

## **Providence in Philo**

**THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE  
IN THE THOUGHT OF  
PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA**

**By**

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**In Memoriam**

**Helene Frick**

## **Abstract**

The objective of this dissertation is to examine the conception of divine providence in the writings of Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 BCE - 50 CE). In order to achieve this aim, we shall follow the theocentric structure of Philo's thought as outlined in the important passage *De Opificio Mundi* 171-2. In this passage, Philo correlates the idea of providence with his concept of God and the theory of creation.

In Chapter One, we shall first review the formal aspects of Philo's concept of God, in particular the idea of God's transcendence, and then correlate how Philo conceptualizes the idea of providence in light of these formal aspects. In particular, we shall explain how Philo can predicate that God is provident in nature, although, strictly speaking, it is Philo's view that God cannot be apprehended in his essence. In Chapter Two, we shall discuss how Philo explains the immanence of God in the cosmos in terms of the Logos and the divine powers, one of which he specifically characterizes as the providential power. In Chapter Three, we shall examine how the concept of God and the notion of providence are both critical for Philo's theory of creation. Philo conceives of the role of providence in cosmological matters as being responsible for the design, administration and continuous existence of the created universe.

There are two more issues--raised in Philo's treatise *De Providentia*--which are critically important in order to gain a thorough understanding of Philo's conception of divine providence. These are the questions of astral fatalism and theodicy. In Chapter Four, we shall address why Philo rejects the assumptions implied in astral fatalism--the divinity of the stars, moral determinism--as irreconcilable with the conception of divine providence. He rejects the divinity of the stars because they cannot be transcendent as God and thus have causal influences over human lives. He rejects astral fatalism because it renders absurd the notion of moral responsibility. Finally, in Chapter Five, we shall correlate the question of theodicy with Philo's conception of providence. Philo proceeds from the Platonic premise that God is not the cause for evil in any way, neither for physical evil nor for moral evil. Unlike the category of physical evil, which he explains in terms of Stoic arguments, the category of moral evil incriminates human beings directly. For Philo, the existence of moral evil exonerates God and his providence as the cause for evil and anchors the blame in the person. Moral evil originates when the rational part of the soul, the mind (which is inherently free and knows the difference between good and evil), cannot resist the assault by the senses and the passions. Philo thus places both the origin and the responsibility for moral evil on the shoulder of the human being.

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I am dedicating this dissertation to the memory of my mother who in many ways embodied what Philo calls the virtuous life. She often wondered whether I would ever find an interest in books. Sadly, she could never discover that her wish was granted beyond her own hopes.

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## Abbreviations

Unless otherwise noted, all references to and translations of ancient authors are according to the Loeb Classical Library.

### 1. Philonic Treatises

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo</i>
<i>Aet.</i>	<i>De Aeternitate Mundi</i>
<i>Agr.</i>	<i>De Agricultura</i>
<i>Anim.</i>	<i>De Animalibus</i>
<i>Cher.</i>	<i>De Cherubim</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	<i>De Confusione Linguarum</i>
<i>Congr.</i>	<i>De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia</i>
<i>Cont.</i>	<i>De Vita Contemplativa</i>
<i>Decal.</i>	<i>De Decalogo</i>
<i>Deo</i>	<i>De Deo</i>
<i>Det.</i>	<i>Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat</i>
<i>Deus</i>	<i>Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis</i>
<i>Ebr.</i>	<i>De Ebrietate</i>
<i>Flacc.</i>	<i>In Flaccum</i>
<i>Fuga</i>	<i>De Fuga et Inventione</i>
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De Gigantibus</i>
<i>Heres</i>	<i>Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres Sit</i>
<i>Hypo.</i>	<i>Hypothetica</i>
<i>Jos.</i>	<i>De Josepho</i>
<i>LA. 1-3</i>	<i>Legum Allegoriae I-III</i>
<i>Legat.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>
<i>Mig.</i>	<i>De Migratione Abrahami</i>
<i>Mos. 1-2</i>	<i>De Vita Mosis I-II</i>
<i>Mut.</i>	<i>De Mutatione Nominum</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De Opificio Mundi</i>
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De Plantatione</i>
<i>Post.</i>	<i>De Posteritate Caini</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De Praemiis et Poenis</i>
<i>Probus</i>	<i>Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit</i>
<i>Prov. 1-2</i>	<i>De Providentia I-II</i>
<i>QE 1-2</i>	<i>Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum I-II</i>
<i>QG 1-4</i>	<i>Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim I-IV</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
<i>Sob.</i>	<i>De Sobrietate</i>
<i>Somn. 1-2</i>	<i>De Somniis I-II</i>
<i>Spec. 1-4</i>	<i>De Specialibus Legibus I-IV</i>
<i>Virt.</i>	<i>De Virtutibus</i>

## 2. Other

- ABD Anchor Bible Dictionary  
ALGHJ Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums  
ANRW *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*  
BJS Brown Judaic Studies  
CRINT Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum  
EK Edelstein, L. and I. G. Kidd (eds.). *Posidonius. The Fragments, The Commentary*, 2 vols., Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 13, 14A, 14B. Cambridge, vol. 1, 2nd ed. 1988, vol. 2, 1988.  
LS A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. New York, 1987.  
JBL *Journal of Biblical Literature*  
LCL Loeb Classical Library  
LSJ H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. by H. S. Jones, rev. with a supplement by E. A. Barber, Oxford, 1968.  
RGG Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3rd ed., Tübingen, 1957-62  
SBLSP *Society of Biblical Studies Seminar Papers*  
SP *Studia Philonica*  
SPhA *Studia Philonica Annual*  
SVF J. von Arnim (ed), *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, 4 vols. Stuttgart, reprint 1964.  
ThW *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, 10 vols. Ed. by G. Kittel and G. Friedrich. Stuttgart, 1933-79.  
TU Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur  
WUNT Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

## **Introduction**

### **The Doctrine of Providence in Philo of Alexandria**

The objective of this dissertation is to examine the doctrine of divine providence in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. Keeping in mind Erwin Goodenough's advice that "we shall know Philo only when we accept him as a whole, and on his own terms",<sup>1</sup> we shall distinguish the aims of the dissertation in these terms. We shall attempt to identify the various constituent elements of Philo's conception of providence, suggest how these elements amount to a coherent doctrine, and make explicit how the doctrine of providence functions as an essential pillar within the structure of his thought as a whole.

To gain a perspective on how Philo establishes the idea of providence as a

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Erwin R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* (Oxford, 2nd ed. 1962), 19.

principal feature of his thought as whole, we must begin with the conclusion of the treatise *De Opificio Mundi*, the passage *Opif.* 170-72. No other text<sup>2</sup> offers as good a starting point to gain insight about the significance of providence within Philo's basic outline of theology. Whether this passage delimits "certain unshakable beliefs",<sup>3</sup> or whether it is "the first creed in history",<sup>4</sup> or Philo's "concept of orthodoxy",<sup>5</sup> this text is an extremely significant compendium of Philonic thought as a whole. Philo emphasizes that these statements represent "among many other things five that are fairest and best" of Mosaic doctrines. He declares:

(1) God is and is from eternity, and (2) that He who really IS is One, and (3) that He has made the world and (4) has made it one world, unique as Himself is unique, and (5) that He ever exercises providence for his creation (καὶ ὅτι ἀεὶ προνοεῖ τοῦ γεγονότος).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Philo composed a treatise in two books, *De Providentia*, on the subject of divine providence. But since this treatise focuses almost exclusively on the question of theodicy in relation to providence (see Chapter Five), it gives only limited insight into the full spectrum of how Philo conceives of the idea of providence.

<sup>3</sup>Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo. Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1947, 5th printing 1982), vol. 1, 164. David Runia, "Platonism, Philonism, and the Beginnings of Christian Thought", in: idem, *Philo and the Church Fathers* (Leiden, 1995), 12, notes that Philo's theological intent is evident in his designation of these statements as δόγματα (*Opif.* 172).

<sup>4</sup>Erwin Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo*, 37.

<sup>5</sup>Alan Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity*, BJS 161 (Atlanta, 1988), 29.

<sup>6</sup>*Opif.* 172. This is the shorter summary of Philo's account of the creation of the world. The more elaborate one is given in *Opif.* 170-172. All references to and translations of (occasionally slightly modified) Philonic texts throughout this study are to the LCL edition with the exception of the treatise *De Providentia*, which is cited according to the divisions of Aucher's Latin edition.

Given that Philo's theological compendium in five "creedal" statements encompasses the idea that God exercises providence for his creation, the notion of providence must be considered to be a pivotal assumption and indispensable aspect of Philonic theology. In other words, the concept of providence is a structural pillar for Philo's thought without which it could not be considered complete.

As Philo's delineation of the decisive aspects of his theology renders explicit, the two crucial doctrines with which the notion of providence must be correlated are the concept of God and the theory of creation. First, Philo's concept of God is represented by the statements that "(1) God is and is from eternity, and (2) that He who really IS is One", and the second part of the fourth statement, that God "Himself is unique." The phrase that "God is and is from eternity" seems deceptively simple and yet it points to the decisive characteristic underlying Philo's concept of God, the distinction between the existence (*ὑπαρξις*) and essence (*οὐσία*) of God.<sup>7</sup> This distinction is implicit in the Greek text which reads *ἔστι καὶ ὑπάρχει ὁ θεός*; the subject "God" is modified by the two verbs *εἰμί* (to be) and *ὑπάρχω* (to exist). As we shall see, Philo charges *εἰμί* with the meaning "God's unknowable essence" and *ὑπάρχω* with the meaning "God's knowable existence." On the basis of this distinction, coupled with his interpretation of the biblical lemma Exodus 3:14 (*ἐγώ*

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<sup>7</sup>Colson's translation of the phrase *ἔστι καὶ ὑπάρχει ὁ θεός* as "God is and is from eternity" shows that he wrestled with the precise translation of *ὑπάρχω*. The phrase "from eternity" is not part of the Greek text (neither in the longer exposition *Opif.* 171) and must represent Colson's attempt to distinguish the theological nuance implied in the two verbs.

εἰμι ὁ ὄν), Philo derives the premise of God's transcendence, the idea that God is "the wholly other."

Second, Philo's compendium closely correlates the idea of providence with the theory of creation, the latter of which is represented by the statements that God "(3) has made the world and (4) has made it one world." The importance of Philo's view of creation in relation to the concept of providence is that it gives concrete reality to God's unknowable essence. As we shall see, the contemplation of the beauty and perfection of the created order presupposes for Philo a creator whose essential characteristics include those of supreme rationality, power and providence, all of which are evident in the design and administration of the cosmos. The created order is thus the empirical reality which gives evidence of providence as belonging to the essence and existence of God.

Inextricably tied to the concept of God and the theory of creation is the doctrine of providence. From the premise that God is not only the cause for the creation of this one world, there follows for Philo the conclusion that he also takes incessant care for the things which he created. Hence, subsequent to his statements on creation, Philo presents the idea of providence in the phrase that God "(5) ever exercises providence for his creation". Philo explains more fully what he exactly means in the longer version of the fifth "article" on providence.

Fifthly, that God also exercises providence (προνοέω) on the world's behalf. For that the Maker should care for the things made (ὅτι καὶ προνοεῖ κόσμου ὁ θεός) is required by the laws and ordinances of

Nature, and it is in accordance with these that parents take thought beforehand for children.<sup>8</sup>

Here Philo elucidates the idea of providence by means of the analogy of parenthood or, more often in his writings, with the idea of fatherhood. Just as a father cares for the well-being of his children so likewise God cares for the welfare of his creation. It is apparent from this analogy that Philo conceives the idea of providence as depending on God who both created and sustains the universe. In other words, the theological framework for Philo's doctrine of providence is the inextricable connection between the unique existence of God, matters of cosmogony and cosmology, and the notion of God's continuous care of his creation, a care which Philo seeks to render intelligible as the concept of divine providence.<sup>9</sup>

How exactly does Philo conceptualize the inextricable connection between the idea of providence and the other doctrines mentioned in his theological compendium? It is critical to discern that he arranges the compendium in a certain order; first, the statements on God, second on creation, and third on providence. The arrangement of these statements in this order is a matter of great significance for Philo's theology because here we find the chief principle by which he establishes his thought as a whole: the concept of God. This is to say that, for Philo, the concept of God is the

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<sup>8</sup>*Opif.* 171-2.

<sup>9</sup>The correlation between God's creation and the notion of providence in Philo's structure of thought may further be seen in his allegorical interpretation of the story of the tower of Babel (cf. *Conf.* 114). Philo construes the human aspiration to build a tower reaching into the celestial realm as a denial of God's existence, divine providence, and the belief in the genesis of creation. The denial of these doctrines Philo ascribes to Epicureans and Sceptics, cf. F. H. Colson's note to *Somn.* 2:283.

structural centre which determines the proper place of all other doctrines of his thought. Put otherwise, Philo's thought is theocentric to the extent that every other facet of his thought must be correlated with the concept of God. On that basis, any significant discussion of Philo's doctrine of providence must take into consideration how Philo's concept of God and his theory of creation shape his conception of providence, but also vice versa.

In sum, then, based on Philo's theological compendium in the passage *Opif.* 171-72, with its focus on the critical interrelationship between the concepts of God, creation and providence, we may formulate a preliminary definition for the doctrine of providence which the following analysis shall bear out. Starting from the premise of God's transcendence, Philo conceives of the concept of providence as an essential feature of God's creation and the governance of that creation; the idea of providence presupposes the perfect goodness, best will, highest purpose, and plan of God for his creation; it also presupposes the power of God, not merely as a potentiality but as an actuality, to carry out his will with conscious care for the benefit of his creation.

### **The Notion of Providence in Greek Philosophy, the Septuagint and Philo**

In Greek thought,<sup>10</sup> the conception of providence is expressed by the technical term *πρόνοια* which can be traced in its philosophical sense to Plato who introduces the

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<sup>10</sup>For the best overview of the doctrine of providence in Greek thought, see Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire", in: *ANRW* II 36.7, 4417-90. See also John Dillon, "Providence", in: *ABD*, vol. 5, 520-21.

term of divine providence (θεοῦ πρόνοιαν) in Greek philosophy.<sup>11</sup> The word πρόνοια is employed in the dialogue *Timaeus*<sup>12</sup> in relation to the demiurge and the young gods in the mythical account of creation of the universe. The idea of providence figures also significantly in Book 10 of the *Laws*<sup>13</sup> where Plato introduces it in relation to the notion of a world soul which guides the universe, the idea that God cares for things both great and small, and the idea that human beings are a part of the good of the universe as a whole. Moreover, an integral aspect of Plato's idea of providence is the axiom that God is not the cause of evil, an axiom that Philo exploited in his discussion of theodicy and providence. Aristotle's conception of providence is far less explicit than that of Plato or the Stoics. Indeed, it is questionable whether Aristotle had any notion of providence since he restricted the influence of providence to the sublunary sphere while the world was left to chance and fate.<sup>14</sup> The Stoics of all periods, however, built on Plato's ideas of providence and adapted it as a crucial element to their materialist philosophy.<sup>15</sup> God is identical

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 3:24.

<sup>12</sup>30c (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν) and 44c (πρόνοια θεῶν). See the pioneering study by Heinrich Dörrie, "Der Begriff 'Pronoia' in Stoa und Platonismus", in: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 24 (1977), 60-87.

<sup>13</sup>896e-905d.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. John Dillon, "Providence", 521 and Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire", 4422-24.

<sup>15</sup>On the Stoic notion of providence, see Myrto Dragona-Monachou, *The Stoic Arguments for the Existence and Providence of the Gods* (Athens, 1976). The principle of providence "was upheld more or less by all Stoics, being so tightly bound up with the Stoic system that, had any representative of the School denied it, he would hardly have been a committed Stoic. Absolute confidence in the divine

to the immanent world soul, or Logos, or providence, and thus essentially functions as a first principle. In the words of Dillon, "the Stoic philosophers adopted the concept of *pronoia* to describe the rational ordering of the universe emanating from a first principle which they designated as *theos*, 'God' but which they conceived of simply as the immanent active principle of the universe."<sup>16</sup>

The idea of providence in Plato and Stoicism was thus largely restricted to the idea of a first principle--metaphysical for Platonists, material for Stoics--that administered the universe with unfailing mechanical precision. But by Philo's time, there was also an interpretation of Plato's works, a tradition known as Middle Platonism, which sought to combine the philosophical understanding of a first principle with the idea of a religious first principle identified with God (see below 1.1.1.1). In other words, beginning with Plato and the Stoics, but coming to a culmination with the Middle Platonists, the idea of providence was deliberately defined as divine providence or as the providence of God. Cicero, though he was himself not a Middle Platonist, provides a parallel to the essentially Middle Platonic understanding of providence. in his statement that:

As a matter of fact 'providence' is an elliptical expression... so when we speak of the world as governed by providence, you must understand the words 'of the gods' and must conceive that the full and complete statement would be 'the world is governed by the providence of the gods'.<sup>17</sup>

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providence was one of the most basic tenets of Stoicism", 131.

<sup>16</sup>John Dillon, "Providence", 520.

<sup>17</sup>Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2:74.

Cicero's last statement that "the world is governed by the providence of the gods" defines also the core of the Philonic conception of providence, with one major exception. For Philo, the pantheistic designation "of the gods" is reconceived in a monotheistic framework as "of God", the God of the Scriptures.

In the LXX, the term *πρόνοια*<sup>18</sup> is only employed nine times in the later books (in Wisdom 14:3, 17:2; Daniel 6:19; 2 Maccabees 4:6; 3 Maccabees 4:21, 5:30; 4 Maccabees 9:24, 13:19; 17:22) written by authors who were influenced by the intellectual and religious milieu of Hellenism. Although the term *πρόνοια* has the meaning of "providence" in these texts, Philo does not base his conception of providence on any of these passages. As we shall see, he employs the term *πρόνοια*, as in Greek thought, to express the idea of providence, but there is no indication that he knows that these biblical passages deal with the question of divine providence.

And yet, even though Philo does not draw on these Septuagintal passages, his doctrine of providence is nonetheless a synthesis between the biblical idea and Greek

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<sup>18</sup>See *πρόνοια* in *A Greek - English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 397. The meaning of the term is correctly distinguished as "attention" when a person is the subject and "providence" when God is the subject. The comment made by David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon. An New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible 43 (New York, 1979) 265, that "except for Wisd and II Macc 14:9, *pronoia* in the sense of Divine Providence is absent from the LXX", is, however, incorrect. A careful reading of these texts makes evident that the subject of *πρόνοια* is God and, hence, that these texts denote the idea of *divine providence*, with the exception of 2 Maccabees 4:6. This is also the view of the editors of *A Greek - English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 397, as their comments on *πρόνοια* indicate. Exactly the opposite is the case in how the LXX employs the verb *προνοέω* (employed in Numbers 23:9; 1 Esdras 2:28; Job 24:15; Proverbs 3:4; Wisdom 6:7, 13:16; Daniel 11:37 (twice); 2 Maccabees 14:9; 3 Maccabees 3:24; 4 Maccabees 7:18). Only in Wisdom 6:7 does it signify God's providential activity.

philosophical arguments. That is to say, Philo derived the idea of God's providence from the biblical narratives which attest God's care and concern for individuals and for his people as a whole, but he read these narratives in terms of Greek thought. This is apparent in Philo's exegesis of several biblical texts. He interprets the narratives about Moses,<sup>19</sup> the patriarchs,<sup>20</sup> and the Jewish people<sup>21</sup> on the assumption that they reveal God's providence. It is striking that Philo reads these narratives in light of the Greek term *πρόνοια*--the Greek technical term encapsulating

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<sup>19</sup>The model of divine providence par excellence may be said to be Moses. Philo presents his life as the beneficiary of God's providence from the very beginning of his calling. The angel at the burning bush is "a symbol of God's providence" (cf. *Mut.* 25, Moses gave himself to God in return for God's providence; cf. *Mos.* 1:67). In *Hypo.* 6:1 it is through God's providence that Moses came to Egypt, in *Mos.* 2:3, Moses "became king and lawgiver and high priest and prophet." He became legislator because God's providence "afterwards appointed him without his knowledge to that work, caused him long before that day to be the reasonable and living impersonation of law" (*Mos.* 1:162); he became a prophet "in order that through the providence of God he might discover what by reasoning he could not grasp" (*Mos.* 2:6).

<sup>20</sup>The change in the name from Abram ("uplifted father") to Abraham ("elect father of sound") is the work of providence and is hence to be honoured (cf. *QG* 3:43). Similarly, when Abraham entreated God for mercy on the righteous inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, God himself "gave him understanding, for not without the assent of divine providence was he about to make entreaty, but He used the wise man as a foundation and base for showing beneficence to those who were worthy of receiving kindness" (*QG* 4:25). Philo notes that Isaac does not become dissatisfied with anything that happens in the world, but knows that all things happen in accordance with nature through divine providence and are for the wellbeing and eternity of all things (cf. *QG* 4:88).

<sup>21</sup>In *Legat.* 3, Philo presents the subject of the treatise *Legatio ad Gaium* as God's providence extending to human beings, but "particularly for the suppliant's race which the Father and King of the Universe and the Source of all things has taken for his portion." In *Heres* 58, Philo speaks of God's providence as Israel's "protecting arm and shield, since our race cannot of itself stand firmly established for a single day." See also, Ellen Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo's Thought. Israel, Jews, and Proselytes*, *Studia Philonica Monographs* 2 (Atlanta, 1996), 174-78.

the notion of providence--which, however, is actually absent in *these* texts in the LXX. Philo's exegesis thus makes explicit his hermeneutic to read into Scripture a meaning derived from Greek thought.

Philo uses the noun πρόνοια 66 times<sup>22</sup> in his writings excluding the Greek fragments of *De Providentia* and possibly the original Greek occurrences in *De Deo*<sup>23</sup>. Like Greek writers,<sup>24</sup> Philo distinguishes πρόνοια in a two-fold sense, a colloquial and a philosophic one. The colloquial meaning of the word embraces the semantic domain of "care, provision, foresight". It is used without any particular philosophic connotation and, most importantly, is employed in contexts in which human beings are the agents of this kind of πρόνοια. The second meaning of πρόνοια is precisely that philosophical technical expression for "divine providence", popularized by the Stoics and Middle Platonists. As in Cicero's statement cited earlier, in Philonic writings the notion of providence is always expressed in the phrase *the providence of God* (πρόνοια τοῦ θεοῦ) where θεοῦ functions as the subjective genitive of πρόνοια. Only the statement that *the world is governed by the providence*

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<sup>22</sup>According to G. Mayer, *Index Philoneus* (Berlin, 1974), 245-6. The prepositional phrase ἐκ προνοίας means "intentionally, with intent" and must be distinguished from the idea of providence. For the legal connotations of this term in Philo, see Erwin Goodenough, *The Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt as Described by Philo Judaeus* (New Haven, 1929; reprint Amsterdam, 1968), 102-3, 179, 228.

<sup>23</sup>πρόνοια occurs twice in this fragment, based on the Greek retroversion of Folker Siegert, *Philon von Alexandrien. Über die Gottesbezeichnung 'wohlthätig verzehrendes Feuer' (De Deo). Rückübersetzung des Fragments aus dem Armenischen, deutsche Übersetzung und Kommentar*, WUNT 46 (Tübingen, 1988).

<sup>24</sup>Cf. LSJ, 1491.

*of God* (πρόνοια τοῦ θεοῦ) adequately describes the Philonic idea of providence. In other words, the crux of defining the Philonic idea of providence is the assumption that God is the author of providence because he is a good and caring God of Scripture, and not merely a metaphysical first principle.

### **Assumptions and Structure of Dissertation**

Our examination of Philo's doctrine of divine providence is guided by two principal assumptions. First, that Philo is foremost an exegete of Scripture and not a philosopher, and second, that Philo does not present his readers with a systematic treatment of the idea of divine providence.

