the text” (39). This statement demonstrates that Morales has not examined the “linguistic literature” as fully as he leads his readers to believe (38). He seems only to have read Saussure as a primary theoretical source, perhaps Grice as well; as a result, he has to lean rather heavily upon several secondary sources, which severely limits

his perspective. Had he interacted with the works of Halliday (e.g., *Language as Social Semiotic* [Baltimore: University Park Press, 1978] or especially “Language as Code and Language as Behaviour” [in *Language as Social Semiotic*; London: Pinter, 1984, 3–35]) or Hasan (e.g., “The Place of Context in a Systemic Functional Model” [in *Continuum Companion to Systemic Functional Linguistics*; London: Continuum, 2009], 166–189) or Porter (*Linguistic Analysis of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015) or any others working within the Systemic-Functional Linguistic paradigm (I do not see any theoretical SFL works in Morales’s bibliography), it is less likely that he would have made such a bold claim. SFL’s theory and modeling of context is *quite* robust. In fact, Halliday and those of the so-called London school (and, I would add, the Australian school) are often referred to as “the contextualists” because of their robust modeling of context and its relationship to language and text (see, e.g., Hernández-Compoy, *Sociolinguistic Styles* [Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2016], 24ff.). Incidentally, this same critique also applies to Morales’s claim about how so-called code models of communication consider the reader in the process of interpretation. In SFL approaches, (ostensible) readers are considered participants in the context and factored into the ways that presentational/ideational, orientational/interpersonal, and organizational/textual meanings are made by writers.

A second issue in the overall methodology is the problematic way that Morales (and Relevance Theory) characterizes context. While I would generally agree that context is “a subset of all the salient or available information to the communicator and the addressee which is accessed in the communication of an utterance” (54) and even that context is a “subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world” (Sperber and Wilson *Relevance*, 15 [quoted by Morales on 55 n. 106]), I would not go so far as to claim that context is “a psychological construct” (55). The problem faced here is, once again, ethnocentrism. The reason for this is that our ancient forebears in the faith, as members of a collectivist society, tended to *sociologize* rather than *psychologize* (at least not in an individualistic, post-Freudian sense). It perhaps would have been more appropriate for Morales to adjust Relevance Theory on this point, maybe to more of a cognitive linguistic perspective that draws upon *social* cognition theory, much like Malina’s scenario (or schemata) model (see Malina, “Reading Theory Perspective” [in *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, ed. J. H. Neyrey [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991], 3–23, esp. 14–17). This model presupposes that writers and readers share a socially created reality and a basic understanding of how their shared world “works.” Because of this, writers may encode *wordings* that realize *meanings* from the shared social system (Malina, “Reading Theory Perspective,” 15), and readers are able to decode these meanings more or less readily because they share the same general sociocultural location as the writers. From the perspective of biblical exegesis and analysis, this requires interpreters such as Morales to familiarize themselves with the values and worldview(s) of the ancient world in general, as well as those of the

subculture dubbed as the kingdom of God and the early groups of Jesus followers. Again, this is because *meaning derives from the social system* (sociocultural context and subcultural contexts) and *not* in the wordings or “squiggles on the page” per se.

I conclude with a brief critique about the actual physical book itself. It appears in the respectable Bulletin for Biblical Research Supplement series, which is published by Eisenbrauns. Knowing this, I was somewhat surprised by the number of print issues and errors in the text. Many of these are minor formatting issues that appear throughout the footnotes and occasionally in the body of the text, such as the italicizing of words that are not part of a book title as though they are (e.g., 41 n. 46: “Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text? As Klein says...*” where “As” should not be italicized) and insufficient spacing between words (see, e.g., “Craig G. Bartholomew” at 41 n. 45 or “Andreas J. Köstenberger” at 43 n. 49; in the body of the text, “A NT ...” occasionally looks like “ANT”). There are occasional typographical errors in the body of the book (e.g., “Relevant Theory” instead of “Relevance Theory” on 43) and at least one instance in which a scholar is referred to with the incorrect name (“Harriet Sim” instead of “Margaret Sim” on 42).