The first assumption, that Philo is primarily an exegete<sup>25</sup> and not a philosopher, is important in order to understand the unique nature of his thought. Philo's thought is a combination of theology and philosophy to the extent that the first is illuminated by the second, or as Wolfson said, "philosophy is the handmaid of theology."<sup>26</sup> That is, as we shall see in Philo's interpretation of the story Moses at the burning bush,

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<sup>25</sup>For a good introduction to Philo as a biblical exegete, see Peder Borgen, "Philo of Alexandria", in: CRINT, section two, vol. 2, 259-64. In Philonic scholarship, the questions are (1) whether Philo should be understood as an exegete or philosopher and (2) how Philo converges philosophy and Scripture. Touching on both of these questions are, for example, Valentin Nikiprowetzky, *Le commentaire de l'écriture chez Philon d'Alexandrie*, ALGHJ 11 (Leiden, 1977), 97-116 (φιλοσοφία chez Philon); David Runia, "God of the Philosophers, God of the Patriarchs: Exegetical Backgrounds in Philo of Alexandria", 206-18, in: idem. *Philo and the Church Fathers. A Collection of Papers*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 32 (Leiden, 1995).

<sup>26</sup>Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo. Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1947, 5th printing 1982), vol. 1, 145.

philosophy elucidates the deeper meaning of Scripture and is therefore deemed an indispensable tool in the interpretation of Scripture. With respect to the doctrine of providence, Scripture and philosophy cohere for Philo in such a way that Scripture and theology set the agenda, i.e. the idea of divine providence, and philosophy provides the arguments for his thought, i.e. the Greek conception underlying the term *κρόνοια*. For this reason, Philo may give the misleading impression of being a simplistic eclectic or a philosophical dilettante. Philo is not interested, however, in showing the superiority of one philosophic tradition over another, but in demonstrating that his theology derived from the Bible is essentially in agreement with Greek thought. Hence, to read Philo as being primarily a philosopher in the Greek manner does injustice to his aims as an exegete of Scripture.

Related to the first assumption that Philo is foremost an exegete and not a philosopher is the second assumption that the Philonic corpus does not present us with a philosophically systematized discussion of providence. This is a rather peculiar fact especially because Philo devoted a complete dialogue in two books to the question of God's providence. The treatise *De Providentia*,<sup>27</sup> classified among Philo's philosophical writings,<sup>28</sup> does not so much offer a philosophically substantiated

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<sup>27</sup>For introductory remarks on this dialogue, see David Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 44 (Leiden, 1986), 396-99.

<sup>28</sup>The philosophical treatises include *Probus*, *De Aeternitate Mundi*, *De Animalibus* and *De Providentia* 1 and 2. The classic studies on the categories of Philonic writings (Allegorical Commentary, Exposition of the Law, The Questions on Genesis and Exodus, Historical Writings, Philosophical Writings) are L. Massebieau, "Le classement des oeuvres de Philon", *Bibliothèque de l'école des hautes études, Sciences religieuses* 1 (1889), 1-91 and Leopold Cohn, "Einteilung und Chronologie

argument for divine providence as it is an apology centred on the question of theodicy. Even if we were to engage in a meticulous examination of *De Providentia* the result would not be the full picture of what Philo has to say on the theme of providence. But Philo's neglect of systematic presentation in this dialogue does not simply stem from a corresponding lack of a systematic conception of the notion of divine providence in the rest of his corpus, nor does it entail that the main elements of this doctrine can no longer be discerned or systematically arranged. To achieve as coherent as possible a doctrine of providence, however, it is necessary to impose an organization or systematization on Philo's thought that is not part of his presentation of the theme of providence.

The structure of the dissertation facilitates our objective to understand how Philo *conceptualizes* the doctrine of providence within his complex thought structure. In our analysis of Philo's theological compendium in *Opif.* 171-72, we concluded that the structure of his thought is theocentric. On that basis, our first task is to ascertain how Philo's concept of God shapes his notion of providence; specifically, we must demonstrate that Philo's doctrine of providence hinges on two presuppositions. The first one is God's absolute transcendence, the second one is God's immanence in the world. In Chapter One, the focus is on Philo's notion of God's transcendence and the idea of providence. Philo deduces the notion of God's transcendence from his interpretation of Exodus 3:14, the statement ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν. From this divine self-designation Philo deduces that transcendence entails that God is ontologically unique,

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der Schriften Philos", in: *Philologus Supplementband* 7 (1899), 387-435.

sufficient unto himself, uncreated, known only as to his existence but not in his essence. Although unknowable and ineffable in essence, Philo insists that it can be predicated about God's nature--by observing the created order--that he is perfectly good and that he *is provident*.

But Philo's presupposition of God's absolute transcendence, including the belief that God is provident, does not imply God's non-relatedness to the world. How, then, can God's providence also be immanent in the world? The answer to that question is the focus of Chapter Two. As the supreme transcendent being, God cannot relate directly to the world but is immanently present in the world by means of his divine Logos and the powers. God creates the universe through his creative power. But God also administers and cares for his creation through the gracious power, or as Philo also calls it, the providential power. Through this power God bestows his goodness on the universe and humanity. In this way providence functions as the immanent power of the goodness of the transcendent God.

Drawing on Philo's theological framework of providence as analogous to the gracious power, we shall then examine how Philo conceives of the role of providence in creation. The role of providence in creation may best be understood as an expression of the unceasing creative activity of the creator, creative in the sense of the design, temporal creation and continuous administration of the cosmos.

There are two questions related to the notion of divine providence that the compendium in *Opif.* 171-2 did not raise, but both of which are addressed by Philo in his treatise *De Providentia*. The first one is the issue of astral fatalism, the second one

is the question of theodicy. Chapter Four deals with the question of astral fatalism in relation to God's providence. Philo introduces the issue in *Prov.* 1:77-88. He is faced with the issue for two reasons: First, the idea of astral fatalism operates on the assumption of the divinity of the stars and their implied powers over human lives. The admission of such an assumption is, however, irreconcilable with Philo's concept of God. Second, the postulate of astral fatalism calls into question the very idea of a person's free will. But any such concession destroys Philo's understanding of moral decision making, a process which critically depends on a person's ability to make a free decision. The issue of theodicy, the question of God's justice in the face of evil and in relation to providence is discussed in Chapter Five. The question was put to Philo by his renegade nephew Tiberius Alexander who fancied to prove the nonexistence of providence by showing that God's providence cannot prevent evil from happening. Philo's response to his nephew's critique is based on the axiom that God is not the cause of evil and on the distinction between physical and moral evil. Physical evil, argues Philo, comes about by the secondary causes in nature, while moral evil originates in the rational soul of the human being.

### **Approach to the Present Study**

The approach underlying this examination seeks to do justice to the assumptions and structure of the dissertation as outlined. We said already that the structure seeks to facilitate the examination of how Philo conceptualizes the doctrine of providence as part of his thought as a whole. But that conceptualization is not a linear development

that renders it easy for the reader either to differentiate scriptural from philosophical ideas or to perceive on what grounds Philo synthesizes Scripture and philosophy. To be able to provide a systematic account of how Philo conceptualizes the idea of providence, our approach, drawing on David Runia's suggestions, shall combine two things.<sup>29</sup> First, our entire study is based on a careful reading of the entire Philonic corpus, including the writings *De Animalibus* and *De Deo*. Each passage that contains the word *πρόνοια* (or cognates)<sup>30</sup> will be thoroughly examined to determine whether or not the term is used in the sense of divine providence. We shall also examine passages that do not employ the term *πρόνοια* or cognates, but which, nonetheless, point to a critical aspect of the doctrine of providence. In the study of every passage attention will be given to exegetical presuppositions, context of particular statements and themes, details in the development of an argument, philosophical background, and Philo's objective of interpretation. Second, and more important, since our aim is to discern how Philo conceptualizes the doctrine of providence, we shall attempt to delineate how important passages scattered throughout the Philonic corpus can be arranged into a coherent conception of providence within Philo's thought as a whole.

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<sup>29</sup>A very good orientation in the vast landscape of Philonic writings is given by David Runia, "How to read Philo", in: *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 40 (1986), 185-98, now reprinted in: idem, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Hampshire, 1990).

<sup>30</sup>Occasionally, as we shall see, Philo expresses the idea of providence with the terms *ἐπιμέλεια* or *ἐπιφροσύνη*.

### The Notion of Providence in Philonic Research

There exists no study that has as its chief end a comprehensive presentation of Philo's doctrine of divine providence. The two exhaustive studies by Wendland<sup>31</sup> and Hadas-Lebel<sup>32</sup> both focus on the dialogue *De Providentia*. Wendland's aim was to establish Philonic authorship and to identify the philosophical arguments and sources employed by Philo, which he determined to be almost exclusively Stoic. But what he did not accomplish, simply because it was not his concern, was to provide a general account of Philo's understanding of providence or to correlate that notion as it emerges in that dialogue to the rest of the Philonic corpus. Similar limitations apply to Hadas-Lebel's work. Although her chief objective was to translate *De Providentia* from Latin into French, she offers a general introduction to Philo's view on providence. Given the narrow focus of her textual edition, her remarks are limited to Philo's view of providence in relation to his cosmology and theodicy. The most thorough study to date is Albrecht Meyer's Tübingen dissertation, *Vorsehungsglaube und Schicksalsidee in ihrem Verhältnis bei Philo von Alexandria*.<sup>33</sup> As the title indicates, Meyer deals with the topic of providence in relation to the Greek notion of fate (ἀνάγκη, εἰμαρμένη). Meyer's aim was to examine how Philo's conception of providence is

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<sup>31</sup>Paul Wendland, *Philos Schrift über die Vorsehung. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der nacharistotelischen Philosophie* (Berlin, 1892).

<sup>32</sup>Mireille Hadas-Lebel. *De Providentia I et II. Introduction, Traduction et Notes*, vol. 35, in: *Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie*, ed. by R. Arnaldez, J. Pouilloux and C. Mondésert (Paris, 1973).

<sup>33</sup>Published as *Vorsehungsglaube und Schicksalsidee in ihrem Verhältnis bei Philo von Alexandria* (Würzburg, 1939).

distinct from the Greek ideas of fate. He begins his thesis by discussing the development of the Greek idea of fate up to the time of Philo and then he examines Philo's doctrine of providence. He correctly asserts that there is a critical correlation between Philo's understanding of God and providence and thus outlines Philo's concept of God by pointing to the Logos and powers. He recognizes that providence must be understood as belonging to the powers, but does not specify in what way such a correlation was accomplished by Philo; he does not refer to Philo's mentioning of the "providential power" in *Legat.* 6. The rest of his examination of providence is limited to a discussion of theodicy as presented in *De Providentia*. In his two-volume work, Harry Wolfson<sup>34</sup> discusses the idea of providence not as a doctrine in its own terms, but only in contexts in which the issue emerges as an aspect of another question. Thus he touches on it in relation to Greek philosophy, creation and free will. His main thesis is that there is an universal and individual providence, the former entails the operation of the laws of the universe and the latter means God's possible suspension of these laws for the benefit of the individual.<sup>35</sup> A similar sporadic treatment of the issue of providence is characteristic of the monographs of Drummond,<sup>36</sup> Goodenough,<sup>37</sup> Bréhier.<sup>38</sup> The articles by David Winston<sup>39</sup> and

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<sup>34</sup>Philo. *Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1947, 5th printing 1982), vol. 1, 424-62.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. vol. 2, 293, 451.

<sup>36</sup>James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus, or the Jewish-Alexandrian Philosophy in its Development and Completion*, 2 vols. (London, 1888, reprint Amsterdam, 1969).

<sup>37</sup>Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light. The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven, 1935, reprint Amsterdam, 1969).

Donald Carson<sup>40</sup> are limited in scope, and touch on the question of providence only tangentially. Even Samuel Sandmel,<sup>41</sup> who deals directly with the topic of providence, deals only with an element of the Philonic concept of providence by focusing on the question of theodicy in the treatise *De Providentia*. Finally, the most recent inquiry into Philo's notion of providence is that by Myrto Dragona-Monachou as part of her larger study, "Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire."<sup>42</sup> This survey traces the development of the idea of providence in Greek thought up to the time of Neoplatonism. She discusses Philo in five pages with the conclusion that Philo's doctrine of providence, which she largely examined from the point of view of theodicy, "is an idiosyncratic one." Philo grounds his theodicy on the "thoroughly Platonic thesis" that God is not the cause of evil, evaluates physical evil in overwhelmingly Stoic terms, and takes recourse in his view of moral evil to the idea of a person's free will which he appropriated from Plato's view that the demiurge delegated the creation of the irrational soul to his inferiors.

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<sup>38</sup>Émile Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 3rd ed., 1950).

<sup>39</sup>"Freedom and Determinism in Greek Philosophy and Jewish Hellenistic Wisdom", in: *SP* 2 (1973), 40-50, and, "Freedom and Determinism in Philo of Alexandria", in: *SP* 3 (1974/75), 47-70.

<sup>40</sup>"Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Philo", in: *Novum Testamentum* 23 (1981), 148-64.

<sup>41</sup>"Some Comments on Providence in Philo", 79-85, in: J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel (eds), *The Divine Helmsman. Studies on God's Control of Human Events*, presented to L. H. Silberman (New York, 1980).

<sup>42</sup>*ANRW* II 36.7, 4417-90.

A perusal of these previous studies shows that none has aimed at a comprehensive understanding of Philo's doctrine of providence. Given this lacuna in Philonic scholarship, there is little need to justify a topic that not only has never been the subject of a thorough examination, but one that is also extremely important for Philo's thought as a whole. To offer an original contribution on Philo's conception of divine providence, and thereby to enrich our knowledge of Philo's thought as a whole, is the purpose of this dissertation.

## **Chapter One**

### **Divine Transcendence and Providence**

The purpose of this chapter is to formulate the conceptual relation between Philo's understanding of God, in particular the idea of divine transcendence, and the notion of providence. The main text underlying our examination is Philo's interpretation of the story of God's epiphany before Moses at the burning bush as recorded in Exodus 3:1-14. This biblical *locus classicus* is paradigmatic in Philo's theology as a whole because it is foundational for his concept of God. On the one hand, Philo's interpretation of the statement in Exodus 3:14 that God is  $\acute{\omicron} \acute{\omega}\nu$  proves to be critical for establishing the doctrines of the transcendence of God, the distinction between divine existence and divine essence, and the unknowability and ineffability of the divine nature. On the other hand, the same biblical narrative of the epiphany reveals Philo's underlying assumption of the conceptual unity between God's transcendence and his immanence. For Philo, God's transcendence does not preclude his

immanence, a feat that Philo achieves through the characterization of the angel at the burning bush as a symbol--analogous to the divine powers--of God's providence.

We shall first review the formal aspects of Philo's concept of God, focusing on aspects such as divine transcendence, the difference between divine existence and essence, the issue of the unknowability and indescribability of God and the question of making positive statements about God's nature. Second, we shall examine Philo's concept of providence in the light of the formal aspects of the concept of God, and third, we shall discuss how the concept of God and the concept of providence cohere as the unified concept of God's providence in Philo's explanation of the theophany at the burning bush.

## 1.1 The Concept of God

### 1.1.1 Transcendence of God

#### 1.1.1.1 Transcendence and Philosophy

In Philo's thought, the idea of transcendence functions as the hermeneutic key<sup>1</sup> that determines the shape of the doctrine of God which in turn determines the idea of immanence and establishes the proper place of all other features of his thought. To be in the position, then, of understanding how Philo conceptualizes the idea of providence we must bear in mind that the full significance of the doctrine comes to light only when seen within the texture of Philo's concept of God which is itself the

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<sup>1</sup>For a discussion of the premise of God's transcendence as the hermeneutic key to Philo's theology, see Luis Angel Montes-Peral, *AKATALEPTOS THEOS: Der unfaßbare Gott*, ALGHJ 16 (Leiden, 1987), 10.

product of the complex question of Philo's weaving together of philosophical traditions and scriptural beliefs.<sup>2</sup> David Runia suggests that virtually all strands of earlier Greek philosophy left their traces in Philo's idea of God; he arrays these possible philosophic sources in five categories.<sup>3</sup> (1) Philo makes use of the Stoic idea that God fills the universe with his powers and the idea of divine agency in the world connoted by the terms *λόγος* and *φύσις*. (2) From Aristotle and the Peripatetics Philo takes the ideas that God is highest cause (*ἀκτίον*), that God is immovable but mover for all else, that God is unceasingly active, and perhaps the distinction between divine *οὐσία* and *δύναμις*.<sup>4</sup> (3) From Plato and the Platonist tradition Philo took the idea that God is the maker, father, creator and providential maintainer of the cosmos, prompted by Philo's understanding of the theology of the *Timaeus*. (4) Also from the

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<sup>2</sup>For our position, see above, 12-13. Philo's typical practice of converging Scripture with philosophy poses the problem where Scripture ends and philosophy begins. It is a painstaking if not an impossible task to determine with any precision how in Philo's thought the teaching of Scripture correlates to a specific philosophic dogma; moreover, such a clear separation of sources might disregard Philo's main intent of showing the compatibility of biblical Judaism with Greek philosophy. For example, in *Spec.* 2:165, Philo relates candidly that the concept of God held by the Jewish nation is shared by "all Greeks and barbarians" and in *Virt.* 64 he submits that, "the disciples of the most excellent philosophy" gain their insight of God as truly existent, incorporeal, eternal, Maker and Father, and "most ancient Cause" from their Jewish predecessors.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 434-5.

<sup>4</sup>Although David Runia refers to Pseudo-Aristotle *De Mundo* 6:397b as a possible source for Philo's doctrine of divine powers, he maintains (cf. *Philo and the Timaeus*, 434, note 140) that "the background of the Philonic doctrine of the *δυνάμεις θεοῦ* is far from clear". For possible Stoic (cf. Diogenes Laertius 7:147) and Platonic (cf. *Phaedo* 95e, *Sophist* 247d-e) influences, cf. David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati, 1985), 19.

Platonist tradition, Philo took the idea that God alone is true being (τὸ ὄντως ὄν), an idea found in the *Republic*, books 6 and 7. (5) Finally, Philo's concept of God betrays traces of the Old Academy and Neopythagoreanism. Runia paraphrases these traces, based on the passage *QE* 2:68, as the idea that "God is One or the Monad, or, in an even loftier affirmation of divine transcendence and simplicity, καὶ ἑνός καὶ μονάδος πρεσβύτερος." Neopythagorean influence is probably also evident in Philo's view that God's oneness includes being, (*Deus* 11: τὸ ἓν καὶ ἡ μονάς, τὸ ὄντως ὄν).

Of these five philosophical traditions underlying Philo's concept of God, the best sources specifically for the doctrine of transcendence<sup>5</sup> are (4) and (5). Philo consistently characterizes God in good Platonic fashion as ὁ ὄν, "He who IS" (based on Exodus 3:14), and in good Pythagorean fashion as the one and monad; such an interpretation aligns Philo closely with the Middle Platonist tradition, as a growing number of recent studies suggest.<sup>6</sup> John Dillon,<sup>7</sup> David Winston,<sup>8</sup> Jaap Mansfeld,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>There is a convenient synopsis of what constitutes the main features of the idea of transcendence between Clement, Philo, Middle Platonism and Gnosticism in Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria. A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, 1971), 212-26. Lilla identifies as the salient features between them, (1) God is incorporeal, formless, without attribute, (2) above space and time, (3) above the μονάς, (4) above virtue, (5) unknown, (6) ineffable, (7) apprehended negatively κατ' ἀφαίρεσιν.

<sup>6</sup>Most recently, Robert M. Berchman, "The Categories of Being in Middle Platonism: Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria", in: John Peter Kenney (ed.), *The School of Moses. Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion*. In Memory of Horst R. Moehring, Studia Philonica Monographs 1. Atlanta, 1995, 98-140; see also the earlier work, idem, *From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition*, BJS 69 (Chico, CA., 1984); Gregory E. Sterling, "Platonizing Moses: Philo and Middle Platonism", in: *SPhA* 5 (1993), 96-111; David Runia, "Was Philo a Middle Platonist: A Difficult Question Revisited", in *SPhA* 5 (1993), 112-40. The standard work on Middle Platonism is still John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (London, 1977); for a

and John Whittaker<sup>10</sup> propose as a possible source for Philo's view of transcendence the theological ideas of Eudorus of Alexandria,<sup>11</sup> a Middle Platonist who flourished at the time of Philo's birth. Eudorus postulated a supranoetic first principle above a pair of opposites, the monad and the dyad; in theological language, one supreme God is placed "beyond the opposites which come forth from him because he is their principle, or cause."<sup>12</sup> Philo reconceived this "flexible Pythagorean system"<sup>13</sup> of

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survey, see Peder Borgen, "Philo. A Survey of Research", in: *ANRW* II.21.1 (1984), 147-50.

<sup>7</sup>See the studies of John Dillon, "The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources", *Center for Hermeneutical Studies. Protocol of the 16th Colloquy (1975)*, vol. 16, 1-8 (now reprinted in: idem., *The Golden Chain* (Hampshire, 1990)), and idem, "The Nature of God in the 'Quod Deus'", in: David Winston and John M. Dillon. *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria. A Commentary on De Gigantibus and Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis*, BJS 25 (Chico, CA., 1983), 217-27.

<sup>8</sup>David Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature", in: Lenn E. Goodman (ed), *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought* (New York, 1992), 21-42, and idem, "Divine Transcendence" in, *Selections* (New York, 1981), 22-24.

<sup>9</sup>Jaap Mansfeld, "Compatible Alternatives: Middle Platonist Theology and the Xenophanes Reception", in: R. van den Broek (ed) et al., *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, 1988), 92-117.

<sup>10</sup>John Whittaker, "Neopythagoreanism and the Transcendent Absolute", in: *Symbolae Osloenses* 48 (1973), 77-86, reprinted in: idem. *Studies in Platonism and Christian Thought*.

<sup>11</sup>Eudorus stood himself in a chain of Platonic interpretations of the idea of the monad. For a survey of Eudorus' theology, see Robert M. Berchman, "The Categories of Being in Middle Platonism: Philo, Clement, and Origen of Alexandria", 107-111. Berchman characterizes Philo's theology in the context of Middle Platonist theologies as a mixture of "a rigorous theological *apophaticism*... [and] a powerful metaphysical *kataphaticism*", 118.

<sup>12</sup>Jaap Mansfeld, "Middle Platonist Theology", 97.

"transcended polarities"<sup>14</sup> into his idiosyncratic scheme of ontology. The Neopythagorean-Middle Platonic idea of the monad as the highest principle becomes in Philo the transcendent God, the pair of opposites is reconceived in the hierarchical manner so that the monad becomes the Logos and is above the dyad, which is in turn reconceived as the two chief powers.

But Philo goes one step further. By explicitly subordinating the Neopythagorean-Middle Platonic supranoetic first principle to his understanding that God "is *better* than the good, *more* venerable than the monad, *purer* than the unit",<sup>15</sup> he introduces a conceptual nuance commonly referred to among Philonic scholars as God's "utter" or "absolute" transcendence.<sup>16</sup> Wishing to secure the uniqueness of God in every aspect, ontological and epistemological, Philo unwittingly draws attention to the philosophical tension of his metaphysical structure. The issue, the full extent of which shall be discussed in the following chapter, is how God so utterly removed from his own created order can actually be in relation to it. If God is utterly transcendent, how

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid. Mansfeld notes that "Pythagoreanism has been considered a major contribution to the rise of Middle Platonism."

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>15</sup>*Praem.* 40 (italics added). In *QE* 2:68, God is said to be "He Who is elder than the one and the monad and the beginning", and in *LA* 2:3 Philo remarks, "The 'one' and the 'monad' are, therefore, the only standard for determining the category to which God belongs. Rather should we say, the One God is the sole standard for the 'monad'."

<sup>16</sup>For example, David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, speaks of "God's utter transcendence", 436, "God the wholly transcendent One", 442. David Winston, "Philo's Conception of Divine Nature", 21, characterizes Philo's idea of transcendence as "an emphatic doctrine of extreme divine transcendence."

can a doctrine of divine providence be made intelligible within Philo's theology as a whole?

While the Middle Platonist tradition proves to be the most congenial one for understanding Philo's conception of God's transcendence, the same may be claimed for Philo's notion of providence. Following Runia's proposal of philosophical sources, the most suitable candidate, as our study shall show, is the Platonist tradition (3) derived from the *Timaeus* because of its thematic correlation between God as the father, creator, and providential maintainer of the cosmos. It is noteworthy that Diogenes Laertius recalls the remark of Favorinus (a 2nd century CE sophist) that Plato was the first to introduce into philosophical discussion the term of divine providence (θεοῦ πρόνοιαν),<sup>17</sup> a term found in *Timaeus* 30c. It is further intriguing that the theme of providence constitutes one of the central features of Middle Platonism, together with a pronounced theocentrism, the theory of creation, and man's place in the cosmos.<sup>18</sup> Ardent witnesses of the idea of providence among the Middle Platonists are Seneca, Plutarch of Chaeroneia, Atticus, Nicomachus, and Numenius.<sup>19</sup> But despite parallels on the theme of providence between Philo and Middle Platonism one must be extremely cautious in attempting to establish Philo's

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<sup>17</sup>Diogenes Laertius 3:24.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 491-4.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. John Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 208-11, 252-3, 360, 373-4; David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 242. For a thorough overview on the question of providence in (Middle) Pre-Neoplatonism, see the survey by Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "Divine Philosophy in the Philosophy of the Empire", *ANRW* II 36.7 (1994), 4436-75.

direct dependence on Middle Platonist thinkers or vice versa.<sup>20</sup> Although Philo shows clear leanings toward Middle Platonism, the legitimate question arises whether his idea of providence is also indebted to the central Stoic dogma of *πρόνοια*; another question is the extent to which this dogma had already been absorbed into Middle Platonism. With respect to Stoic influence, Paul Wendland, *Philo's Schrift über die Vorsehung* (Berlin, 1892), has identified numerous Stoic sources in the dialogues *De Providentia*, but the question is more precisely how Stoic thought shaped Philo's conceptualization of the idea of providence, if it did at all.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.1.1.2 Transcendence and Scripture

As important as the philosophical underpinnings of Philo's idea of transcendence might be, for Philo the starting point for the concept of the transcendent God is the scriptural principle of monotheism<sup>22</sup> as recorded in the Pentateuch. Decisive in this

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<sup>20</sup>See the sound warning about this difficulty by David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 501.

<sup>21</sup>Much Stoic thought on the question of providence is found in the dialogue *De Animalibus*. Cf. Abraham Terian, *Philonis Alexandrini De Animalibus: The Armenian Text with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, Studies in Hellenistic Judaism 1 (Chico, CA., 1981), 51, and in the short fragment *De Deo*, see Folker Siegert, *Philon von Alexandrien. Über die Gottesbezeichnung "wohlthätig verzehrendes Feuer" (De Deo)*, WUNT 46 (Tübingen, 1988). Cf. *Deo* 5, 12. For a stimulating discussion of the question, see Gretchen Reydam-Schils, "Stoicized Reading of Plato's *Timaeus* in Philo of Alexandria", in: *SPhA* 7 (1995), 85-102.

<sup>22</sup>Philo's attempt to bring together his Biblical heritage and philosophical traditions must be seen in the light of the vast differences between biblical and philosophical monotheism, cf. Yehoshua Amir, "Die Begegnung des biblischen Monotheismus als Grundthema des jüdischen Hellenismus", in: *Evangelische Theologie* 38 (1978), 2-19.

respect is his interpretation of the divine epiphany before Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3:14, the statement that reads in the LXX, ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν ("I am He who IS"). Philo exegetes this biblical lemma in *Mut.* 11, *Somn.* 1:230, *Mos.* 1:75, and *Det.* 160.<sup>23</sup> Because these passages have received ample scholarly attention,<sup>24</sup> suffice it here to note the following. The self-designation of God as ὁ ὢν, "He who IS", may be understood as the name of God. But, while Philo can so describe it and so use it on occasion,<sup>25</sup> he does this in very guarded fashion; he thinks it is, rather, to be regarded as an allusion to God's true nature, because the meaning of ὁ ὢν, as Philo remarks in *Mut.* 11, is equivalent to "My nature is to be (εἶναι), not to be spoken." In *Somn.* 1:231 God's self-declaration as ὁ ὢν entails that a person "may recognize His subsistence (ὑπαρξις)", by which Philo means (in *Somn.* 1:230) that "it is not the nature of Him that IS to be spoken of, but simply to be (εἶναι)." In *Mos.* 1:75 ὁ ὢν refers "to Whom alone existence belongs" and presupposes "the difference between what IS and what is not", and in *Det.* 160 it implies that "God alone has veritable being" because "other lesser than He have not being, as being indeed is (οὐκ

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<sup>23</sup>We must add to these the neglected fragment *De Deo*. In *Deo* 4 Philo alludes to Exodus 3:14 pointing out that ὁ ὢν is not God's proper name because he is ἀκατανόμαστος, ἄρρητος, ἀκατάλητος.

<sup>24</sup>For commentary and nuances, see especially David Runia, "God of the Philosophers, God of the Patriarchs: Exegetical Backgrounds in Philo of Alexandria", 208-16.

<sup>25</sup>In *Abr.* 120 Philo declares that God "in the sacred scriptures is called He that IS as His proper name (κυρίῳ ὀνόματι καλεῖται)." For further discussion, see below note 59.

ὄντων κατὰ τὸ εἶναι), but exist in semblance only, and are conventionally said to exist."

These passages encapsulate more or less the key aspects of Philo's view of divine transcendence each of which he articulates more fully in other passages of his writings. These aspects are: (1) The idea that God's existence is alone "veritable being", a kind of being that is unlike any other kind of existence, and hence becomes Philo's capstone for the doctrine of God's transcendent existence, (2) the distinction between the existence (expressed by the term ὑπαρξις) and the nature (expressed by the terms εἶναι, οὐσία) of God, and (3) the idea of the unknowability and unnamability, or ineffability of God.

Terminologically, Philo derives the idea of God's transcendent existence from the masculine ὁ ὢν or the neuter τὸ ὄν,<sup>26</sup> by which he means to convey the idea that God's existence is ontologically the highest and, therefore, a unique existence. Throughout the Philonic corpus the meaning of ὁ ὢν, "He who IS", is specified more precisely in terms such that God "truly exists",<sup>27</sup> that he is "the One, the truly existing God",<sup>28</sup> that he is "the Alone existent One",<sup>29</sup> that he is "the only God"<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. the note in James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus, or the Jewish-Alexandrian Philosophy in its Development and Completion*, 2 vols (London, 1888, reprint Amsterdam, 1969), vol. 2, 63, on Philo's various designations for God. ὁ ὢν occurs 29 times, the neuter τὸ ὄν 38 times.

<sup>27</sup>*Virt.* 64, ὁ ὄντως ὢν; cf. *Decal.* 59.

<sup>28</sup>*Virt.* 40, τοῦ ἐνός καὶ ὄντως ὄντος.

<sup>29</sup>*Fuga* 101, τοῦ μόνου, ὃ ἔστιν ἀψευδῶς.

<sup>30</sup>*Fuga* 140, θεοῦ μόνου.

and the "best of all existences, incomparable Cause of all things."<sup>31</sup> Although these descriptions reveal explicitly that Philo envisions the existence of God as a being incomparable to any other divine being, his most superlative characterization of God is summarized in the terse phrase that "God is the most generic one."<sup>32</sup> This distinctive designation of God as τὸ γενικώτατον implies, as Wolfson notes, that God "belongs to no class and hence we do not know what He is",<sup>33</sup> that "God is 'most generic' absolutely; there is nothing more generic than He."<sup>34</sup> For Philo, there is no other being that can be compared to God in any aspect because God exists as the only genus, hence absolutely, in a class by himself; there simply exists nothing on the level of God.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>*Fuga* 141, τοῦ τῶν ὄντων ἀρίστου καὶ ἀσυγκρίτου καὶ πάντων αἰτίου.

<sup>32</sup>*LA* 2:86 (my translation of τὸ δὲ γενικώτατόν ἐστιν ὁ θεός; Whittaker translates the Greek as "the primal existence is God", or alternatively, "supremely generic" God). In *Sacr.* 92 Philo says "that everything which comes after God is found to have descended by a whole genus", thus implying that God is the highest genus.

<sup>33</sup>Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 109-10.

<sup>34</sup>Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 252. Here we have an excellent example of Philo's liberal fusion of Scripture and philosophy. Wolfson shows that in his interpretation of the statement that God is "the most generic", Philo combines Aristotelian and Stoic principles. From Aristotle Philo adapts the idea that God is the absolutely most generic because he is the uncaused cause of all things and thus their unique genus, (cf. *Philo*, vol. 1, 252), and from the Stoics Philo takes the idea that "the something" (τὸ τι) is the most generic of all things; for the full scriptural context (Philo's explanation of the manna) and philosophical background, cf. *Philo*, vol. 2, 110).

<sup>35</sup>Note also the passage *LA* 2:1-3. "But God, being One, is alone and unique, and like God there is nothing... neither before creation was there anything with God, nor, when the universe had come into being, does anything take its place with Him; for there is absolutely nothing which He needs... God is alone, a Unity, in the sense that His nature is simple not composite... For whatever is added to God, is either superior

### 1.1.2 Divine Existence and Essence

Another fundamental aspect of Philo's concept of God is the philosophical<sup>36</sup> distinction between God's existence and essence.<sup>37</sup> Just as the notion of God's transcendence, Philo derives the distinction between God's existence and essence from the divine self-designation  $\delta\ \acute{\omega}\nu$  in Exodus 3:14. Philo makes this distinction in his commentary on the term  $\delta\ \acute{\omega}\nu$  in *Somn.* 1:230. He remarks that "it is not the nature of Him who IS to be spoken of, but simply to be ( $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\iota$ )", and again in *Somn.* 1:231, in the phrase that we "may recognize His subsistence ( $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\xi}\iota\varsigma$ )." This last term points to Philo's terminological preference; typically he employs the term  $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\alpha\rho\acute{\xi}\iota\varsigma$  to denote "existence" and the term  $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$  to denote "essence".

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or inferior or equal to Him. But there is nothing equal or superior to God. And no lesser thing is resolved into him... The 'one' and the 'monad' are, therefore, the only standard for determining the category to which God belongs. Rather should we say, the One God is the sole standard for the 'monad'. For, like time, all number is subsequent to the universe; and God is prior to the universe, and is its Maker." Wolfson (*Philo*, vol. 1, 171-3) discovers in this passage the principle of the unity of God which consists of the uniqueness, self-sufficiency and simplicity of God.

<sup>36</sup>That it was Philo's philosophical commitment that superimposed this sharp distinction of divine essence and existence on the biblical concept of God is the view of Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 94-101, and David Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature", 21.

<sup>37</sup>When searching for God, Philo remarks *Spec.* 1:32, "two principal questions" are considered by "the genuine philosopher": the first one is "whether the Deity exists ( $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\ \tau\acute{o}\ \theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omicron\nu$ )", and the second "what the Deity is in essence ( $\tau\acute{\iota}\ \acute{\epsilon}\sigma\tau\iota\ \kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \tau\eta\nu\ \omicron\upsilon\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha\nu$ )." Note the parallels between Philo and Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2:13, "all have engraved in their minds an innate belief that the gods exist (*esse deos*). As to their nature there are various opinions, but their existence nobody denies". Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 111-113, on the Platonic background (*Timaeus* 28c) and influence of the distinction in the history of philosophy.

Whereas God's existence and, as we shall see, also his providence are apprehended by contemplation of the created order, God's essence is beyond apprehension. The inability to apprehend the divine essence is a logical consequence of Philo's presupposition of utter divine transcendence derived from God's self-designation as ὁ ὢν in Exodus 3:14. Because God exists in a class all by himself as the one and the most generic being, there are, by definition, as Philo notes in *Somn.* 1:231, "not in God things which man can comprehend (καταλαβεῖν)", and he notes elsewhere, that "a clear vision of God as He really is (κατὰ τὸν ὄντως ὄντα θεόν) is denied us."<sup>38</sup> How the distinction of God's existence and essence shapes Philo's view of providence, we shall examine below in our discussion of the concept of providence.

### 1.1.3. The Unknowability and Ineffability of God

The problem of the concealment of the divine essence has a double edge. On the one hand, human apprehension of God's nature is impossible because the object of apprehension is God in his "utter" transcendence. On the other hand, there is the epistemic limitation inherent in the human mind. Two important passages, *Spec.* 1:41-50 and *Post.* 166-69, illustrate this problematic well. Based on the biblical lemma of Moses' encounter with God after the demolition of the golden calf (cf. Exodus 33:12ff LXX), Philo explains why human apprehension of God's essence is impossible. When Moses, the person God loves most (θεοφιλέστατος Μωϋσῆς),

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<sup>38</sup>*Spec.* 1:40.

beseeches God: "Reveal Thyself to me (ἐμφάνισόν μοι σαυτόν)",<sup>39</sup> an invocation Philo interprets to signify Moses' desire to fathom God's essence, God replies that no created being can comprehend his divine essence for "the apprehension (κατάληψιν) of Me is something more than human nature (ἀνθρώπου φύσις), yea even the whole heaven and universe will be able to contain."<sup>40</sup> The reason for the inability is that "we have in us no organ (ὄργανον)" through which we can apprehend God's essence, "neither in sense (αἰσθησις), for it is not perceptible by sense, nor yet in mind (νοῦς)."<sup>41</sup> Since, moreover, apprehension of the divine essence can only be achieved by the purest mind (ἀκραιφνέστατος νοῦς),<sup>42</sup> no created being can apprehend God<sup>43</sup> except God who is himself pure essence and mind.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately then, "the question of the essence of the Existent Being" can lead only to the recognition "that the God of

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<sup>39</sup>*Spec.* 1:41, cf. Exodus 33:13 LXX: ἐμφάνισόν μοι σαυτόν. Philo discusses this request of Moses also in *Post.* 16, 169; *Fuga* 165; *Mut.* 8; *LA* 3:101. Cf. the excellent exposition of these passages by H. A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 83-90. He has demonstrated that even in the difficult text of *LA* 3:101, where Philo speaks of Moses' direct apprehension of God, Philo means Moses' direct perception of the existence (and not essence) of God. It is Moses' direct apprehension of God's existence because it is given to him by prophecy and revelation, and not indirectly through the observation of the universe.

<sup>40</sup>*Spec.* 1:43-44.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. *Mut.* 7.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. *Spec.* 1:46.

<sup>43</sup>*Spec.* 1:43, 46.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. *Praem.* 40.

real Being is apprehensible by no one, and to see precisely this, that He is incapable of being seen."<sup>45</sup>

The total concealment and unknowability of God's essence has far-reaching ramifications for Philo's theology as a whole, and hence also for the doctrine of divine providence. The consequence of the unknowability of God's essence is, strictly speaking, that *nothing* can be known about God's attributes. Given Philo's view of God's nature, it is conceptually impossible to say that God is provident because providence as a quality of God's nature cannot be perceived and known directly (but see our discussion below in section 1.2.3.1). The knowledge of God is limited to the knowledge of God's existence, as is the knowledge of his providence; both must be perceived indirectly *κατὰ δύνανταιν* through contemplation of the cosmos.

Philo indeed concedes that any "seeing" of God, although it can never be direct, may be a "seeing" of God through his powers which indirectly reveal God's essence in a way similar to our enjoyment of the sun which we enjoy only in its emanations, but never in its pure essence.<sup>46</sup> Elaborating on the verse "See, see that I AM" (Deuteronomy 32:39), Philo interprets the verse in this way. The reference that "the Existent One is visible", he says, refers "to each of his powers."<sup>47</sup> The verse does not say, "See Me", but, "See that I AM", and for Philo this means that a person can only apprehend God's existence (*ὑπαρξίς*), because "it is quite enough for a man's

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<sup>45</sup>*Post.* 15.

<sup>46</sup>For a possible Platonic background of this metaphor, see *Republic* 509c.

<sup>47</sup>*Post.* 168.

reasoning faculty to advance as far as to learn that the Cause of the Universe is and subsists (ἔστι τε καὶ ὑπάρχει)."<sup>48</sup> Similarly, God "can be perceived and known... from the powers that range the universe, and from the constant and ceaseless motion of His ineffable works".<sup>49</sup> Philo's view that perception of God is mediated by the perception of God's powers in the universe is elegantly summarized at the end of the passage *Post.* 166-69. His comments are based on God's answer to Moses' request to see God, the verse (Exodus 33:23), "Thou shalt behold that which is behind Me, but My Face thou shalt not see."

This meant that, that all that follows in the wake of God is within the good man's apprehension, while He Himself alone is beyond it, beyond, that is, in the line of straight and direct approach; a mode of approach by which (had it been possible) His quality would have been made known; but brought within ken by the powers that follow and attend Him; for these make evident not His essence but subsistence from the things which He accomplishes.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout his writings, Philo maintains that God's essence is completely concealed and unknowable to the human mind. God can be known and apprehended only through the activity of the powers in the works that follow him; that is, "through his *relationality*."<sup>51</sup> Because the powers reflect God's essence, but are themselves not identical with it, they reveal God's existence from the works of creation and the fact

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<sup>48</sup>*Post.* 168.

<sup>49</sup>*Post.* 167.

<sup>50</sup>*Post.* 169.

<sup>51</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 437. Runia also notes that knowledge of God "cannot and does not proceed *beyond* the relational. God in his absoluteness is unknowable. The interpreter of Philo's doctrine of God must exercise great care in not breaking the epistemic limits set by Philo himself."

that God is in relation with his creation. In one instance Philo identifies the powers with the "glory" of God<sup>52</sup> because they "present to your sight a sort of impress and copy of their active working",<sup>53</sup> and again they supply "quality and shape to things which lack either."<sup>54</sup> This amounts to Philo's view that God's essence can only be apprehended to the extent that the powers reveal divine activity and glory; but these are merely images of the divine essence and not identical with the essence itself. In Philo's structure of theology it is then impossible to apprehend directly that God in his essence is provident. That apprehension must be mediated by the perception of God's existence, which is in turn only possible because of the activity of the divine powers in creation.

Philo's view of the utter concealment and unknowability of God's nature is one side of the coin that has on its reverse the ineffability, or unnamability of God. Since it is entirely impossible on epistemological grounds to know God in his essence, it is also impossible on linguistic grounds to describe the one who is unknown in essence; hence, "no concept can be formed of His essence, for the concept of the essence of a thing is formed by its definition."<sup>55</sup>

That Philo is well aware of this systematic tension within the structure of his theology is explicit in several passages. Paradigmatic again is his interpretation of the

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<sup>52</sup>*Spec.* 1:45. In *QG* 4:54, Philo remarks that God "holds out of sight the glory of his powers."

<sup>53</sup>*Spec.* 1:47.

<sup>54</sup>*Spec.* 1:47.

<sup>55</sup>Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 111.

divine epiphany at the burning bush. In all the passages in which Philo exegetes the meaning of ὁ ὢν as foundational for his view of God's transcendence--in *Mut.* 11-13, *Somn.* 1:230, *Mos.* 1:75, *Det.* 160, *Deo* 4--he makes explicit reference to the conviction that God has no proper name. Because God's "very nature cannot be seen",<sup>56</sup> "it is a logical consequence that no personal name even can be properly assigned to the truly Existent."<sup>57</sup> The impossibility of assigning a proper<sup>58</sup> name to divine essence is well expressed in *Somn.* 1:230.

He who IS... has no proper name (κύριον ὄνομα),<sup>59</sup> and that whatever name anyone may use of Him he will use by licence of language (καταχράομαι); for it is not the nature of Him who IS spoken of, but simply to be.

How does Philo overcome the linguistic limitations of having to name that which has no proper name? Philo concedes that mankind is in need of an appellation for the God it worships. In *Mut.* 12 he remarks that God admits human beings to address him "by

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<sup>56</sup>*Mut.* 9.

<sup>57</sup>*Mut.* 11. *Mos.* 1:75 reads that "no name at all can properly be used of Me, to Whom alone existence belongs", and *Det.* 160 notes that Moses says ὁ ὢν "as best as he may in human speech." Significant are also *Legat.* 6, "for if the whole heavens should become an articulate voice, it would lack the apt and appropriate terms (κυρίως ὀνόμασιν) needed for this, but even for God's attendant powers."

<sup>58</sup>Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. II (The Way of Negation, Christian and Greek) (Bonn, 1986), 149, notes that in Philo the philosophical reason for the impossibility of naming God is that "ontological priority is required for true naming". God named Adam who named the animals etc. Names, therefore, "do not come from posterior entities." Since God is ontologically the first entity, he cannot be named.

<sup>59</sup>Likewise, in *Abr.* 121, Philo notes that God "in the sacred scriptures is called He who IS as His proper name (κυρίῳ ὀνόματι καλεῖται)", but clarifies that this is not God's real name.

licence of language, as though it were his proper name."<sup>60</sup> In the very next verse he repeats more precisely:

For those who are born into mortality must needs have some substitute for the divine name, so that they may approach if not the fact at least the name of supreme excellence and be brought into relation with it.<sup>61</sup>

Philo's solution to the question of addressing God who strictly speaking cannot be named is by means of applying language catachrestically. It is crucial to note that Philo stresses the catachrestic application of language by employing the verb *καταχράομαι* and the noun *κατάχρησις*.

*Katachresis* is part of Greek understanding of rhetoric and grammar and in a technical sense belongs to the theory of tropes.<sup>62</sup> Generally speaking, *katachresis* may be defined as the use or misuse of words and phrases. Among the several technical definitions cited by Runia, the one closest to Philo is found in Pseudo-Plutarch's *Vita Homeri*, according to which *katachresis* is "the transference of a word-usage from an object which is properly (*κυρίως*) signified to another object which has no proper name (*κύριον ὄνομα*)".<sup>63</sup> For our purpose it is sufficient to note

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<sup>60</sup>*Mut.* 12: δίδωσι καταχρησθαι ὡς ἂν ὄνοματι κυρίῳ. In *Mut.* 27, Philo comments that the words, "I am your God" (*ἐγὼ εἰμι θεὸς σός*) are "used by licence of language and not in their proper sense" (*λέγεται καταχρηστικῶς, οὐ κυρίως*).

<sup>61</sup>*Mut.* 13.

<sup>62</sup>For a discussion of the technical understanding and function of *katachresis*, cf. David Runia, "Naming and Knowing. Themes in Philonic Theology with special Reference to the *De Mutatione Nominum*", in: R. van den Broek et al., *Knowledge of God in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden, 1988, now reprinted in: idem. *Exegesis and Philosophy*. Hampshire, 1990), 69-91.

<sup>63</sup>David Runia, "Naming and Knowing", 84. The reference is Pseudo-Plutarch, *Vita Homeri* 2:18 346.11-16.

that Philo overcomes the problem of the unnamability of God precisely in terms of *katachresis* thus defined.<sup>64</sup> The term "God", for example, does not signify for Philo the proper name of God, but it signifies the creative power. Philo derives the word "God" (θεός) from the verb τίθημι, a term that has the meaning "to contrive, create" for him.<sup>65</sup> The term "God", although used as if it were the name of God, does not properly signify divine essence, but points to God's activity as the creative power. The internal logic of Philo's understanding of *katachresis* is thus apparent: although we must use the term "God" to describe divine reality, the term itself cannot sufficiently signify what divine reality is or who God is. Hence, in all the passages in which Philo addresses the question of the ineffability of God the gist of the discussion is on the substitutionary character of language.<sup>66</sup>

By way of conclusion, Philo's conceptual framework of God's utter transcendence and the unknowability and indescribability of God's essence requires the conclusion that it is impossible to know and describe any divine quality, including the assertion that God is provident. One response to this dilemma, as we shall see, is Philo's attempt to derive the existence of providence by making it dependent, not upon God's

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<sup>64</sup>Philo refers to the concept of *katachresis* fourteen times in his writings, the noun eight times and the verb six times. As David Runia notes, "Naming and Knowing", 85, Philo's usage amounts to "a comparatively high frequency when compared with other writers."

<sup>65</sup>Cf. *Conf.* 137, *Abr.* 121, *Mut.* 29, *Fuga* 97.

<sup>66</sup>According to Philo's own definitions, language is using words "to express facts" (*Somn.* 1:230), or more generally speaking, to give phonetic articulation to the reality of things (cf. *Cher.* 56).

essence, but upon divine activity in creation. Another response is Philo's intentional use of anthropomorphic language and negative theology, not as an attempt to ignore the problematic of his theological framework, but to make intelligible the mystery of God's relation with the world.

#### 1.1.4 The Knowledge of God

We concluded in the previous section that although we use the name "God", it is impossible to have knowledge of God's nature. To overcome the predicament of speaking about God who, strictly speaking, cannot be named or spoken of, Philo nevertheless uses anthropomorphic and negative language and even positive qualities.

##### 1.1.4.1 Anthropomorphic Language and Negative Theology

Because the concept of God's unknowable and indescribable nature requires that God cannot be described in positive terms, one of the possibilities to "describe" God is by comparing him metaphorically to beings closest to him; another possibility is by saying what he is not. Philo utilizes both possibilities, that of anthropomorphic language and that of negative theology. The most suitable language for expressing the relation between God and humanity, according to Yehoshua Amir, is the anthropomorphic one. Rather than trying to establish a specific concept of God, anthropomorphic speech has the primary function of making intelligible the essentially

ineffable relation between God and humanity.<sup>67</sup> While nonetheless expressing this relation in anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language, Philo is fully aware of the theological imprecision inherent in such language.<sup>68</sup> Human images applied to God are limited to the extent that they enable human beings to articulate an *analogia relationis*, but not an *analogia entis*, between God and humanity. Anthropomorphic language cannot make a legitimate assertion about the manner in which God reveals himself to humanity nor can anthropopathic descriptions in any way be prescriptive of a possible "emotional" condition of the nature of God.<sup>69</sup> The anthropomorphic image that is most critical for Philo's idea of providence is that of the fatherhood of God. We shall now introduce Philo's use of anthropomorphism in relation to the concept of God and return to the image of fatherhood below in our discussion of the Philonic concept of providence.

In a superficial sense, anthropomorphic language is "elementary negative theology", as Raoul Mortley notes, because it suggests, not that God is not human,

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<sup>67</sup>Cf. Yehoshua Amir, "Die Begegnung des biblischen Monotheismus als Grundthema des jüdischen Hellenismus", 4. In his words, anthropomorphic language "dient der Versinnlichung der Gottesbeziehung und nicht dem Entwurf einer Gottesvorstellung."

<sup>68</sup>In response to the verse that "God is not a man" (Numbers 23:19), Philo remarks that mortal human beings are not able to think worthily of "the nature of the Cause", and then explains as follows: "We shun indeed in words the monstrosity of saying that God is of human form, but in actual fact we accept the impious thought that He is of human passions. And therefore we invent for Him hands and feet, incoming and outgoings, enmities, aversions, estrangements, anger, in fact such parts and passions as can never belong to the Cause" (*Sacr.* 95-96; cf. *Deus* 53-56, *Mut.* 54, *Plant.* 70).

<sup>69</sup>See the section on scriptural anthropomorphism and divine *apatheia/eupatheia* in David Winston, "Philo's Conception of the Divine Nature", 23-32.

but rather that he is "super-human."<sup>70</sup> As anthropomorphic designations cannot, strictly speaking, reveal any aspect of the essence of God, neither can any negative attribute resolve the problem of the ineffability of divine essence. Negative theology goes further than anthropomorphic imagery in that it "eliminates all personal and human imagery from the description of the ontological essence, but not only this, it goes further in order to eliminate... the entire language of the external world. All existential, positional, temporal, qualitative, and moral concepts are eliminated. Language depreciates the whole of the human conceptual and linguistic apparatus."<sup>71</sup> The result of the *via negativa* is the emphasis on the utter transcendence and perfection of God.<sup>72</sup> Negative descriptions are not, however, a denial of the qualities belonging to the divine essence; they rather point to the fact that God is beyond qualities and hence beyond description of qualities.

Philo employs the following α-privative terms: "uncreated" (ἀγέννητος),<sup>73</sup> "incorruptible" (ἀδέκαστος),<sup>74</sup> "unalterable" (ἀτρεπτος),<sup>75</sup> "beyond perception"

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<sup>70</sup>Raoul Mortley, *From Word to Silence*, vol. 2, 15.

<sup>71</sup>Idem.

<sup>72</sup>Luis Angel Montes-Peral, *AKATALEPTOS THEOS: Der unfaßbare Gott*, 132. speaks of the *via negationis* in Philo as a "structural component on the way to God's perfection." For the view that negative theology is an attempt to articulate the perfection of God, cf. Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo* (Chicago, 1919, reprint New York, 1979), 18.

<sup>73</sup>*Mos.* 2:171, *Deus* 56.

<sup>74</sup>*Cher.* 17, *Deus* 18, *Plant.* 108, *Conf.* 121, *Migr.* 115.

<sup>75</sup>*Mut.* 54.

(ἀκατάλητος),<sup>76</sup> "without name" (ἀκατονόμαστος),<sup>77</sup> "ineffable" (ἄρρητος),<sup>78</sup> "invisible" (ἀόρατος),<sup>79</sup> "beyond circumscription" (ἀπερίγραφος),<sup>80</sup> "incomparable" (ἀσύγκριτος),<sup>81</sup> "without form" (ἀειδῆ),<sup>82</sup> "incorporeal" (ἀσώματος).<sup>83</sup> In Philo's understanding of the divine essence, these negative terms indicate what God is not and thereby emphasise the opposite, namely the perfection of God.

#### 1.1.4.2 Positive Descriptions [*via eminentiae*]

We might conclude that the consequence of Philo's inextricably relating God's unknowability and his ineffability is the impossibility of describing God in positive terms. As Billings charges, "it is by logical contradiction that Philo attaches positive predicates to this Being of whom he has said we can know nothing."<sup>84</sup> But, although

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<sup>76</sup>*Det.* 89, *Somn.* 1:67, *Deo* 4.

<sup>77</sup>*Deo* 4, *Somn.* 1:67.

<sup>78</sup>*Deo* 4, *Somn.* 1:67, *LA* 3:206, *Heres* 170. On the last three negations in *Somn.* 1:67, cf. John Whittaker, "ΑΡΡΗΤΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΚΑΤΟΝΟΜΑΣΤΟΣ", in: H.-D. Blume and F. Mann (eds.) *Platonismus und Christentum*. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie (Münster, 1983), 303-306, now reprinted in J. Whittaker, *Studies in Platonism and Christian Thought* (London, 1984).

<sup>79</sup>*Cher.* 101, *Conf.* 138.

<sup>80</sup>*Sac.* 59.

<sup>81</sup>*Fuga* 141.

<sup>82</sup>*Mos.* 1:158.

<sup>83</sup>*Mos.* 1:158.

<sup>84</sup>Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo*, 18.

he does not address the problem explicitly, Philo is aware of it.<sup>85</sup> If he understands divine predicates in the sense of Aristotelian properties (ιδιότητες), as Wolfson thinks, namely "that, while they must necessarily be assumed to belong to the essence of God, they do not tell us anything about the essence of God, for this, according to him [Philo], must remain unknown",<sup>86</sup> the force of the seeming logical contradiction lessens. For Philo was far more concerned with the question of the relation between God and humanity than he was to work out fully the metaphysical and epistemological implications of his understanding of transcendence; prompted by the abundant use of positive terms in Scripture,<sup>87</sup> he employs positive descriptions of God precisely because he wishes to make the point that God is both absolutely transcendent and yet immanently involved in human affairs. If nothing can be predicated positively of God, nothing can be predicated of the nature of the relation between God and humanity. That relation cannot be said to be good, for example, unless goodness is predicated of God; and it cannot be said to be one of providence unless it is predicated about God that he is provident. For Philo, ascribing predicates to God is not so much an attempt to gain rational insight into God's true nature as it is the hope of characterizing how

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<sup>85</sup>Philo raises the question in *LA* 3:206, "Who can make any positive assertion concerning His essence or quality or state or movement?"

<sup>86</sup>See Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 133.

<sup>87</sup>Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 129, notes that "on purely scriptural grounds the problem of the divine predicates presents itself to Philo merely as a problem of apparent contradictions... by declaring that these predicates are not meant to be taken literally and that they are used only for the purpose of instruction, the problem, in its scriptural aspect, is solved for him." On the technical meaning of the terms predicate, quality, accident, definition, genus, see Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 130-33.

God relates to humanity. To say that God is good or powerful rests on the assumption that the goodness and power we see manifest in the created order do give us an indication of his nature; what we see, Philo assumes, arises from their prior existence in God.

#### 1.1.4.3 The Property of Acting

Because of man's epistemic incapability of apprehending God's nature directly, knowledge of God must be mediated indirectly by its effects. In Philonic terms, God's activity is the basis for discerning the effects or shadows of God's essence. Philo says in *Cher.* 77 that "it belongs to God alone to act (ποιέω), and this we may not ascribe to any created being. What belongs to the created is to suffer (πάσχω)." In *LA* 1:5 Philo explains in more detail that "God never leaves off making (ποιέω),<sup>88</sup> but even as it is the property (ἴδιον) of fire to burn and of snow to chill, so it is the property of God to make. [...] He is to all besides the source of action." In *Det.* 162 he says "He who really IS must needs be active not passive", and in *Prov.* 1:6, a passage complicated by text-critical minutia,<sup>89</sup> Philo refers to the Stoic view that it is unfitting for the deity to be ever inactive.

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<sup>88</sup>Cf. *Gig.* 42, "God is uncreated and ever active (ποιῶν ἀεί)."

<sup>89</sup>For details regarding text-critical issues, cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 148-51. The text-critical problems arise because there exists no original Greek text, but only an Armenian version and an inadequate Latin version (Aucher's translation of the Armenian).

Wolfson argues that in these passages "Philo reduces all the properties predicated of God to only a single property, that of acting."<sup>90</sup> Every predicate assigned to God is therefore only a different aspect of the one property of acting. Wolfson argues further that the phrase "source of action" (*LA* 1:5) means in Aristotle the same as power (*δύναμις*) because it is the source of movement and that in Plato, too, the phrase is "a description of the causative aspect of the ideas."<sup>91</sup> From these philosophical parallels Wolfson draws the conclusion that in Philo the properties of God are thus the powers of God, and the names by which God is called are nothing but designations of these properties or powers of God.<sup>92</sup> Whether Wolfson is right in claiming that Philo adapted the idea of the properties of God as the powers of God in response to Aristotle and Plato remains a matter of dispute.<sup>93</sup> But Philo indeed makes the connection between God's activity and the divine powers, albeit in the polemical passage *Opif.* 7. It is "impious falsehood" he indicts, to postulate "in God a vast inactivity", but "we ought on the contrary be astonished at His powers as Maker and Father." Runia comments on this passage that the maintenance of the cosmos is

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<sup>90</sup>Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 133. Wolfson claims that since God's essence is one and simple whatever belongs to divine essence as a property must be one and simple. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 437, note 162, however, raises the legitimate criticism that it is possible in Philo to understand "being" as a chief property in addition to that of "acting"; if true, the issue of the relation between these two properties is a critical one, but according to Philo's understanding of the concealment of divine essence, impossible to solve.

<sup>91</sup>Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 134.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>93</sup>See note 4 above.

guaranteed because of "God's never-ceasing creative and providential activity",<sup>94</sup> an idea that Philo exploits as a proof for the existence of providence.<sup>95</sup>

## 1.2 The Concept of Providence

We are now in a position to examine Philo's concept of providence in light of the formal aspects of the concept of God. We shall begin with a discussion of the relation between transcendence and the idea of providence, followed by a discussion of how Philo correlates God's existence and the existence of providence, and end with a discussion of how he actually predicates that God is provident by nature.

### 1.2.1 Transcendence and Providence

Philo's high view of the transcendence of God does not prevent him, however, from ascribing to God also the notion of providence, linking the two via the idea of God being the "cause" for creation. The reasoning unfolds as follows. In *Congr.* 105 we find one of the rare instances where Philo actually employs the phrase ὁ ὑπεράνω θεός, "the transcendent God", a designation that is also found in fragment 4 in

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<sup>94</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 154. Philo introduces the theme of providence at *Opif.* 9.

<sup>95</sup>Although Philo is vague in specifying how God's thinking-acting relates to providential activity, David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 440-1, surmises that God's thinking is located in the Logos and effectuated κατὰ δύναμιν. As we shall see in the next chapter, Philo indeed takes the step of presenting the idea of providence in terms analogous to one of the divine powers.

Eudorus and undoubtedly signifies for both authors God's "transcendent" being.<sup>96</sup> That God is, moreover, the transcendent Cause of all things follows from Philo's understanding of God as the most generic being,<sup>97</sup> and is spelled out by him in several places. For example, in the classic passage *Opif.* 8 Philo remarks that "the active cause is the perfectly pure and unsullied Mind of the universe, transcending virtue, transcending knowledge, transcending the good itself and the beautiful itself", and in *Post.* 14 he specifies that "the Cause of all is not in the thick darkness, nor locally in any place at all, but transcendent above both place and time."<sup>98</sup> Finally, the explicit connection between God as transcendent cause and providence is made clear in the passage *Virt.* 216. Philo narrates Abraham's journey from the land of the Chaldeans. Abraham

is the first person spoken of as believing in God, since he first grasped a firm and unswerving conception of the truth that there is one Cause above all (ἐν αἰτίῳ τὸ ἀνωτάτω), and that it exercises providence (προνοέω<sup>99</sup>) for the world and all that there is therein.

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<sup>96</sup>For the Greek text of the fragment and commentary, see Jaap Mansfeld, "Middle Platonist Theology", 97.

<sup>97</sup>See note 33 above. In *LA* 3:206 God is identified as the First Cause.

<sup>98</sup>For other passages where Philo utilizes the epithet of the "cause" for God, cf. *Plant.* 64, "the highest and worthiest Cause of all things (τὸ ἀνωτάτω καὶ πάντων ἀριστον αἰτίον)"; *Deus* 56, "the Cause of all things (τὸ πάντων αἰτίον). See also the more general statement in *Conf.* 137, a passage with some text-critical difficulties, "That aspect of Him which transcends (ὑπεράνω) His Potencies cannot be conceived of at all in terms of place, but only as pure being"; cf. *Fuga* 164.

<sup>99</sup>F. H. Colson's translation of the phrase καὶ προνοεῖ τοῦ τε κόσμου καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ as "and that it [God as Cause] provides for the world", ignores the fact that whenever God is the subject of the verb προνοέω, the reference is to God's *providence*, and not simply God's general care. The latter Philo expresses by the term ἐπιμέλεια.

Philo accomplishes the correlation of the transcendence of God and providence by characterizing God as "cause." His chief argument is that because God as Cause (τὸ αἷτιον) is inherently active he brings the universe into existence and continually maintains the structure of the created order through his providential care. This point is especially forcefully outlined in *Prov.* 1:12. Philo in fact builds his argument for the existence of providence on the Aristotelian premise that there must be a first cause, God the creator,<sup>100</sup> because the coming into being (the beginning) of the universe cannot be explained apart from a first cause. Philo connects the idea that God is the first cause and created the universe with the well-ordered structure of the cosmos and derives from it God's ongoing providential care for the world (cf. *Prov.* 1:26, 30-33).

That Philo achieves the relation between the transcendence and providence of God through the idea of the efficient cause of creation (cf. also *QG* 4:87) points to his attempt at securing God's transcendence without compromising his providential activity in the world. On one occasion, however, Philo says that God *is* provident (see below 1.2.3.1) and thus ascribes providence to God's transcendent nature; but far more often—as we shall see in Chapter Two—he speaks of God's providential *activity* in the world, and thus distinguishes providence from God's transcendent being.

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<sup>100</sup>In *QG* 1:6, Philo refers explicitly to Plato. "Plato said [*Timaeus* 92c], the Creator is the greatest and best of causes, while the world is the most beautiful of created things."

### 1.2.2 Divine Existence and Providence

In the preceding section we employed the passage *Virt.* 215 in our examination of the relation between the transcendent cause and providence. This same text (215-6) has further significance in light of Philo's correlation between divine existence and providence. Philo tells of Abraham that he did not rest from seeking the One,

until he received clearer visions, not of His essence (οὐσία), for that is impossible, but of His existence and providence (τῆς ὑπάρξεως καὶ προνοίας αὐτοῦ). And, therefore, he is the first person spoken of as believing in God, since he first grasped a firm and unswerving conception of the truth that there is one Cause above all (ἓν ἀπὸν τὸ ἀνωτάτω), and that it exercises providence (προνοέω) for the world and all that there is therein.

Philo does not resolve why Abraham perceives God's existence *and* providence, nor does he address the question of the relation between the two. But corresponding to Philo's thought as a whole, the answer must be that there is a necessary correlativity between God's existence and his providence, which we may delineate in this way. The distinction between God's nature and essence entails that knowledge of the latter is completely impossible, while knowledge of the former is possible,<sup>101</sup> as is the knowledge of divine providence. For Philo, the knowledge of God cannot be purely conceptual, for that would mean knowledge of his essence; knowledge of God is therefore dependent on the created and perceptible reality, the visible cosmos. God cannot be not known as he is, but only by what he does, by his activity.

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<sup>101</sup>In *Praem.* 39 Philo says that every vision of God only shows "that He IS, not what He is"; cf. *Praem.* 44, *Det.* 89.

To demonstrate both the existence of God and that of providence, Philo employs the cosmological argument and, closely related to it, the teleological argument (see our discussion below of *Ebr.* 19). Both arguments are based on the assumption that the rational design and physical perfection of the created order are evidence of the rationality and activity of God, and hence, they presuppose the existence of God.<sup>102</sup> Philo interprets the fact that the universe is well-ordered and continuously maintained according to the laws of nature as proof that God is graciously disposed toward his creation, a disposition which Philo equates with the idea of God's providence. In Philo's own words, God as "the Cause above all exercises providence for the world and all that is therein." The knowledge of God's existence and his providence are both derived from the created order. They are necessarily related because creation without perpetual providential care would jeopardize the very existence of the world and call into question the graciousness of God toward the world.

A case in point that Philo establishes the correlation between divine existence and providence by means of the cosmological and teleological arguments is found the passage *Ebr.* 19. Pharaoh replies to Moses' plea to let the people of Israel go in the

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<sup>102</sup>Although the cosmological argument (cf. *Spec.* 1:32-34; Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 73-93) predominates, Philo proves the existence of God also with reference to Plato's statement in the *Timaeus* that "everything which becomes must of necessity become owing to some Cause; for without a cause it is impossible for anything to attain becoming" (*Timaeus* 28a; cf. *Fuga* 12: "For the world has come into being, and assuredly it has done so under the hand of some Cause."), or by allusion to Aristotle's view of God as prime mover (cf. *Fuga* 8; *Conf.* 123; *Spec.* 2:5; *Prov.* 1:12) or immovable mover (cf. *Post.* 28).

words: "Who is He that I should obey Him", and, "I know not the Lord" (Exodus 5:2), Philo comments as follows:

(1) In the first of these utterances he [Pharaoh] asserts that there is no God (ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι τὸ θεῖον); (2) in the second that even if there is a God he is not known to us, and this conclusion presupposes the assumption that there is no divine providence (ὅπερ ἐκ τοῦ μὴ προνοεῖν). For if there were such a thing as providence, God too would be known (εἰ γὰρ προνόει, κἄν ἐγνώσκετο).

Decisive for understanding (2) is Philo's assertion that Pharaoh's agnosticism is possible only on the assumption that providence does not exist. In the first part of (2) the argument moves from conclusion (there is no providence) to assumption (even if God exists he is not known); Philo concludes that God's existence cannot be known because providence does not exist.

CONCLUSION		ASSUMPTION
God exists but is unknown	→	Providence does not exist

In the second part of (2), in the statement, "for if there were such a thing as providence, God too would be known", Philo reverses the argument. Based on the assumption that providence exists, the conclusion follows that God is known.

ASSUMPTION		CONCLUSION
Providence does exist	→	God is known

Why does Philo assert that the existence of God leads to the existence of providence, and vice-versa, that the existence of providence leads to the knowledge of God? To understand Philo's postulate of the interrelation between divine existence and providence--their existence is mutually inclusive in the sense that if the existence of one can be known the existence of the other must be presupposed--we must give adequate consideration to the philosophical background that shaped his view. In

proving the existence of God, Philo adapts the cosmological argument reminiscent of the Stoic argument for the existence of providence as narrated in Cicero's treatise *De Natura Deorum*. It is striking, as Myrto Dragona-Monachou remarks, that Philo's "arguments for the existence of providence almost fully correspond to the Stoic arguments in Cicero's 'De natura deorum'."<sup>103</sup> As a comparison between Cicero and Philo reveals, these philosophers espouse remarkably similar theses:

Philo

"God has made the world...and ever exercises providence for his creation" (*Opif.* 172)

Cicero

"the world and all its parts were set in order at the beginning and have been governed for all time by divine providence" (*De Natura Deorum* 2:75)

Cicero supports his thesis with the following three arguments: (1) "the argument proving that the gods exist; if this be granted, it must be admitted that the world is governed by their providence (*consilio*)" (2:76-80); (2) the argument that "all things are under the sway of sentient nature, and that by it the universe is carried on in the most beautiful manner; and this proved, it follows that the universe was generated from living first causes" (2:81-97); and (3), the argument from "the wonder that we feel at the marvel of creation" (98-153). Although Philo makes use of (2) and (3) in his writings, of relevance to our passage is the argument of (1).

One must either deny the existence of the gods... or anybody who admits that the gods exist must allow them activity, and activity of the most distinguished sort; now nothing can be more distinguished than the government of the world; therefore the world is governed by the wisdom of the gods... But as a matter of fact nothing exists that is superior to god; it follows therefore that the world is ruled by him... In

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<sup>103</sup>"Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire", 4457.

fact if we concede divine intelligence, we concede also divine providence, and providence exercised in things of the highest moment.<sup>104</sup>

Like Cicero, Philo establishes the *existentia dei* on the basis that we discern "the Artificer by means of His works (διὰ τῶν ἔργων τὸν τεχνίτην κατανοοῦντες)",<sup>105</sup> but unlike Cicero, he does not defend the existence of providence in such a systematic manner. The Philonic passage that echoes Cicero's argument the most is *Prov.* 1:26. Here the aspect of God's care for every part<sup>106</sup> of creation serves Philo as the pivotal argument for the existence of providence. Because every part of creation is a testimony to the good care of God, says Philo, it follows that creation *per se* is the most convincing evidence of the existence of God's providence. God's providential care is deduced from the teleological perfection of the universe (cf. *Prov.* 1:31-33; 2:74) and because such perfection presupposes art and knowledge of the highest kind, says Philo in *Spec.* 1:35, "we have gained the conception of the existence of God (τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον ἔννοιαν ἐλάβομεν ὑπάρξεως θεοῦ)."

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<sup>104</sup>Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2:76-77.

<sup>105</sup>*LA.* 3:99; cf. *Spec.* 1:41, *Post.* 167-9, *Prov.* 1:23, Wisdom of Solomon 13:5. In *Prov.* 1:22 Philo comments on Plato, *Timaeus* 29b, making use of the idea that the existence of the world is a proof of the existence of God its creator. Cf. *Prov.* 1:33, a passage in which Philo argues that without providence the order of the universe cannot be explained.

<sup>106</sup>In *Prov.* 1:31 Philo rejects (1) the idea that only some parts of the universe may be considered to point to providence and (2) the conclusion that the Father and Steerer of the universe are hence limited in their power to exercise providence over the whole world.

In sum, by combining the cosmological and teleological arguments, Philo deduces both the existence of God *and* the existence of providence from the contemplation of the perfectly ordered and well-maintained cosmos. It is *a priori* inconceivable in Philo's theology to believe in God as creator but not in his providence or vice versa.<sup>107</sup>

### 1.2.3 Divine Essence and Providence

Philo's understanding of the relation between God's essence and the idea of providence points once more to his use of anthropomorphic images. Our interest in Philo's use of anthropomorphisms will be limited to comments on the roles the images of God as Father and Maker play in his thought and the relation these might have to the concept of providence.<sup>108</sup> The relation between the description of God as Father and the idea of providence is such, says Philo, that it is the nature of a father to care

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<sup>107</sup>This is quite clear in the passage *QG* 4:87 where Philo ascribes the two views to Pharaoh, that (1) Pharaoh knows God because he admits that "he was made by the Creator", but (2) nonetheless holds "that the world and what is in the world are without providence and care (τὴν πρόνοιον καὶ ἐπιμέλειον)."

<sup>108</sup>Philosophically Philo derives the idea of God as father from Plato's *Timaeus* 28c, a text from which he deduces his understanding of God as "ontological and creative source" (David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 110). The idea of God/Father and providential care is implicit in Plato (cf. Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus*, 23, who notes that "the notion of God's providential care is emphasized in Plato, though it does not occur in connection with the word πατήρ." (In Wisdom of Solomon 14:3, however, the idea of God/Father and providence is made explicit as one theme). Philo combines the Platonic image of God/father with the idea of providence. In the "association of God's fatherhood with the doctrine of divine Providence the two strains of thought merge together in a manner which is characteristically Philonic" (David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 110-111).

for his offspring. In *QG* 3:42 Philo explains God's pledge to Abraham, that he will become "the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:4). His interpretation of the promise includes the key definition on the role of fatherhood: "In the manner of a father, thou shalt be invested with the care and supervision (ἐπιμέλειαν καὶ ἐπιστοασίαν) of many nations." The nature of being a father, as Philo says, prompted by biblical usages of the father image, is the caring for that which is in need of care. Philo does not say that fatherhood *per se* means to be "provident"; rather, he defines the virtue of care (ἐπιμέλεια) as the essential aspect of fatherhood. Then he applies the role of earthly father to God as the heavenly Father, and thereby establishes the providence of God as Father in analogy to the parental care of a father.

Philo's transferring of the idea of parental fatherly care into the idea of God's providence is evident in several passages in his writings. In *Spec.* 3:189 (cf. *Mut.* 45; *Spec.* 1:318), for example, God is rightly called Father and Maker, says Philo, because the Father who made the universe "takes thought (ἐπιμελέομαι) for His offspring, His providence watching over (προνοέω) both the whole and the parts". Similarly, in *Opif.* 9-10,

Those who assert that this world is unoriginate unconsciously eliminate that which of all incentives to piety is the most beneficial and the most indispensable, namely providence. For it stands to reason that what has been brought into existence should be cared for (ἐπιμελέομαι) by its Father and Maker. For as we know, it is a father's aim in regard to his offspring to preserve them and an artificer's in regard of his handiwork to preserve them.

Philo's criticizes the view of those who hold that the world is without beginning (ἀγέννητος) because they disregard the role of providence in creation. For everything

that exists must have been brought into existence and must be cared for. The reason for that care "stands to reason", i.e. is a logical, a natural thing (cf. *Opif.* 172, *Praem.* 42, "it is a law of nature") for Philo and is simply assumed as elemental for the role of father. The earthly father cares for his children and the heavenly Father provides for his creation. In *Prov.* 1:31 Philo reverses the argument. If there is no providence in the world of the Father and Steerer of the universe, then it is questionable why human beings care for one another. Another passage that links the idea of care to providence is *Praem.* 42 (cf. Wisdom of Solomon 14:3), where Philo relates God as the maker to providence. "This transcendent order" of the world has come into existence by the maker, says Philo, and "there must be a providence, for it is a law of nature that a maker should take care (ἐπιμελέομαι) of what has been made." The same connection between God as the Father and providence is made in *QG* 4:87. Philo criticizes (Epicurean) philosophers who "rule out the providence and care (τὴν πρόνοιον καὶ ἐπιμέλειαν) which are given by the Father to His offspring." In his theological compendium in *Opif.* 171, Philo summarizes his view of the relation between the parental care for their children and providence in these words.

God exercises providence on the world's behalf. For that the Maker should care (ἐπιμελέομαι) for the thing made is required by the laws and ordinances of Nature, and it is in accordance with these that parents take thought beforehand for children.

Again, Philo describes the Maker in terms similar to the Father, and elsewhere in terms similar to the king.<sup>109</sup> The care of the Maker is made intelligible in terms of

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<sup>109</sup>See the careful study by Naoto Umemoto, "Die Königsherrschaft Gottes bei Philon", in: *Königsherrschaft Gottes und himmlischer Kult*, WUNT 55. Eds. Martin

the parents' care for their children. The motive for care is rooted in the laws of nature; nature requires that parents take care of their children just as the laws of nature require that the Creator takes care for his creation. Hence, the anthropomorphic image of human fatherhood applied to God serves Philo as a congenial means of connecting the idea of providence to the concept of God in such a way as to render comprehensible to his readers the belief that God the Father takes immanent care of his creation and humanity.

#### 1.2.3.1 God is Provident

Finally, despite the logical constraints of Philo's view of the unknowability and ineffability of divine nature, on one occasion at least, Philo possibly describes God as being provident in essence and not simply in activity. In the passage *Spec.* 1:209, Philo employs the unique predicate construction ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ... προνοητικός, a phrase embedded in the sentence: ὁ γὰρ θεὸς ἀγαθὸς τε ἔστι καὶ ποιητὴς καὶ γεννητὴς τῶν ὄλων καὶ προνοητικὸς ὧν ἐγέννησε. Colson translates this sentence into English as follows: "God is good, He is the maker and begetter of the universe and His providence is over what He has begotten." Judged in terms of a dynamic equivalent translation, Colson's rendering is entirely satisfying. But given our interest in Philo's precise use of the predicate "provident", the following brief comments on syntax are in order. The subject of the sentence is ὁ θεός, the verb is ἐστίν and takes four predicates: the two adjectives ἀγαθός and προνοητικός, and the two nouns ποιητής

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Hengel and Anna Maria Schwemer (Tübingen, 1991), 224.

and γεννητής. A literal translation is thus, "God is good, [he is] maker and begetter..., and [he is] provident". This translation renders more accurately the fact that at least once Philo employs the adjective προνοητικός to describe the idea of providence. What is the significance of this unique use of the adjective?

The full significance of Philo's use of προνοητικός comes to light only when compared to Philo's usual description of the idea of providence with the terms πρόνοια and προνοέω. Whenever Philo characterizes the concept of providence with the words πρόνοια or προνοέω, he emphasizes the point of God's providential activity, for example, in creation or in relation to humanity. But in the passage *Spec.* 1:209, the grammatical function of the adjective προνοητικός is that of a predicate in relation to God. The phrase "God is provident" (ὁ θεός ἐστὶν προνοητικός) predicates a quality about who God is, that is to say, predicates about God's nature that he is provident. In other words, unlike the terms πρόνοια and προνοέω, which express the idea of God's providential activity, the adjective προνοητικός signifies the idea that God is provident by nature. Philo's unique statement that "God is provident" is thus a pivotal aspect of his conception of divine providence because it reveals Philo's understanding that the idea of providence is not only evident in God's activity, but also that it is firmly rooted in God's essence.

### 1.3. The Concept of the Providence of God

The manner in which Philo correlates his concept of God, especially his view of divine transcendence, with the concept of God's providence in the world brings us

back again to his interpretation of the divine epiphany at the burning bush. Perhaps more than any other passage in the Philonic corpus, this account demonstrates Philo's uncompromising conviction of the concurrence of God's utter transcendence *and* his immanent presence in the world. For Philo, God's absolute transcendence does not imply God's absolute non-relatedness to his creation. But in order to preserve God's utter transcendence, the relation between transcendence and immanence can only be an indirect one. In Philonic thought, that relation is brought about through the divine powers. Philo outlines that relation in the passage *Post.* 14.

But though transcending and being beyond what He has made, nonetheless has He filled the universe with Himself; for he has caused His powers to extend themselves throughout the Universe to its utmost bounds.

It is Philo's unique doctrine of the divine powers--which we will discuss in detail in Chapter Two--that demarcates the metaphysical parameters within which God's immanent activity in the world is made comprehensible. The idea of providence is an integral facet of the doctrine of powers, as is the idea of angels. Philo's portrayal of the angel at the burning bush as a symbol of God's providence falls thus squarely into his understanding of the immanence of God. To illustrate how Philo establishes this link between God's transcendence and immanence by means of the idea of providence, we will turn again to the passage *Mos.* 1:65-67. The larger context of Philo's scriptural exegesis is Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush (*Mos.* 1:63-84); part of this section includes Philo's interpretation of the statement, "I am He who IS" (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν) in *Mos.* 1:75 which we examined above in our discussion

of transcendence. But as an introduction to that statement, Philo offers the following comment on the burning of the bush.

In the midst of the flame was a form (μορφή) of the fairest beauty, unlike any visible object, an image supremely divine in appearance, refulgent with a light brighter than the light of fire. It might be supposed that this was the image of Him who IS (εἰκόνα τοῦ ὄντος εἶναι); but let us rather call it an angel (ἄγγελος) or herald... The angel was a symbol of God's providence (προνοίας ἐκ θεοῦ), which all silently brings relief to the greatest dangers, exceeding every hope.<sup>110</sup>

The crux of Philo's commentary is that he identifies the angel as a symbol of God's providence. He arrives at this conclusion by describing that which was seen in the flame first as a form (for a discussion of this term, see below) and second as an image. The image he calls an angel, and of the angel he says that he "was a symbol of God's providence." In sum, then, Philo offers two different interpretations of the same epiphany at the burning bush. The first is derived from the term ὁ ὢν, that God revealed himself as "He who IS", the divine self-designation that constitutes the pillar of Philo's notion of transcendence, and the second is that the angel of God who appeared to Moses is a symbol of divine providence.

Since we dealt already with the first interpretation (see above 1.1.1.2), the question now is why the angel is symbolic of God's providence? Drummond's answer that the angel "was in reality a visible symbol of the providence of God, a figure or statue of most God-like mien, making it evident to Moses that God was really there"<sup>111</sup> leads in the right direction, but leaves unanswered the crucial question why

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<sup>110</sup>Mos. 1:66-67.

<sup>111</sup>James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus*, vol. 2, 267.

an *angel* was symbolically present at the burning bush and why the angel was a symbol of God's *providence*. The significance of angels in Philo's theology<sup>112</sup> is that they serve as intermediaries between God and humanity. Philo deduces this at *Somn.* 1:142 from the story of Jacob's dream of the angels ascending and descending a ladder. Their purpose is that "they both convey the biddings of the Father to His children and report the children's need to their Father",<sup>113</sup> and again that "they go on embassies bearing tidings from the great Ruler to His subjects of the boons which He sends them, and reporting to the Monarch what His subjects are in need of."<sup>114</sup> Since Philo typically assigns to the divine powers the task of divine-human mediation, the question is whether he perceives angels as being the same as powers, or merely having the same tasks as the powers. In *Spec.* 1:66 angels are said to be

servitors to His powers, unbodied souls, not compounds of rational and irrational nature, as ours are, but with the irrational eliminated, all mind through and through, pure intelligences, in the likeness of the monad.

Philo does not explicitly identify angels with powers, but he does say that angels are servitors to His powers (*ὑποδιακόνους αὐτοῦ τῶν δυνάμεων*), and elsewhere that the angels are "servitors (*ὑποδιάκονοι*) and lieutenants (*ὑπαρχοι*) of the primal God."<sup>115</sup> Wolfson, however, identifies the angels as powers and remarks the following.

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<sup>112</sup>For an attempt to derive Philo's philosophical understanding of angels from the Middle Platonist tradition, see John Dillon, "Philo's Doctrine of Angels", 197-205, in: David Winston and John M. Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria*.

<sup>113</sup>*Somn.* 1:141.

<sup>114</sup>*Plant.* 14; cf. *Gig.* 12, *QE* 2:13.

<sup>115</sup>*Abr.* 115.

"The term 'powers' is therefore sometimes used by him [Philo] to include both the immanent powers and the angels, as in his statement that 'as pillars support whole houses, so also do the divine powers support (1) the whole world and (2) that most excellent and God-loving race of mankind.' Of the two phrases which we have set off by numbers, the first undoubtedly refers to the immanent powers in general and the second to angels in particular."<sup>116</sup> On the basis of this interpretation Wolfson proposes the crucial distinction that "just as the immanent powers serve as instruments of divine providence, so also the angels serve as instruments of divine providence; but whereas the immanent powers are employed by God in the exercise of His care over the world as a whole, the angels are employed by him in the exercise of His care only over mankind."<sup>117</sup> Whether angels are the same as powers in Philo's understanding must remain an open question.

Decisive for understanding angels in Philo's thought is that they serve in a *function* that is indistinguishable from that of the immanent powers inasmuch as they are mediators between God's transcendence and immanence. The God who reveals himself as "He who IS" and thus indicates his utter transcendence is at the same time not a *deus ex machina*, far removed and unrelated to his creation. This immanent aspect of the divine relationship Philo describes in terms of the angel being a visible symbol of God. But why a symbol of God's *providence*? Because the purpose of the

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<sup>116</sup>Cited in Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 373, on the basis of Richter, *Fragments*, 6, 222.

<sup>117</sup>Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 372.

appearance of the angel is to proclaim God's ongoing care for his people,<sup>118</sup> or, to recall Drummond's words again, the angel "was in reality a visible symbol of the providence of God ... making it evident to Moses that God was really there."<sup>119</sup> But what do these abstract characterizations mean? The answer lies in Philo's description that the angel appeared in the "form" of the flame. To comprehend the significance of this description we need to look at another Philonic passage. In one instance, Philo explains that "the substance (οὐσία) of angels is spiritual (πνευματική); however, it often happens that they imitate the forms of men."<sup>120</sup> Here Philo reveals an important insight. Usually in Philo's writings, angels exist as incorporeal and purely intelligent beings, as the citation of *Spec.* 1:66 above shows, but sometimes, as in the case of Moses' encounter, they have a hypostatized mode of existence. That is, they appear in a mode which is corporeal, visible, and perceivable by the human mind. The reason, we might surmise, is that as a hypostatized being the angel is actual "evidence", at any rate an assurance of the nearness of God who because of his transcendence cannot appear unmediated; he is there in the form of the angel who visibly symbolizes the power and providence of God. Philo clarifies the reason for

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<sup>118</sup>In *Fuga* 161-2 Philo allegorizes the epiphany at the burning bush. He says that the bush was burning but not consumed is representative of the question of "the causes by which the most essential occurrences in the universe are brought about" (161). But God kept Moses from pursuing such a question, "when now on the point of engaging in an endless and futile labour, he is relieved of it by the kindness and providence (προμηθεία) of God the Saviour of all men, who from out of the hallowed spot warned him, 'Draw not nigh hither', as much as to say 'Enter not on such an inquiry'."

<sup>119</sup>James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 2, 267.

<sup>120</sup>*QG* 1:92.

God's sending of the angel as a symbol of his providence in *Mos.* 1:72. God declares, "I have taken compassion on them [Israelites] Myself... I am of a kindly nature and gracious to true suppliants." The reference to God's gracious nature (εἰμι ἰαεως) plays a pivotal role, as we shall see, in Philo's conception of divine providence. Indeed, the belief that God is graciously disposed toward his creation is the central and consistently implied assumption of Philo's notion of providence. In our passage, the symbolic presence of God's providence embodies the hope "which all silently brings relief to the greatest dangers",<sup>121</sup> by which Philo means the deliverance of the people of Israel from the bondage in Egypt. Concretely, then, the angel symbolizes God's providence to signify "that the sufferers would not be destroyed by their aggressors, who would find that the aggression was vain and profitless while the victims of malice escaped unharmed."<sup>122</sup>

The circle of Philo's concept of God is thus complete. Philo's interpretation of the burning bush establishes both God's transcendence and his immanence in the world. The ὁ ὢν of Exodus 3:14, "He who IS", is at once the utterly transcendent *and* the one who is immanently involved in the well-being of his people. The angel is a symbol of God's providence and, much like the divine powers, thereby also an instrument of the mediation between God and humanity. To understand more accurately how Philo conceptualizes the immanent aspect of providence as part of that mediation is our next task.

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<sup>121</sup>*Mos.* 1:67.

<sup>122</sup>*Mos.* 1:67.

## Chapter Two

### Divine Immanence and Providence

The objective of the preceding chapter was to understand how Philo's conception of providence is anchored in his concept of the transcendent nature of God. The objective of this chapter is to elucidate how the notion of providence comprises a significant feature of Philo's perception of God's immanence in the world. To scrutinize the idea of providence from the two aspects of the transcendence and the immanence of God does not imply, however, that Philo espouses a dualistic view of providence, or else that he thinks of two different types of providence. There is no evidence throughout his writings that he differentiates levels of providence in the manner of some of the Middle Platonists.<sup>1</sup> Corresponding to his premise that there is

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<sup>1</sup>Philo *refrains* from presenting the idea of providence along the Middle Platonic lines of Pseudo-Plutarch, Nemesius and Apuleius who distinguish between three *πρόνοιαι* each of which operates on a different level in the universe (Cf. John Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 294-98, 324-6; Giovanni Barra, "Apuleius und das Problem der Entstehung des Bösen", in: Clemens Zintzen (ed), *Der Mittelplatonismus* (Darmstadt, 1981), 283-98 [orig. "Apuleio e il problema dell'origine del male", *Vichiana* 1 (1972), 102-113]). Pseudo-Plutarch (572f), for example, says that "the highest, or

only one God, Philo also advances a unified doctrine of providence. Conceptually there is one kind of divine providence, the providence of the one God with the two constitutive aspects of transcendence and immanence.<sup>2</sup> On close examination of the relevant Philonic passages, it is evident that when Philo employs categories such as goodness, graciousness and virtue, he speaks of providence in relation to the transcendent nature of God, but when he wishes to make the point that providence immanently benefits the world and humanity he employs categories such as powers and gifts of grace. The two aspects of transcendence and immanence are consequently a matter of perspective and emphasis, as the two sides of a coin, and jointly constitute the one notion of providence. This is not to suggest that this conceptual framework dominated Philo's mind at all times when he articulated his doctrine of providence, nor is it to claim that he consistently maintains the distinction, or even that it is systematically worked out in all the passages dealing with providence.

The general aim of this chapter is to explore the various components of Philo's conception of the immanent aspect of God's providence. Specifically, the two guiding questions are (1) *why*, in Philo's view, the transcendent God exercises providence for the world, and (2) *how* the doctrine of God's providence fits into Philo's conception

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primary, Providence is the intellection or will, beneficent to all things, of the primary God... Secondary Providence belongs to secondary gods, who move in heaven", and tertiary providence is said to be "contained in fate" (John Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 324).

<sup>2</sup>From a Neoplatonist perspective, Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.5:15, speaks explicitly of one providence (πρόνοια μία) which he characterizes as alone being on a high level (ὑπεράνω); on a lower level providence is fate (εἰμαρμένη).

of God's immanence in the world. The answer to the first question lies in Philo's concept of God's inherent goodness and graciousness. Our task is thus to work out what Philo means by divine goodness, how it is related to the idea of the grace of God, and why the two ideas of goodness and grace belong to the core of the notion of providence. The answer to the second question points to Philo's doctrines of the Logos and the divine powers, both of which figure markedly in Philo's way of relating God's transcendence and immanence. In its transcendent aspect, the Logos is related to God's nature as the mind of God, and in its immanent aspect, the Logos administers the work of the divine powers in the created world. Philo perceives providence in its immanent aspect on the level of the powers as corresponding to the gracious power. Fundamental to the notion of providence as a whole, therefore, is Philo's understanding that goodness, graciousness and power find their unity and origin in God himself; ultimately, from an immanent point of view, providence functions as a divine power in the world, once specifically referred to by Philo as "providential" power, which is rooted in the goodness and graciousness of the transcendent nature of God.

## **2.1 The Immanence of God**

In order to be in a position to make intelligible Philo's view of providence we must first comment on an issue that not only seems to puzzle every interpreter of Philo's writings, but also one that has a significant bearing on the subject of divine providence. It is the problem of the vast gap between God's transcendence and

immanence. This gap is said to arise from Philo's notion of God's utter transcendence and the ensuing difficulty of how God is immanently related to and involved in that which comes ontologically after him.<sup>3</sup> Three comments are in order.

First, although in Philonic theology a tension arises between God's transcendence and his immanence in creation, this tension is not an issue peculiar to Philo; it is a matter of logical coherence characteristic of any theistic conception which deals with the relation between the divine and creation. It is, nonetheless, a legitimate question whether Philo's premise of God's "utter" transcendence precludes the possibility that God is also immanent in the world on the *a priori* grounds that God is not in contact with his creation as the creative first principle.<sup>4</sup> Are transcendence and immanence not mutually contradictory principles? For Philo there seems no logical contradiction between these two. As we saw in the previous chapter, Philo's exegesis of the biblical passage of the angel at the burning bush as a symbol of God's providence suggests that God is *simultaneously* wholly transcendent (as the  $\delta \omega\nu$ ) and wholly immanent in the world (in the form of an angel). God is not either transcendent or immanent; he is both transcendent *and* immanent. God is always utterly transcendent above the world

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Peder Borgen, "Philo", in: *ABD* vol. 5, 339, notes that for many Philonic scholars the "dominant feature in Philo's thought... [is] to bridge the gap between the transcendent God and man by intermediaries, such as Logos, the powers etc."

<sup>4</sup>Philo rejects explicitly the Stoic dogma of the material immanence of god; he attacks the notion that god is identical to the created order or that he becomes part of it. In *Mig.* 179 he rejects the Stoic view of the universe "either being itself God or containing God in itself as the soul of the whole", and in 181 he maintains that Moses did not hold that "the universe nor its soul is the primal God"; cf. *LA* 1:91. On Stoic ideas of god as the immanent causal principle, see *LS*, 44F, 45G, 45H, 46A, 46B, 46H.

as he is always utterly immanent in the world. There can be no exclusion of one over the other and no metamorphosis of one into the other. Any such transformation imperils the very idea of Philo's concept of God as being both wholly transcendent and immanent. It appears that Philo is not bothered by the logical predicament which the issues of transcendence and immanence present for his philosophy as well as his theology based on Scripture. Or else, he disregards this predicament because of his conviction that regarding the notions of transcendence and immanence, the God of Scripture is not in substantial tension with the God of the philosophers.<sup>5</sup> The upshot of all this is that there remains an incongruity,<sup>6</sup> a visible seam, as it were, in Philo's metaphysical scheme that should not be harmonized or explained away.<sup>7</sup>

Secondly, the manner in which Philo overcomes the philosophical problem of God's transcendence and immanence is usually thought to be in his doctrines of the Logos and the divine powers. But whether Philo actually supposed that he was able to

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. *Spec.* 2:165; *Virt.* 64.

<sup>6</sup>The aporiai are clearly perceived by Philo's interpreters. Norman Bentwich, *Philo Judaeus of Alexandria* (Philadelphia, 1910), 134, wisely warns that to say (as does Siegfried and Zeller) that there is "an inherent contradiction in Philo's system, which ruins it", is "to take Philo according to the strict letter to the neglect of the spirit, and to do that with one so eloquent and so careless of verbal accuracy is to utterly misunderstand him."

<sup>7</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 443. Note his remarks. "How then must the fact that God is creator be seen in relation to his unqualified transcendence? An answer can only be given in paradoxical and negative terms. God both is and is not raised high above creatorship. God's creative activity, as one aspect of his being, in no way circumscribes, let alone exhausts, his divine nature. Any attempt to proceed beyond this point is to attempt to map the contours of God's essence, a task beyond human capacity."

*solve* this problem must remain an open question.<sup>8</sup> Given Philo's theocentric thought as a whole, it is just as conceivable that he introduces the Logos and the powers of God primarily in order to *preserve* God's utter transcendence rather than devising a tight system of philosophical theology which has as its aim the bridging of the gap between transcendence and immanence. By employing a hierarchy of divine levels, Philo is able to maintain God's transcendence on a level that is ontologically superior to his divine intermediaries. Inasmuch as the intermediary powers carry out the work of creation, God's transcendent nature may be apprehended as being detached from actual contact with creation. But the distinction between God and the Logos with its powers does not jeopardize the unity of Philo's concept of God because "God and Logos are only conceptually, not actually separable."<sup>9</sup> That is, conceptually there is only one God, that belief constitutes the pillar in Philo's concept of God, but because of the transcendent essence of God, divine activity is actually mediated by the Logos and the powers emanating from it. The Logos and the powers are thus conceptually integrated in Philo's idea of one God, but their function is in the immanent realm of creation. The unity in Philo's concept is preserved because even though the Logos creates the world through its attending powers, it is nonetheless God who creates.

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. the interesting but unexplained suggestion by David Runia (*Philo and the Timaeus*, 443-4) that "it might seem a daring thesis, but to our mind the doctrine [of the powers] appears designed more to *draw attention* to the problem [of utter transcendence] than actually solve it."

<sup>9</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 443.

Thirdly, the notion of providence must also be understood within the matrix of Philo's view of God's immanence and the powers. The idea of immanence presupposes God's unceasing thinking-acting which is located in the Logos as νοητὸς κόσμος<sup>10</sup> (the transcendent aspect of the Logos) and carried out by the activity of the powers in the sense-perceptible world (the immanent aspect of the Logos). Because the idea of a transcendent God implies for Philo that there can be no direct relation between God and the created world, Philo's belief that God *exercises* providence in the world is inseparably linked to God's activity, and hence to the immanent powers. Since, moreover, God reveals his activity in the creation of the world through the powers, the creation of the world is a *conditio sine qua non* for man's perception of God's providential activity and presence in the world. If there were no created world, there would be no place in relation to which God would be immanent and be able to exercise his providential activity. When Philo wishes to stress the immanent aspect of God's providence, in contrast to the transcendent aspect, he characterizes that immanent aspect of God's providential activity analogous to one of the divine powers, the gracious power, and actually employs the term "providential power", in *Legat.* 6, to describe it.

## 2.2 God's Goodness and Providence

The idea of goodness is the critical link between the notions of transcendence and immanence, perhaps more important than any other single element in Philo's thought.

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. *Opif.* 24-25, *Prov.* 1:7.

As does the idea of providence itself, so also does the idea of divine goodness have a transcendent and an immanent aspect. In its transcendent aspect, goodness is part of the ineffable being of God (cf. Chapter 1.3.3.2); in its immanent aspect, goodness becomes a tangible reality and perceptible by human apprehension. To understand how goodness thus understood serves as the touchstone for Philo's notion of providence, we commence our examination with the question of the motive for God's immanence in the world. Since according to Philo, God in his transcendence is completely self-sufficient and without any need, why then would God also want to create the world and continually exercise his providence in it. Philo's answer is lucid and concise: because of the goodness of God. The interrelation between God's self-sufficiency, his goodness, and creation is addressed by Philo in *Mut.* 46.

We all know that before the creation of the world God was sufficient unto Himself and that after the creation He remained the same, unchanged. Why then did He make the things which were not? Why, save because He was good and bountiful (ὅτι ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόδορος ἦν)".

Philo stresses God's immutable aseity before and after creation; the creation of the world does not result in any mutation in God's self-sufficient nature. Philo posits no relation between God's aseity and the extent of his goodness. He simply identifies the latter as the reason for bringing "things which were not" into existence, for effecting the change from non-being to being, hence, for creating the world. In Philonic theology, there is thus no intrinsic need or reason in God's transcendent nature to be immanently related to the world other than his goodness. It is pivotal to recognize the double aspect of the idea of goodness in that Philo relates it to both the invisible

transcendent nature and the visible immanent activity of God, a facet which one interpreter<sup>11</sup> called the *ad intra* and *ad extra* aspects of the Philonic idea of divine goodness. On the one hand, Philo stresses the goodness of God as a divine attribute (cf. *Deus* 108; *LA* 3:105; *Legat.* 5; *Conf.* 180), and on the other hand, he emphasizes the relation between the essential goodness of God and that goodness as the cause of that which comes from God. In *LA* 3:73, for example, Philo asserts that "'God' is the name of the goodness pertaining to the First Cause (ὁ θεὸς γὰρ ἀγαθότητός ἐστι τοῦ αἰτίου ὄνομα)" by which he made both animate and inanimate beings.<sup>12</sup> In this instance, Philo identifies God in terms of the Aristotelian teaching on the first cause, or the formal cause, the cause "by which (τὸ ὑφ' οὗ)" something is caused.<sup>13</sup> God's good nature, the *ad intra* aspect, is thus brought in relation with God as the cause for the creation of the world, the *ad extra* aspect via the idea of goodness. Since according to Philo human apprehension of God's essence is impossible, from a human point of view, apprehension of the immanent aspect of divine goodness is therefore dependent on what comes after God, that is, on the created universe. But crucially related to the perception of God's goodness are also God's graciousness and his will to impart his goodness. Together these three elements—God's goodness, grace, and will—constitute the immanent aspect of Philo's notion of divine providence.

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<sup>11</sup>Luis Angel Montes-Peral, *AKATALEPTOS THEOS: Der unfaßbare Gott*, 103.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. *Agr.* 129, αἰτιον... μόνων ὁμολογήσαι τῶν ἀγαθῶν; *Cher.* 29, τοῦ αἰτίου... ἀγαθότητος.

<sup>13</sup>On Philo's understanding of Aristotelian causes, see our more substantiated discussion of the passage *Cher.* 125-27 below 3.4.

### 2.2.1 God's Goodness and Grace

The idea that God is good and that he is immanently involved in the world Philo finds in Scripture itself.<sup>14</sup> The God of the Bible is the creator of the universe and the God who is engaged in the history of his chosen people in particular and human affairs in general. This Philo takes for granted. But what he does not find in Scripture is the *reason* for God's immanence in the world; that it is the goodness of God, this insight he gains by reading Plato. Here we have an excellent example how Philo takes the scriptural premise of divine goodness and clothes it in philosophical garb. Although Runia thinks that "no biblical text *compels* the introduction of the theme of God's goodness"<sup>15</sup> into Philo's theory of creation, it is not unreasonable to assume that Philo simply took the idea from the repeated statements in the biblical creation account that everything "was good." At any rate, the specific Platonic *Vorlage* from which Philo adapts his philosophical explanation of divine goodness in the passage *Opif.* 21 is the Platonic dialogue *Timaeus* 29d-30c. In the section *Timaeus* 29d-e Plato says the following.

Let us, then, state for what reason (αἰτία) becoming and this universe (τὸ πᾶν τόδε) were framed by him who framed them. He was good (ἀγαθὸς ἦν); and in the good no jealousy (οὐδεὶς φθόνος) in any matter can ever arise. So, being without jealousy, he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself. That this is the supremely valid principle of becoming and of the order of the world, we shall most surely be right to accept from men of understanding. (Translation Cornford)

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<sup>14</sup>On God's goodness, see for example Psalms 33:8, 99:5, 118:68 LXX.

<sup>15</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 442.

Philo makes extensive use of this philosophical source in his own explanation of God's goodness in *Opif.* 21, as even a cursory perusal of this passage illustrates.<sup>16</sup>

Philo adapts the Platonic passage to his view of goodness in these terms.

Now just such a power (δύναμις) is that by which the universe (τόδε τὸ πᾶν) was made, one that has as its source nothing less than true goodness (τὸ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀγαθόν). For should one conceive a wish to search for the cause (αἰτία), for the sake of which this whole was created, it seems to me that he would not be wrong in saying, what indeed one of the men of old did say, that the Father and Maker of all is good (ἀγαθὸν εἶναι); and because of this He grudged not (οὐκ ἐφθόνησεν) a share in his own excellent nature.

The decisive points of agreement between Plato and Philo are that God is good, that he is without envy, that he is Father and Maker (cf. *Timaeus* 28c) and as such the cause<sup>17</sup> for the creation of the universe. It is indeed striking that Philo follows Plato<sup>18</sup> both by adapting these essential characterizations of God and by employing virtually identical terminology; just how closely Philo follows Plato's terminology may be gleaned from parallel columns.

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 132-6.

<sup>17</sup>Whereas in *LA* 3:73 Philo says that God is "the name of the goodness pertaining to the First Cause (αἴτιον)", that is, according to Aristotle, the formal cause, in *Opif.* 21 (cf. *Cher.* 125, below 3.3.5), the emphasis is on the goodness of God as the final cause (αἰτία).

<sup>18</sup>Further clues that Philo depended on this Platonic dialogue is the allusion to Plato himself in *Opif.* 21 as "one of the men of old". Plato's own allusion in *Timaeus* 29e to "men of understanding", Philo construed in *Deus* 108 to be a reference to Moses. Philo's claim in the same text that Moses taught the motive for the creation (αἰτία γενέσεως) of the world was the goodness of God probably springs from Philo's desire to present Moses as a philosopher on a par with Plato.

Plato, *Timaeus* 29d-ePhilo, *Opif.* 21

ἀγαθὸς ἦν  
τὸ πᾶν τόδε  
οὐδεὶς φθόνος  
αἰτία  
τὸν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα (28c)

ἀγαθὸν εἶναι  
τόδε τὸ πᾶν  
οὐκ ἐφθόνησεν  
αἰτία  
τὸν πατέρα καὶ ποιητὴν

Philo derives the idea of the goodness of God, expressed in the phrase that "the Father and Maker of all is good" (*Opif.* 21), by conflating the Platonic views that the Cause is good and that the demiurge is good (δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός, *Timaeus* 29a) with the designation of God as "maker and father"<sup>19</sup> (τὸν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα, derived from *Timaeus* 28c). This fusion of the goodness of the demiurge with the biblical concept of God—a feat, according to Runia, that is first found in Philo and that has "enormous implications for the history of ideas"<sup>20</sup>—becomes of paramount importance to Philo's view of providence.

How does Philo achieve this feat, and why is it indispensable in the explanation of God's providence? The starting point lies in Philo's reconception of the Platonic idea of divine goodness into the scriptural but un-Platonic concept of the grace of God.<sup>21</sup> The crucial distinction between the two is that "Platonic goodness is essentially *metaphysical*, signifying excellence of being, whereas the goodness of the

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<sup>19</sup>A phrase that Philo employs very frequently, for example: *Opif.* 7, 10, 21, 77; *Conf.* 144; *Heres* 98, 200, 236; *Fuga* 177, 197; *Abr.* 9, 58; *Mos.* 1:158; 2:48, 238, 256; *Decal.* 51, 64, 105; *Spec.* 1:34; 2:6, 256; 3:178, 189, 199; 4:180; *Virt.* 34, 64, 77; *Praem.* 24, 32; *QG* 1:6; 2:34.

<sup>20</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 441, 135.

<sup>21</sup>On the theme of grace in Philo, see the monograph by Dieter Zeller, *Charis bei Philon und Paulus*, Stuttgarter Bibelstudien 142 (Stuttgart, 1990).

God of the Bible is best described in terms of *grace*".<sup>22</sup> Philo does not take issue with the Platonic idea that divine goodness signifies ontological perfection. But just as he goes beyond the Pythagorean, Middle Platonist notion of the monad in his conception of the transcendence of God,<sup>23</sup> he also goes beyond the Platonic identification between the demiurge and the idea of the good.<sup>24</sup> That he goes beyond these philosophical ideas is evident in *Praem.* 40<sup>25</sup> when he declares explicitly that God "is better than the good, more venerable than the monad, purer than the unit." The clue to a possible meaning comes from the context. The subject of Philo's reflection is the impossibility of human apprehension of God's essence. According to Philo's concept of God's utter transcendence, it is impossible to make a positive assertion about God's essence. When Philo now says that God is better than the good, the point he wishes to make is that God even transcends the category of goodness; that is, it is inconceivable to define what goodness means in relation to God's essence. Is Philo's view of goodness influenced by the Platonic passage *Republic* 509b? Plato says that "the good itself is not essence (οὐσία) but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος)." Although later Platonists debated the relation between the goodness of

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<sup>22</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 441; cf. Dieter Zeller, *Charis bei Philon*, 38-43.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. *QG* 2:68, *LA* 2:3.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Luis Angel Montes-Peral, *AKATALEPTOS THEOS: Der unfaßbare Gott*, 99-100, and Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo*, 16, 30.

<sup>25</sup>In *Legat.* 5, for example, God is "the primal good (τὸ πρῶτον ἀγαθόν)" and may rather be called "better than the good (τὸ κρείττον μὲν ἀγαθοῦ)". See also *LA* 2:1-3.

the demiurge (cf. *Timaeus* 29e) and the ἀγαθόν of *Republic* 509b, Philo regards goodness as part of the divine nature, but not transcending it. According to Runia, for Philo, God's goodness "is emphatically not parallel to God, let alone at a higher level of transcendence. The formulas ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας and ἐπέκεινα νοῦ are not found in Philo."<sup>26</sup> In other words, it is impossible to reconcile the isolated reference in *Praem.* 40 to Philo's concept of God in the rest of his corpus. Nowhere else does Philo hold the view that God transcends the category of being or mind. The knowledge of God's transcendent nature, including God's essential goodness, remains a mystery precluding direct human apprehension, because "to God alone is it permitted to apprehend God" (*Praem.* 40). The ontological and epistemological hiatus that thus appears between the relation of God's essential goodness and the human knowledge of it can only be mediated indirectly.

From an anthropocentric point of view, God's goodness cannot be fathomed in any direct way, only the effects of that goodness can be perceived. Hence, Philo introduces the idea of God's grace to make intelligible how divine goodness becomes a tangible expression of God's nature. What Philo has concretely in mind when he speaks of God's goodness in conjunction with the idea of God's grace can be seen in the two passages *Deus* 104-108 and *LA* 3:78. In both instances Philo exegetes the biblical lemma that "Noah found grace with the Lord God" (Genesis 6:8), discussing

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<sup>26</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 135; see his concise discussion of *Republic* 509b in later Platonism regarding the development of "a hierarchical transcendental theology". Philo shows at best traces (cf. *Opif.* 8, 21; *Deus* 108) of this discussion, but never says that God is beyond the category of being.

in particular the meaning of the phrase "finding grace", an idea brought into close relation with divine goodness. The relation between grace and goodness is evident in Philo's discussion concerning the origin of creation (ἀρχὴ γενέσεως). Philo maintains that it

is the goodness and grace of God (ἀγαθότης καὶ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ), which He bestowed on the race that stands next after Him. For all things in the world and the world itself is a free gift (δωρεά) and act of kindness (εὐεργεσία) and grace (χάρισμα) on God's part.<sup>27</sup>

The subjective genitive construction ἀγαθότης καὶ χάρις τοῦ θεοῦ makes apparent that Philo envisions both goodness and grace as attributes of God's nature.<sup>28</sup> The genitive τοῦ θεοῦ is the subject in relation to goodness and grace, best rendered as "belonging to God." That Philo indeed understands these as attributes is further evident in the way in which he introduced the above quotation. Grace, he says, "belongs to Him alone as a thing that is His very own (μόνου τὴν χάριν οἰκεῖον)." At any rate critical for his understanding of providence is that both goodness (cf. *Spec.* 1:209) and grace belong to the nature of God.

Whether Philo assumes any conceptual distinction between the ideas of goodness and grace and how he perceives the relation between them is difficult to determine. Philo, unfortunately, does not clarify this matter. Runia's view--that when Philo employs the term "goodness" he is thinking of it in the sense of metaphysical

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<sup>27</sup>LA 3:78.

<sup>28</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 97, interprets the phrase ἀρχὴ γενέσεως in an ontological sense as the principle of the world's becoming which is concretely God's goodness and grace.

perfection, but when he uses the term "grace" he is thinking of the goodness of God in the biblical sense of God showing lovingkindness and forbearance for the world<sup>29</sup>-  
-can be supported with the passage *Deus* 108, Philo's second commentary on Genesis 6:8. He explains that

if anyone should ask me what was the motive (αἰτία γενέσεως) for the creation of the world, I will answer what Moses has taught, that it was the goodness of the Existent (ἡ τοῦ ὄντος ἀγαθότης), that goodness which is the oldest of His bounties (πρεσβυτάτη τῶν χαρίτων) and itself the source of others.

As in *LA* 3:78, Philo describes goodness in this instance as an attribute of God's nature (ἡ τοῦ ὄντος ἀγαθότης), but then specifies that it "is the oldest (πρεσβυτάτη) of His bounties (χαρίτες) and itself the source of others". There is again a certain ambiguity present in describing goodness both as belonging to God's nature and as being the oldest of the gracious deeds or the source of other gracious deeds. To resolve the ambiguity, it is important to note that in this context Philo does not relate the term "grace" to goodness, but the term "bounties", or better "gracious deeds" (χαρίτες). But these gracious deeds depend on someone's grace; that is, God bestows gifts of grace because he is gracious.<sup>30</sup> God's grace is thus tantamount to God's

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 441.

<sup>30</sup>The idea of grace presupposes that the benefactor is of higher standing than the recipient (Dieter Zeller, *Charis bei Philon*, 21, summarizes it well: "Die Gunst [grace] dagegen kommt aus der hohen Stellung dessen, der nichts bedarf") and in a position of power to dispense benefits. Strictly speaking the relation between giver (God) and recipient (humanity) is a non-reciprocal one. Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 136-8, stresses that the activity of God does not depend on the recipient of the action. "In a strictly logical sense, therefore, such a non-reciprocal relation is not a true relation; Philo consequently describes it as *quasi*-relation."

goodness when Philo speaks not of metaphysical perfection, but of the gifts that result from that perfection. This is why goodness, understood as grace, is the source of gracious deeds.<sup>31</sup> Philo makes the same point in *Mig.* 182 where he explains that the verse, "God in heaven above and earth below" (Deuteronomy 4:39), is not a reference to God as the Existent one but to the creative power, and then identifies that power in *Mig.* 183 as "nothing else than goodness"<sup>32</sup>, which "has driven away from itself envy (φθόος)... [as] it is the mother of gracious deeds (χάριτες)". Billings' view that in Philo "the term 'goodness' tended to mean 'graciousness'"<sup>33</sup> is therefore quite correct within the distinction that goodness signifies transcendent perfection whereas grace signifies the deeds that spring from that goodness. God's motive for allowing cosmic and human participation in his goodness is described by Philo with the term *χάρις*, "grace", while the acts of that grace are described by the plural *χάριτες*, "deeds of grace". In brief, then, goodness might be said to be the mother of gracious gifts in the sense that goodness is the abstract idea of God's metaphysical perfection, whereas the idea of grace signifies the tangible way in which God bestows, because of his will, his goodness in actual deeds.

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<sup>31</sup>Dieter Zeller, *Charis bei Philon*, 42, summarizes it well when he says that grace "meint die nach außen gewandte Seite der Vollkommenheit Gottes, seine Fähigkeit, aus totalem Selbstbesitz heraus überreich zu schenken. Sie konkretisiert sich aber in den *χάριτες*, den Wohltaten."

<sup>32</sup>G. H. Whitaker (LCL) translated *ἀγαθότης* too vaguely as "loving-kindness".

<sup>33</sup>Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo*, 37. He also describes Philo's view of the goodness of God as "a fatherly care for men and for all creation", 20.

### 2.2.2 God's Goodness and Will

Of further relevance to Philo's notion of providence is the belief that God's *will* is the pivotal link between his goodness, grace and the *χάριτες*. This aspect of the Philonic concept of divine goodness cannot be underestimated. Although goodness, grace, and will belong to God's transcendent nature, it is because of God's will<sup>34</sup> that his goodness becomes actually immanent in the world. God is good and *wishes* to share his goodness, he *wants* to be a bountiful giver (cf. *Mut.* 46). For Philo, God's will to share his goodness is the key factor in connecting transcendent goodness with tangible reality. For as long as the goodness of God is only an attribute of God's transcendent being it is without benefit for human beings; only in the form of gifts (*χάριτες*), individual and cosmic, can God's goodness be said to be a benefit.

Philo's view of the will of God depends once again on his Platonic source. Plato employs the phrase of God's willing twice in our *Timaeus* passage, at 29e and 30a. In *Timaeus* 29e, Plato says that God although "being devoid of envy (*φθόνος*)<sup>35</sup> He desired (*ἐβουλήθη*)<sup>36</sup> that all should be, so far as possible, like unto Himself", that is, good. In *Timaeus* 30a, we read: "For God desired (*βουληθεὶς γὰρ ὁ θεός*) that, so

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<sup>34</sup>With the exception of the treatise *De Sobrietate* (cf. index in Mayer) every other Philonic writing makes reference to God's willing (*βούλομαι* and cognates); see, for example, *Opif.* 44, 77, 138; *LA* 2:35, 63; *Plant.* 14.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. *Opif.* 21, that God "grudged not (*οὐκ ἐφθόνησεν*) a share in his own excellent nature."

<sup>36</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 136, identifies a second passage, *Phaedrus* 247a, where Plato raises the question of *φθόνος*, "reacting against ideas of divine vengeance and nemesis in early Greek theology". On the divine will, see also *Laws* 967a.

far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil."<sup>37</sup> Similar to Plato's view,<sup>38</sup> Philo's own understanding of God's will in relation to his goodness is poignantly stated when he says that God can do both good and evil, "but wills (βούλομαι) the good only".<sup>39</sup> For both Plato and Philo the absence of divine envy (cf. *Timaeus* 29e; *Opif.* 21, *Deo* 12) does not simply mean that God is self-sufficient; rather, this lack of envy has a positive corollary in God's will to share his goodness with his creation. More developed than in Plato<sup>40</sup> is the idea of divine will by Middle Platonists.<sup>41</sup> Not only is βούλησις part of the divine nature, it is an essential aspect of the idea of providence. Runia emphasizes that "all Middle Platonists hold to the view, derived from *Tim.* 41a-b, that the cosmos is indestructible through the agency of God's *pronoia* or will."<sup>42</sup> Pseudo-Plutarch (*De Fato*, 573b), for example, speaks generally of the βούλησις of the Father of the universe but also very concisely of providence when he states that "providence is the intellection or will, beneficent to

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<sup>37</sup>Note that in the *Timaeus* 29e and 30a, the demiurge willed that the cosmos should be as good as possible; in Philo, the emphasis is on that God willed that the cosmos should come into being as such (cf. *Opif.* 16, *Conf.* 175).

<sup>38</sup>On the divine will in Plato, see also *Laws* 967a.

<sup>39</sup>*Spec.* 4:187. Seemingly there is tension between Plato's and Philo's view on God's relation to evil. Given Philo's axiom that God is not responsible for any evil (see Chapter Five on theodicy) can mean no more that God could do evil because he is omnipotent. But this is never his will.

<sup>40</sup>According to Diogenes Laertius (7:88), the early Stoics reflected also on the divine will. Chrysippus, for example, speaks loosely of the will "of him who orders the universe."

<sup>41</sup>Cf. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 284.

<sup>42</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 494.

all things, of the primary God." God's will is not only directly related to the idea of providence but actually equivalent to it. The same is true in Calcidius, *In Tim.* 176, where the will of God is equated with νοῦς and πρόνοια. This is not to suggest that Philo consciously modelled his view of God's will according to one of the Middle Platonists. But it is instructive in light of his doctrine of providence that the experience of the goodness of God depends on God's will; in this respect Philo is closest to Middle Platonist thought.<sup>43</sup> Because of God's goodness Philo ascribes in *Congr.* 171 various epithets to God that signify the results of his goodness: "For God is good and the cause of what is good, the benefactor (εὐεργέτης), the saviour (σωτήρ), the nourisher (τροφεύς), the enricher (πλουτοφόρος), the bountiful giver (μεγαλόδωρος)."<sup>44</sup> As benefactor, for example, "he wills only the one, to bestow benefits."<sup>45</sup> There is then a logical sequence in Philo's conception of the relation between God's goodness and his creatures. Because God is good, gracious, and not envious, he also wills to create the world and be beneficent toward it.

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<sup>43</sup>Albrecht Dihle, *The Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1982), 90, remarks that Philo almost exclusively uses the words βούλησις/βούλημα, "which denote the intellectual activity preceding action", instead of the terms θέλησις/θέλημα which are mostly used in the LXX.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. David Winston, "Judaism and Hellenism: Hidden Tension in Philo's Thought", in: *SphA* 2 (1990), 7. In Stoicism benevolence (εὐνοια) was classified by the Stoics as a kind of βούλησις, cf. *Plant.* 106.

<sup>45</sup>*Plant.* 87. cf. 88, "to be bountiful (φιλόδωρος) is His choice and delight."

### 2.2.3 God's Goodness and Providence

After considering Philo's ideas of God's goodness, grace, and will, we are now in a position to establish how these ideas, together with Philo's adaptation of Platonic and Stoic teachings, constitute the notion of providence. First, to understand the philosophical reason why Plato, and following him, Philo, correlates the concepts of divine goodness and providence we must return to our passage in *Timaeus* 29d-30c. After giving a concise account how the demiurge in his goodness brought order into disorder and endowed the universe with reason and soul, Plato completes this section by explicitly acknowledging the involvement of providence in the act of creation.

This, then, is how we must say, according to the likely account, that this world came to be, by the god's providence (διὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ γενέσθαι πρόνοιαν), in very truth a living creature with soul and reason.<sup>46</sup>

This passage is extremely significant and not to be separated from the unity of *Timaeus* 29d-30c. This entire section serves Philo as a congenial framework for his own philosophical and terminological preferences for terms such as ἀγαθὸς ἦν, αἰτία γενέσεως, βούλησις and φθόνος, and perhaps even the subjective genitive phrase πρόνοια τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>47</sup> But far more important is the fact that in this section of the *Timaeus* we find, conceivably for the first time in the history of Greek philosophy,<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>*Timaeus* 30b-c (Cornford).

<sup>47</sup>For Philo's overall conceptual and terminological dependence on this section of the *Timaeus* (27d-31a), cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 91-176.

<sup>48</sup>Favorinus maintains (cf. Diogenes Laertius 3:24) that Plato was the first to advance the doctrine of providence. According to Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire", 4420, this claim is perhaps based on Favorinus' relationship to Socrates. On the authority of Xenophon, Socrates declared

an intentional link between divine goodness, creation and providence, a feat that serves Philo as the conceptual background for his own view of God's providence.

The second philosophical element that Philo adapts to his doctrine of providence is the Greek idea of the divine gifts, *χάριτες*. The idea of the *χάριτες* has a long history in Greek thought and is reflected philosophically the most in Roman Stoicism.<sup>49</sup> Seneca, for example, composed a lengthy treatise, *De Beneficiis*, on the question of divine benefits, in the course of which he says:

God bestows upon us very many and very great benefits (*beneficia*), with no thought of any return, since he has no need of having anything bestowed, nor are we capable of bestowing anything on him.<sup>50</sup>

While Seneca speaks in general of God's benefits in the context of God's aseity, Epictetus identifies in particular the "faculty of vision" as one of "the gifts received from God (*τὰς παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ χάριτας*)",<sup>51</sup> and Josephus maintains that the universe

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the gods, omniscient, omnipotent and benevolent (*Memorabilia* 1.4:18) who ordered the universe as a sign of their providence for man's sake (1.4:6-7). For a discussion of the Socratic view of providence in Plato, cf. Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire", 4419-22. It is perhaps more than a footnote to the history of Greek philosophy that the Epicureans attacked Plato's *Timaeus* side by side with the Stoic idea of providence (cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1:18).

<sup>49</sup>For a brief survey of the idea in Greek thought, see Dieter Zeller, *Charis bei Philon*, 13-16; we are not concerned with traces of the mythological side of the graces in Philo, see *ibid.*, 33-35. On Stoicism, see Émile Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris, 3rd ed., 1950), 147-9.

<sup>50</sup>*De Beneficiis* IV 9:1.

<sup>51</sup>*Discourses* II 23:2.

is in God's hands and may be seen "by His works (ἔργους) and bounties (χάρισιν)."<sup>52</sup> Whether an individual gift or cosmic munificence, all the χάριτες are the gifts coming forth from God's goodness and grace and brought about by the divine powers. How these χάριτες are actually related to the idea of providence is clear from Epictetus' discourse περὶ προνοίας. While discussing "the chief works of nature", including the biological difference between man and woman,<sup>53</sup> he refers to the works of nature as "works of providence (ἔργα τῆς προνοίας)". These works, he concludes, should lead a person to praise the deity and to acknowledge his benefits (ἐπεξέρχασθαι τὰς χάριτας).<sup>54</sup> Zeller detects in Epictetus' correlation of the works of providence and the χάριτες the Stoic doctrine to defend πρόνοια as an immanent cosmic force.<sup>55</sup> In Stoic materialism, the deity "is taking providential care of the world... [and] is called many names according to its various powers (δυνάμεις)".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>*Contra Apionem* 2:190. Underlying Josephus' discussion is the distinction between the essence and existence of God; as in Philo and Middle Platonism, the latter can be established by means of the cosmological argument.

<sup>53</sup>*Discourses* I 16:9-14.

<sup>54</sup>*Discourses* I 16:15. The reason is, as Epictetus notes twice, that "God is great (μέγας ὁ θεός)" (*Discourses* I 16:16, 17). Although Epictetus employs the term μέγας, "great", to describe the reason for God's giving of his benefits, conceptually this characterization might only be a variant of the Platonic and Philonic preference for the term ἀγαθός. Plato actually employs the two terms μέγας and ἀγαθός as a description of God in the final sentence of the *Timaeus* (91c). The main point is that divine goodness and beneficence go together, as Philo says in *Prov.* 2:82: "the attributes of His nature are altogether good and benevolent."

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Dieter Zeller, *Charis bei Philon*, 42.

<sup>56</sup>Diogenes Laertius 7:147.

Philo, too, makes use of the idea of divine powers (cf. *LA* 3:97-98 where the powers are explicitly identified with Stoic thought) although his concept of a transcendent God is at odds with Stoic materialism. For Philo, the divine powers are administered on the immanent level of the Logos (see below 2.3) as the means by which God bestows his benefits, the *χάριτες*, upon creation. Philo establishes the connection between the powers and the *χάριτες* in *Plant.* 86, where he remarks that God uses the creative power "in virtue of which He bestows benefits."<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in *Mig.* 183, Philo says that the power by which God bestows his gifts is "nothing else than goodness ... [which] is the mother of gracious deeds (*χάριτες*)." Philo's ideas of goodness, grace, will, and the deeds of grace are unified in the doctrine of providence. The passage *Spec.* 1:209 shows as probably no other Philonic text how Philo relates these elements. Philo says about God that:

when we reason about Him we recognize in Him partition and division into each of the Divine powers (*δυνάμεις*) and excellences (*ἀρεταί*). For God is good (*ἀγαθός*), He is the maker and begetter (*ποιητῆς καὶ γεννητῆς*) of the universe and His providence is over what He has begotten (*προνοητικὸς ὧν ἐγέννησε*); He is saviour and benefactor, and has the plentitude of all blessedness and all happiness.

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<sup>57</sup>In *Cher.* 27 Philo identifies the two chief powers, the creative and the royal power, respectively as "goodness (*ἀγαθότης*) and sovereignty (*ἐξουσία*)", noting that it is "through his goodness [that] He begat all that is". In *Deus* 111, Philo speaks of the powers, "which present Him to us as Lord and God, Ruler and Benefactor", a clear allusion to the hierarchy (for a discussion of the importance of the hierarchical ordering of the powers in relation to providence, see below section 2.3) and functions of the powers: Lord represents the royal power through which God is ruler, and God represents the creative power (cf. *QG* 2:68) through which God is benefactor. Cf. *QE* 2:61, *Ebr.* 106-7.

The picture that emerges from these statements is the idea that providence is nothing else than Philo's basic concept that unifies God's continuous gracious dealing with the cosmos and humanity. Indeed, the notion of providence is the result of Philo's attempt to correlate God's goodness, powers, creation, and benevolence within a doctrinal matrix that does not compromise God's transcendence and immanence;<sup>58</sup> summarized in the words of LaPorte, God's giving of his grace to his creation is equivalent to his providential efficacy.<sup>59</sup> We have seen how the ideas of goodness, grace and will constitute elements of the doctrine providence. Now we must clarify how these ideas are closely tied to God's activity in the world through his divine powers and how the idea of providence meshes within Philo's hierarchy of the powers.

## 2.3 God's Powers and Providence

### 2.3.1 The Logos and the Powers

We suggested already that the answer to the question of the mediation between God's transcendence and the immanent aspect of the idea of his providence in the world is rooted in Philo's doctrines of the *λόγος*<sup>60</sup> and the divine powers. To answer now our

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<sup>58</sup>The relation between goodness, grace, gracious deeds is made clear in *Abr.* 143-6. Like a king, says Philo, God graciously gives (*χαρίζομαι*) good gifts (*ἀγαθά, χάριτες*) by his "own agency (*δι' ἑαυτοῦ*) and bestows these through the beneficent powers"; cf. *QG* 4:87.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. Jean LaPorte, *Eucharistia in Philo*, Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity 3 (New York, 1983), 144. He takes grace as the efficacious aspect of God, namely as his power, through which he is providential in his creation.

<sup>60</sup>The philosophical origin of Philo's idea of the *λόγος* is a very complex issue. A brief survey includes the following points. As Leopold Cohn ("Zur Lehre vom Logos bei Philon", in: *Judaica*, Festschrift Cohens, (Berlin, 1912), 303-31), Horowitz

second key question of *how* the notion of providence is systematically embedded in these doctrines, we shall first offer some remarks on the role of the Logos which will help us in bringing into sharper focus the crucial question of how Philo perceives of providence as being analogous to the gracious power.

The ontological relationship between God, the λόγος, and the powers, Philo establishes as follows:

In the first place (there is) He Who is elder than the one and the monad and the beginning. Then (comes) the Logos of the Existent One, the truly seminal substance of existing things. And from the divine Logos, as from a spring, there divide and break forth two powers (ἀπὸ δὲ τοῦ θείου λόγου, καθάπερ ἀπὸ πηγῆς, σχίζονται δύο δυνάμεις). One is the creative (power), through which the Artificer placed and ordered all things; this is named 'God'. And (the other is) the royal (power), since through it the Creator rules over created things; this is called 'Lord'.<sup>61</sup>

Essential for Philonic theology is that the λόγος has its place between God and the powers; ontologically, the λόγος is on a lower level than God the Existent one, but on a higher level as the source of the creative and royal powers, the so-called two

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("Entwicklung des alexandrinischen Judentums unter dem Einflusse Philos", in: *Judaica*, 535-68), Winston (*Logos and Mystical Theology*, 15), and Runia (*Philo and the Timaeus*, 482-3) have argued, is a synthesis of Platonic and Stoic thought. Arising from the proposition of God's absolute transcendence, Philo needs a term, distinct from the essence of God, that sufficiently encapsulates the totality of God's thinking-acting as a world-immanent reality. To achieve this, Philo reconceives Plato's cosmic world-soul in the *Timaeus* into the idea of the λόγος and merges it with the Stoic idea of the λόγος (as both Winston and Horowitz emphasize) as *terminus technicus* for divine reason. The suitability of this term, in Horowitz's words "ein willkommener Anknüpfungspunkt", for Philo's perception of God's thinking-acting in creation "lies in the fact that it could readily be assimilated to the 'word of God' in Scripture, which had been rendered in the Septuagint by the term *logos*" (Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 15).

<sup>61</sup>QE 2:68, extant in a Greek fragment, cf. Philo, LCL Supplement to *Questions and Answers to Exodus*, 255-6. Cf. *Fuga* 97.

primary powers. Being in such a position, the specific role that Philo ascribes to the λόγος later in the same passage is that of "mediator and arbitrator" between transcendence and immanence, between creator and creation, via its attendant powers.<sup>62</sup> This mediating role is made explicit in Philo's comment on the verse, "And I [Moses] stood between the Lord and you" (Deuteronomy 5:5). Philo declares that the λόγος is:

neither unbegotten (ἀγέννητος) as God, nor begotten (γεννητός) as you, but midway between the two extremes, serving as a pledge for both; to the Creator as assurance that the creature should never completely shake off the reins and rebel, choosing disorder rather than order; to the creature warranting his hopefulness that the gracious God will never disregard his own work.<sup>63</sup>

The double role of the λόγος is immediately apparent. On the hand, the λόγος relates to the Creator, and on the other hand, to the creatures. Both roles are defined in more detail in Philo's further comments on the same verse. To the λόγος the Father "granted the singular gift, to stand between and separate the creature from the Creator", in such a way that the Logos is, "both suppliant of ever anxiety-ridden mortality before the immortal and ambassador of the ruler to the subject".<sup>64</sup> This

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<sup>62</sup>In addition to mediator, elsewhere Philo describes the λόγος also as "the first principle, the archetypal idea (ἀρχέτυπος ἰδέα), the pre-measurer (προμετρήτης) of all things" (*QG* 1:4), the oldest and most generic of created things, or even as "the second God (ὁ δεύτερος θεός, ὃς ἐστὶν ἐκείνου λόγος)" (*QG* 2:62), or "pre-Logos God (ὁ πρὸ τοῦ λόγου θεός)" (*QG* 2:62), or "the Word who is antecedent to all that has come into existence (ὁ λόγος ὁ πρεσβύτερος τῶν γένεσιν εἰληφότων)" (*Mig.* 6, cf. *Agr.* 51), or the sum total of the ideas (*Spec.* 1:48, 329) which constitute the intelligible world after which the sensible one is formed.

<sup>63</sup>*Heres* 206, translation by D. Winston, *Selections*, 94.

<sup>64</sup>*Heres* 205 (Translation Winston, *Selections*).

then is the Logos' role: to mediate the gap between creator and creature. In order to understand how the Logos accomplishes the mediation between creator and creation and, moreover, to understand how the powers and providence form a part of the Logos' mediatory role, it is imperative to consider Philo's view of the Logos in relation to the divine powers. It must be said, however, that this is not the place to review Philonic scholarship on the extremely complex question of Philo's Logos' doctrine. For our purposes it is sufficient to draw on the views of Wolfson,<sup>65</sup> Winston,<sup>66</sup> and Runia,<sup>67</sup> inasmuch as they are representative of the view that, when speaking of the Philonic Logos, it seems "unavoidable to speak of levels."<sup>68</sup> They agree that Philo envisions the Logos on the highest level as the noetic mind of God and on the lower level as the immanent or hypostatized aspect of that mind in form of the divine powers by which the Logos brings into existence and maintains the order of

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<sup>65</sup>Wolfson proposes a three-fold systematization of Philo's λόγος doctrine (cf. *Philo*, vol. 1, 226-40, 327-32). He discerns in the λόγος three stages. (1) the property (mind) of God, and as such identical with divine essence, (2) the totality of incorporeal ideas and powers, but unlike God's essence, and (3) the totality of powers immanent in the world. In its third stage, the Logos "is the instrument of divine providence or of the preservation of the world." (vol. 1, 331).

<sup>66</sup>David Winston (*Logos and Mystical Theology*, 17-19) speaks of "the twofold Logos in the Universe" (17), the intelligible world of ideas and the visible world as copies of the ideas, but also of the "one Logos that constitutes the manifestation of God as thinking-acting" (19).

<sup>67</sup>David Runia ("God and Man in Philo of Alexandria", 72-73) distinguishes three aspects of the Logos. (1) the transcendent aspect, which is the place of the noetic cosmos, corresponding to the Platonic model in creation (2) the immanent aspect, which is "the providential maintainer of the cosmos once it is created (cf. Plato's world-soul or the Stoic Logos)." (72), and (3) the instrument of creation, which bridges the transcendent and the immanent aspect.

<sup>68</sup>David Runia, *Philo of Alexandria*, 450.

creation. The higher level is the transcendent aspect, the lower level the immanent aspect of the Logos and both are bridged by the Logos's role as the instrument of creation (for a discussion of the Logos as instrument see below, 3.3.3). Both Wolfson and Runia characterize this lower immanent level as the level on which God's providential activity is carried out by the divine powers under the direction of the Logos. It is, therefore, precisely on the Logos' lower level through the divine powers that God is in relation with what he has created. How Philo envisions the nature of that divine-human relation becomes clear in a passage in the treatise *De Mutatione Nominum*. He explains that:

The Existent considered as existent is not relative (πρός τι). He is full of Himself and is sufficient for Himself... But the Potencies (δυνάμεις) which He has projected into creation to benefit (ἐπ' εὐεργεσίᾳ) what He has framed are in some cases spoken of as in a sense relative (πρός τι), such as the kingly (τὴν βασιλικήν) and the beneficial (τὴν εὐεργετικήν), for a king is a king of someone and a benefactor the benefactor of someone, while the subject of the kingship and the recipient of the benefit is necessarily something different.<sup>69</sup>

Over a century ago, Drummond saw that the significance of Philo's thought in this passage must be unravelled in light of Aristotle's teaching on the category of relation (πρός τι).<sup>70</sup> The ideas that God is not relative (οὐδὲν πρὸς τι) but that the powers are in

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<sup>69</sup>*Mut.* 27-28. In *Post.* 14, Philo notes similarly: "But though transcending and being beyond what He [God] has made, nonetheless has He filled the universe with Himself; for He has caused His powers (δυνάμεις) to extend themselves throughout the Universe to its utmost bounds, and in accordance with the laws of harmony has knit each part to each."

<sup>70</sup>Cf. James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 2, 48-49, also David Runia, "Naming and Knowing", 79-80. On Aristotle's definition of the fourth category of relation (πρός τι), see *Categories* 6a-b. That Philo knows of all ten categories is evident in *Decal.* 30-31, a passage in which he mentions all of them, as "the doctrines of philosophy",

a sense relative (ὡσανεὶ πρὸς τι) with respect to creation is integral to Philo's conception of the mediation between transcendence and immanence. To say that God is not relative does not imply, notes Drummond, "that Philo places God beyond the reach of every relation",<sup>71</sup> but rests on the logic of Aristotle's correlative terms. For example, according to Aristotle, the idea of "man" is not correlative of the idea of "slave", even though a man might have a slave, but the idea of "man" is correlative of the idea of "slave" because of the idea that a man is also a "master".<sup>72</sup> Applied to Philo's idea of God's transcendent existence, God is a pure essence complete and not himself correlative to something else. But as soon as God is spoken of as maker and artificer (ποιητῆς καὶ δημιουργός, *Mut.* 29), he is brought into relation with things made, that is creation. Now according to Philo, as pure being God is beyond relation (πρὸς τι), but the powers are said to be "in a sense relative" (ὡσανεὶ<sup>73</sup> πρὸς τι). The kingly power is relative of king and subject, the beneficial of benefactor and recipient, the creative of creator and creation. But as Drummond writes, the relation between powers and subjects is not a mutually correlative one—he calls it a *quasi* relation—because the powers do not experience any alteration in their intrinsic

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and gives a rather brief explanation of each.

<sup>71</sup>James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 2, 48.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. *Categories* 7.

<sup>73</sup>For Stoic usage of the term ὡσανεὶ, cf. Diogenes Laertius 7:51, 61.

character by being in relation to something else; "it would be truer to say that their objects are relative to them than that they are relative to their objects."<sup>74</sup>

Ultimately, Philo's use of the Aristotelian category of relation is a pivotal element in his concept of God, principally in his attempt to resolve how the transcendent God, who is beyond the category of relation, is nonetheless immanently related to his creation. The issue of the divine human relation is therefore inextricably linked to Philo's doctrine of the powers. As the passage *Mut.* 27-28 makes clear, Philo posits between the absolute God and his relative creation the beneficent powers through which God exercises his divine benevolence. Since Philo reduces the divine properties to the primary property of God as "acting"<sup>75</sup>, the role of the λόγος is the execution of divine activity through the creative and royal powers. This function of the λόγος is vividly exemplified in Philo's allegorical interpretation of the cherubim over the mercy-seat. Being inspired by a voice from within his soul, Philo writes:

The voice told me that with the one God who truly Is are two all-high and primary powers, Goodness and Sovereignty. Through his Goodness he engendered all that is, through his Sovereignty he rules what he has engendered, but a third uniting both is intermediating Logos, for it is through Logos that God is both ruler and good.<sup>76</sup>

In this passage Philo submits a concise outline of his basic theology: the truly existent, transcendent God, created everything because of his goodness and rules what

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<sup>74</sup>James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 2, 49.

<sup>75</sup>In *Cher.* 77 Philo subsumes all God's qualities under the one quality of acting, for "it belongs to God to act, and this we may not ascribe to any created being"; see Chapter 1.3.3.1.

<sup>76</sup>*Cher.* 27-28, translation by David Winston, *Selections*, 89. Cf. *Plant.* 9-10.

he created, not directly, but through the agency of the *λόγος*. Even though Philo denies any direct contact between God and his creation, when he speaks of God's involvement in creation he does so in the context of God's powers. These powers are indicative of God's nature in that they reveal the effects of God's goodness. Just as God's transcendent goodness can only be perceived immanently as the effects of that goodness through the powers, so likewise must God's provident nature be perceived. When Philo relates how God exercises his providence, he means that God is necessarily making indirect contact with his creation, as we shall see, through his powers. Philo thus implicitly assumes the double aspect of his doctrine of providence, namely, that the transcendent God who is provident makes known the effects of his providence by means of divine powers. Indeed, we shall argue that Philo's general idea of God's transcendent goodness may be perceived in its immanent aspect as the creative power, and more specifically, as the gracious power, or analogous to it, a power which Philo termed on one occasion the "providential" power. It is thus not incongruous to say that the effects of God's providence are seen through the providential power.

### 2.3.2 The Gracious and Providential Power

To understand how Philo perceives the immanent aspect of God's providence in analogy to the gracious power, it is imperative to establish the Philonic hierarchy of the divine powers. Although Philo's presentation of the diversity of the powers is not

entirely consistent, there still is a dominant pattern.<sup>77</sup> Speaking of the powers as colonies of the divine λόγος, Philo lists five different powers:

their leader being creative (ποιητική) power, in the exercise of which the Creator produced the universe by a word (καθ' ἣν ὁ ποιῶν λόγῳ τὸν κόσμον); second in order is the royal (βασιλική) power, in virtue of which He that has made it governs that which has come into being; third stands the gracious (ἔλεως) power, in the exercise of which the Great Artificer takes pity and compassion on his own work; fourth < is the legislative (νομοθετική) power, by which He prescribes duties incumbent on us; and fifth ><sup>78</sup> that division of legislation, by which He prohibits those things which should not be done.<sup>79</sup>

The two primary powers, the creative and royal (or kingly) power,<sup>80</sup> each has a derivative power; the gracious (or propitious) power--sometimes Philo calls it εὐεργέτης or χαριστήριος<sup>81</sup> or χαριστική<sup>82</sup>--follows the creative power in that the creator "takes pity and compassion" for what he has made, the legislative power follows the royal power in that the former prescribes both duties (προστακτικὴ δύναμις) and prohibitions (ἀπαγορευτικὴ δύναμις) incumbent on human behaviour. That Philo thinks of these powers in an actual hierarchical fashion he makes clear in

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<sup>77</sup>For a good introduction to Philo's doctrine of the powers, see Erwin Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 23-30.

<sup>78</sup>The Greek text is corrupted at this point; the conjecture in brackets is that of Wendland.

<sup>79</sup>*Fuga* 95, cf. 103-4; *QG* 1:57, 2:68, 75.

<sup>80</sup>In *Cher.* 27 the creative and the royal powers are called the "two all-high and primary powers", in *QE* 2:64 Philo calls them "the two highest guards". Regarding their relation, in *QE* 2:62 Philo writes that "though the powers around God are of the same age, still the creative (power) is thought of before the royal one."

<sup>81</sup>*Ebr.* 106.

<sup>82</sup>*Heres* 166.

*QG* 2:68 where he explains that the creative power is the source of the gracious and beneficent powers, and the royal power is the source of the punitive and legislative powers. The full picture of Philo's view of the powers that emerges from these passages is best expressed graphically. Diagram 1 depicts the hierarchy of the powers within Philo's metaphysical scheme.

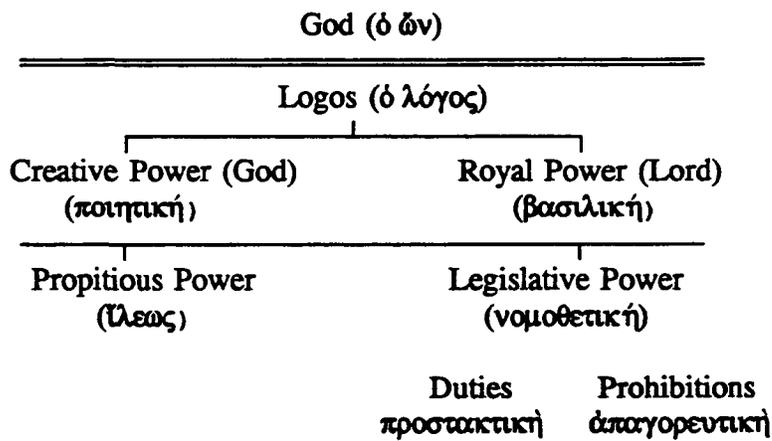


Diagram 1: The Five Powers<sup>83</sup>

The constant elements of the Philonic hierarchy of divine powers are the two primary powers, the creative and the royal powers, and the two powers that emanate from these, the gracious and legislative powers.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>83</sup>For a similar hierarchical schemata, see Erwin Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 29; Ursula Früchtel, *Die kosmologischen Vorstellungen bei Philo*, 21-22.

<sup>84</sup>The fact that a textual corruption (cf. *Fuga* 95) makes it difficult to determine the two divisions of the legislative power need not distract us here because for the present purpose of our thesis we are only concerned with the creative and gracious powers.

How providence coheres within this hierarchy of the powers, however, Philo addresses elsewhere. In *Legat.* 6, a very important passage for Philo's theology in general and for the relation between the idea of providence and the divine powers in particular, Philo maintains a somewhat different classification of the divine powers.

He speaks of the powers as:

the creative (κοσμοποιητική), the kingly (βασιλική), the providential (προνοητική), and of the others all that are both beneficial (εὐεργέτις) and punitive (κολαστήριος), assuming that the punitive are to be classed among the beneficial.

Again he mentions the creative and royal powers, but he is far less explicit about other powers. The hierarchy of the powers is unique in this text; for only here in the entire Philonic corpus does Philo specifically mention "a providential power" beside the two primary powers, the creative and the royal.<sup>85</sup> What is not obvious from the text, however, is the precise relation between the providential and the two primary powers. There are three possibilities. (1) Philo does not imply a hierarchy. (2) Because these three are mentioned together and are thought of as separate from "the others", Philo might conceive of them as being on the same ontological level (see Diagram 2).

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<sup>85</sup>Although he does not state that "providence is a power", he does state that there is "a providential power"; he brings thus into close relation the idea of a divine power and providence. The distinction seems to be rooted (1) in Philo's attempt to preserve the transcendent and immanent aspects of providence and (2) in the reduction of the idea of providence to the level of the powers. One aspect of providence is that of a power, but the doctrine as a whole is far more than this one aspect; hence Philo's hesitation to identify providence as a power.

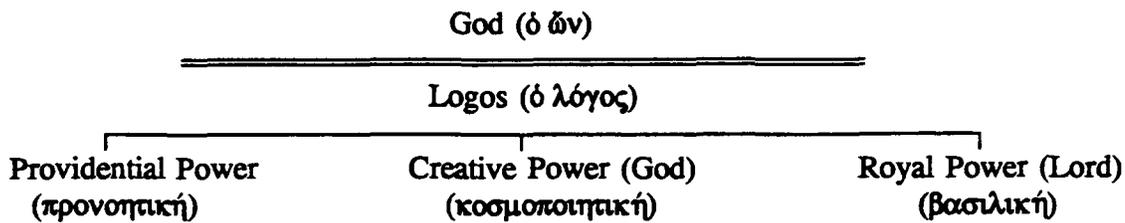


Diagram 2: The Providential and The Two Primary Powers

(3) The third possibility is that Philo envisions the creative and the kingly powers on the same ontological level, but the providential with the beneficial and punitive powers on a lower level (see diagram 3).

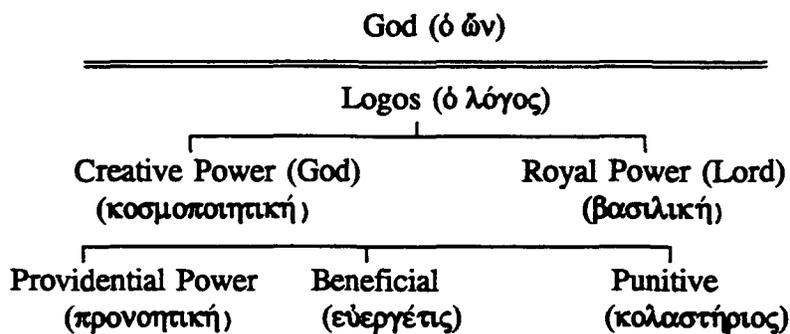


Diagram 3: The Providential, The Two Primary and The Other Powers

That Philo thought of the third possibility seems most plausible for reasons that are anchored in his doctrine of the powers and his conceptualization of the idea of providence. Both reasons can be derived from the long passage *QE* 2:68. First, to recall the hierarchy of the powers (cf. above Diagram 1), Philo always understands the creative and the royal powers as the only two<sup>86</sup> primary powers which in turn are the source of the gracious and punitive powers. Because Philo never identifies any

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<sup>86</sup>In *QE* 2:68, Philo specifies that from the Logos break forth "two powers (δύο δυνάμεις)", the creative and the royal.

other power as a primary power and since the primary powers are the source of the other powers, it follows that when Philo speaks of "the providential power" it must be on an ontological level lower than the primary powers. Moreover, "for by the side of the creative (power) there grows the propitious, of which the name is 'beneficent'." Philo thus evidently subordinates the beneficent power to the creative power. The reference in *Legat.* 6 to the beneficial power can therefore only mean that it is also on an ontological level lower than the creative power. But what is the relation between the beneficial and the providential power? The answer lies, second, in Philo's conceptualization of providence as being part of his basic conviction that God's grace is invariably expressed in the power subsidiary to the creative power just as God's punishment is invariably expressed in the power subsidiary to the royal power (cf. *QE* 2:68).<sup>87</sup> Philo's hierarchy of the powers leaves no doubt that the gracious power (ἡλεως δύναμις) always follows the creative power (ποιητικὴ δύναμις). The same connection between creative and gracious power is made in *QE* 2:66: "... for if God were not propitious to those things which exist together, He would not have made anything through the creative (power)."<sup>88</sup> Now, to recall once more the passage *Fuga* 95, Philo's characterizes the third power, the gracious power (ἡλεως δύναμις),

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<sup>87</sup>A point also emphasized by Erwin Goodenough, *Introduction*, 104, and Ursula Früchtel, *Die kosmologischen Vorstellungen bei Philo*, 19.

<sup>88</sup>In *Spec.* 1:209, in the statement that "God is good, He is the maker and begetter of the universe and His providence is over what He has begotten", Philo connects, though implicitly, goodness, providence, and the powers. God's goodness and creatorship are united in the creative power, a connection Philo establishes in *Cher.* 27-28 while the reference to providence as the care over creation is an allusion to the gracious power.

as the power through which "the Great Artificer takes pity and compassion on his own work (τρίτη δ' ἡ ἰλεως, δι' ἧς ὁ τεχνίτης οἰκτεῖρει καὶ ἐλεεῖ τὸ ἴδιον ἔργον). Later in the same treatise, in *Fuga* 103-4, Philo evidently defines the gracious power in an immanent sense. He makes the distinction between the powers that are "far removed from our race", which he identifies as the two primary powers, and the other powers "which are close to us and in actual contact with perishable mankind", which he identifies as the gracious and the two divisions of the legislative power. It is now crucial to realize the parallels between Philo's perception of the gracious power and providence. In *Spec.* 1:308, an extremely important passage for Philo's doctrine of providence (Philo employs the term *πρόνοια* three times in *Spec.* 1:308-10), Philo's description of the gracious power parallels his description of the help for "those most helplessly in need."

Yet vast are his [God's] excellences and powers (ἀρεταῖς καὶ δυνάμεσιν), he takes pity and compassion (ἐλεον καὶ οἶκτον λαμβάνει) on the most helplessly in need... He holds their low estate worthy of His providential care (πρόνοια)... and therefore they are not denied the hope that is greatest of all, the hope in God, Who in the graciousness of His nature (διὰ τὴν ἰλεω φύσιν αὐτοῦ) does not refuse the task of caring (πρόνοια) and watching over (ἐπιμέλεια) them in this desolate condition.

Philo's description of God's care for the most needy culminates in the statement that because of the graciousness of his nature (διὰ τὴν ἰλεω φύσιν), God does not refuse his providence. In other words, the reason for God's providence is his gracious nature. Not only does the reference to "God's excellence (ἀρετή)", or virtue, refer to God's providence, an identification which Philo unambiguously establishes in *Deus* 29 (for a full discussion, see below 2.3.3), but even more significant, the reference to

"God's pity and compassion" matches the description of the gracious power in the passage *Fuga 95*.

*Fuga 95*

"Third stands the gracious power, in the exercise of which the Great Artificer takes pity and compassion on his own work (τρίτη δ' ἡ ἰλαως, δι' ἧς ὁ τεχνίτης οἰκτεῖρει καὶ ἐλεεῖ τὸ ἴδιον ἔργον)".

*Spec. 1:380*

God, "takes pity and compassion (ἔλεον καὶ οἰκτον λαμβάνει) and offers "His providential care (πρόνοια)."

God, "in the graciousness of His nature (διὰ τὴν ἰλαω φύσιν αὐτοῦ) does not refuse the task of caring (πρόνοια)."

The common denominator for Philo's description of *both* the gracious power and God's providence is God's compassion and mercy,<sup>89</sup> both of which Philo circumscribes with the terms ἐλεέω, οἰκτ(ε)ίρω,<sup>90</sup> χάρις, εὐεργετίς and cognates. When taken together these two texts provide the clue to Philo's conception of the doctrine of providence: The idea that God shows pity and compassion because of his gracious nature is equivalent to him to the idea that God exercises his providence, one of his virtues, by means of the gracious power. Thus defined, the transcendent and immanent aspects of the Philonic doctrine of providence are apparent. The belief that providence has its origin in God's gracious nature points to God's transcendent being whereas the idea of God's taking pity and compassion through the gracious power (the power by which God is in contact with mankind, cf. *Fuga 104*) points to God's immanence. Hence, when Philo uses the term "providential power", he wishes to

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<sup>89</sup>On Philo's Stoic ascription of mercy (ἔλεος) to God, see David Winston, "Hidden Tension", in: *SPhA* 2 (1990), 9-10.

<sup>90</sup>Cf. *Opif.* 169.

underscore the immanent aspect of God's providence. As can be seen from the hierarchy of the powers and from the definition of the gracious power, the providential power is analogous to the gracious power in virtue of their functions to exercise pity and compassion for the needy.<sup>91</sup>

### 2.3.3 God's Powers and Virtues

Let us now return to the question of the relation between powers and virtues. Even though this discussion addresses matters of God's nature, it is placed here rather than in Chapter One, because of its conceptual link with Philo's notion of the powers.

In the previous section we claimed, without giving evidence, that Philo's mentioning of God's "excellences and powers (ἀρεταῖς καὶ δυνάμεσιν)" in *Spec.* 1:309 is an allusion to his identification of the idea of providence as one of the "virtues" or "excellences" of God. The proof-text for this claim is *Deus* 29:

God employs the forethought (προμηθεῖα) and providence (πρόνοια)<sup>92</sup> which are virtues peculiarly His own (οἰκεῖα ἀρεταί), and suffers nothing to escape His control or pass outside His comprehension.

The immediate questions arising from these two passages are how Philo understands the term "virtue" and in what way these "virtues" are related to God's powers. Is the term "virtue" a synonym for the term "power", or are both terms indicative of unique

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<sup>91</sup>The context in which the term "providential power" occurs (in *Legat.* 6) is further support for our thesis. In *Legat.* 3, Philo argues that God has not given up his providential care for Israel, "the suppliants' race." So also *QG* 4:29.

<sup>92</sup>F. H. Colson's translation (LCL) of πρόνοια as "foreknowledge" is somewhat misleading because whenever God is the subject of πρόνοια, Philo thinks of God's providence.

and different properties of God? Do the virtues have the same functions as the powers in that through them God creates the cosmos, that we recognize the existence of God and receive glimpses of God's essence?<sup>93</sup>

There are two instances in the Philonic corpus where Philo uses the term "virtue" as a synonym for the term "power". In the fragment *Deo* 4 he speaks explicitly of the "creative and royal virtue", which is indeed a quite striking reference to the two primary powers. In his Greek retroversion, Siegert specifically emphasizes that the meaning of the Armenian term in this context is equivalent to the meaning of the Greek term (ποιητική και βασιλική) ἀρετή ("virtue") and not δύναμις ("power").<sup>94</sup> Likewise, in *Mos.* 2:189 Philo identifies graciousness and beneficence as divine excellences (ἀρετῶν θείων... τῆς τε Ἰεω και εὐεργετιδος) rather than the customary δυνάμεις.<sup>95</sup>

But far more important than these two instances of terminological synonymy is the conceptual distinction between the two terms in the rest of the Philonic corpus.

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<sup>93</sup>Cf. *QE* 2:37.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. Folker Siegert, *De Deo*, 78.

<sup>95</sup>There are other possible but less certain instances of a synonymous use of the terms "virtue" and "power". For example, the statement in *Somn.* 2:243 that the λόγος is divided "into the four virtues" may also be an allusion to the powers. Moreover, in *QE* 2:61 Philo asserts that "the Existent One is seen also through other powers, especially through the propitious and beneficent ones (διὰ τῆς Ἰεω και εὐεργετικῆς)". The term here translated by Marcus as "powers" is a rendering of the two Armenian nouns "virtues and powers" (according to his remark in, *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, LCL, supplement vol. 2, 108, note d), and may therefore be a translation of the Greek terms ἀρεταί and δυνάμεις; cf. *QG* 3:56, *Heres* 110.

Billings notes that both terms are indicative of "phases of divine activity",<sup>96</sup> and Drummond writes that inasmuch as the powers "denote certain excellent properties, they are also denominated virtues... [both] stand for the same thing regarded under different aspects."<sup>97</sup> Billings points out that in relation to God himself, that is in their transcendent aspect, the powers are the incomprehensible thoughts or ideas of God (cf. *Spec.* 1:48; *QG* 4:42) called the virtues of God. But in relation to God's creation and human beings, that is in their immanent aspect, the purpose of God is accomplished by the powers. The difference, therefore, between powers and virtues is that they represent different aspects of God's nature as thinking-acting. The term "power" signifies the immanent exercise of God's essential goodness in the world, whereas the term "virtue" signifies the "moral" excellence, or the attributes, of God's transcendent nature.

Philo's two-fold understanding of God's thinking-acting in terms of the words "power" and "virtue" surfaces in the context of *Deus* 77-80. Philo maintains that, just like the powers, God cannot dispense his virtues--he mentions knowledge, wisdom, prudence, justice and "others"-- were they not tempered<sup>98</sup> for "no mortal could

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<sup>96</sup>Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo*, 44.

<sup>97</sup> James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 2, 88.

<sup>98</sup>Philo's view of receiving God's virtues, or gifts, according to human capacity may go back to Plato, *Timaeus* 30a, to the phrase that the demiurge gives good things *κατὰ δύναμιν*. Cf. *Opif.* 23 and for comments, Pierre Boyancé, "Philon-Studien", in: Clemens Zintzen (ed), *Der Mittelplatonismus* (Darmstadt, 1981), 44 [orig. "Études philoniennes", in: *Revue des Études Grecques* 76 (1963), 79-82, 96-108]

receive them".<sup>99</sup> Like all divine properties, the virtues belong to God's transcendent nature and cannot therefore be apprehended in their purity by the human mind; it is only via the powers that the effects of these virtues are mediated to human beings.<sup>100</sup> When Philo emphasizes the moral excellence of the nature of God he sometimes uses the term "virtue", but when he stresses the activity of God in relation to the world and humanity, he prefers the term "power". In this sense, the nuance of the terms is one of aspect, but not of substance, for together these two constitute God's thinking-acting. There is therefore no contradiction when Philo calls providence both a virtue (*Deus* 29) and a power (*Legat.* 6); the former because it pertains to God's nature and is indicative of the idea that in his goodness and graciousness God cares for his creation,<sup>101</sup> the latter because the execution of God's care in the world, his providence, requires divine activity which is always the task of the divine powers.

## 2.4 Synopsis

Chapters One and Two give evidence that Philo's conception of providence as a whole is the result of making intelligible how God in his transcendence is immanently involved in the cosmos. Just as Philo's concept of monotheism is "ontologically a

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<sup>99</sup>*Deus* 79. The powers, too, as Philo says in *Deus* 77, are unmixed in relation to God himself, but mixed in relation to created beings.

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Folker Siegert, *De Deo*, 62-64, on the mediating role of the powers.

<sup>101</sup>It is important to note that in the few places Philo mentions God's virtues he closely associates them with God's grace or mercy for the world. In *Spec.* 1:308, Philo says, "vast are his [God's] excellences and powers, he takes pity and compassion on those most helplessly in need", in *Moses* 2:189 and *QE* 2:61 he speaks of God's propitious and beneficent (ὡλεως καὶ εὐεργετική) virtues.

unit", but is "really a trinity in external relations",<sup>102</sup> comprised of the Logos and the two primary powers, so too, is the doctrine of providence one concept, comprised of a transcendent and immanent aspect. Indeed, the very idea of God's providence in the world requires that God's transcendent nature, the idea that God *is* provident, somehow be made known in natural and human affairs, in the idea that God *exercises* providence. There is perhaps no passage that encapsulates this relation between transcendence and immanence as sharply as the passage *Deus* 108: "But He has given His good things in abundance to the All and its parts, not because He judged anything worthy of grace, but looking to His eternal goodness, and thinking that to be beneficent was incumbent on His blessed and happy nature." The transcendent aspect of providence is rooted in God's "blessed and happy nature", namely his eternal goodness, grace, and the will to be beneficent for his creation. The immanent aspect of providence is the mediation of God's nature thus understood by the Logos and the powers. The creative power, and issuing from it the gracious or providential power, are the powers which actually relate the goodness and graciousness of God to the world. The deeds these powers bestow on creation and humanity are the gifts (*χάριτες*) of God. For Philo, the concept of providence thus rests in the correlation of God's nature to his powers, as can be seen in the following graph.

Transcendence	Immanence
God is good	Goodness exercised by the Creative Power
God is gracious	Gracious deeds dispensed by the Gracious Power
God is provident	Providence exercised by the Providential Power

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<sup>102</sup>Erwin Goodenough, *Introduction to Philo*, 104.

Because God is good, gracious and provident, he wills to bestow these virtues upon his creatures through the powers. God's transcendent goodness is mediated by the creative power and his grace by the gracious or providential power. There is a conceptual progression from God's goodness to his creation of the universe to his providence over the world. Goodness and providence<sup>103</sup> are related in this way: God's goodness is the reason for the creation the world, brought about through the creative and gracious power,<sup>104</sup> while providence is that power, or virtue, that bestows God's goodness as benefits on the world. Hence, in Philonic theology, there is *a priori* correlation between God's goodness and the doctrine of providence.

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<sup>103</sup>In *Prov.* 1:3 Philo calls providence itself "good".

<sup>104</sup>In *Mos.* 2:132 Philo says that God's goodness and the gracious power are in harmony.

## Chapter Three

### Providence in Philo's Theory of Creation

David Winston once made the insightful remark that "a philosopher's theory of creation invariably reveals the fundamental presupposition of his thought and is inextricably intertwined with his doctrine of God."<sup>1</sup> Philo's theory of creation is no exception to this rule. In the previous two chapters we discussed how Philo conceives of providence as being rooted in God's transcendent nature and how providence is immanent in the world through the creative and gracious powers. The objective of this chapter is to show in precisely what way Philo's conception of providence thus rooted in his concept of God also critically shapes his theory of creation and, vice versa, how his theory of creation reveals some of the assumptions undergirding his notion of God's providence. The questions that are relevant to the discussion of the role of providence in creation are the specific issues of the createdness, the duration, and the possible destruction of the universe. The significance of all of these questions for the

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<sup>1</sup>David Winston, "Philo's Theory of Creation", in: *Selections*, 7.

theory of creation cannot be adequately understood apart from their correlation with the doctrine of providence. It appears, however, that no article or monograph has ever focused for its own sake on how to correlate Philo's ideas of the cosmos' createdness, duration and possible destruction with his conception of providence.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say, to be sure, that Philonic scholars have not paid any attention to the role of providence in creation,<sup>3</sup> but only that it has happened from the bias of Philo's theory of creation and thus fails to do justice to the prominence the subject actually occupies in Philo's thought as a whole. At least, scholars who have written on the subject attest the inextricable relation Philo postulates between God's creation and his providence. Simply put, without studying Philo's conception of the created cosmos it would be impossible to fathom his understanding of the immanent aspect of God's provident nature.

Our chief task, after formulating the state of the questions, is to revisit the issue of why and how the notion of providence plays such a significant role with respect to the createdness and indestructibility of the universe. We shall also pay special

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<sup>2</sup>For an excellent survey of Philo's theory of creation in Philonic scholarship, see Gregory Sterling, "Creatio Temporalis, Aeterna, vel Continua? An Analysis of the Thought of Philo of Alexandria", in: *SPhA* 4 (1992), 15-41.

<sup>3</sup>Meyer, *Vorsehungsglaube und Schicksalsidee*, 34, asserts that in Philo's thought the belief in God as creator is very closely associated with belief in providence. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo*, 108, in his introduction to Philonic metaphysics, stresses "Philo's repeated, almost unbroken, emphasis upon the providence of God in the world", while Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 298, maintains likewise that "to Philo, the belief in providence ultimately rests upon creation", and Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 455, thinks that "if God's *creatio continua* and providential care ceased it [cosmos] would immediately revert to its original state."

attention to Philo's understanding of the precise relation between providence and the Logos. The issue is whether Philo perceives providence as an instrument of creation in a role similar to that which he typically assigns to the Logos. This is a difficult issue in Philo's doctrine of providence and certainly one that defies an easy solution.

### 3.1 The State of the Question

What has been accomplished in Philonic research on the question of Philo's view of the cosmological role of providence? A brief survey of the studies of Drummond,<sup>4</sup> Wolfson<sup>5</sup> and Winston<sup>6</sup> shows that they recognize the issue of the role of providence

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 2, 55-62. His thesis is that "God must exercise providence over the cosmos, caring both for the whole and for the parts." He then correctly substantiates this thesis by placing the notion of providence within "the very conception of a benevolent Creator" as expressed by Philo in his creed in *Opif.* 172. Concretely this means that "God's goodness is poured forth with unrestricted prodigality.... as he graciously bestows good things upon all." These gifts are the graces of God administered according to the "limited capacity" of the recipients.

<sup>5</sup>Cf. Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 297-9, 316. Wolfson argues that Philo rejects the Aristotelian view in *Opif.* 7 that the cosmos is without beginning by reworking a Stoic argument (cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2:76) for providence. The argument that nothing is more exalted than the administration of the world and that consequently the world is administered by divine providence is rewritten by Philo, according to Wolfson, in these terms: "there is nothing more exalted than the creation of the world. Consequently this world was created by God" (298). Wolfson takes as further proof for this Philonic re-interpretation of a Stoic argument the fact that in *Opif.* 9-10 the createdness of the cosmos is also linked to the idea of God's providence. Wolfson then concludes that to Philo, "the belief in providence ultimately rests upon creation", but adds that to Philo the concept of cosmic providence entails as well the idea of individual providence, by which he means that God "by His sheer will, can miraculously change the order of nature which He himself has implanted in the world" for the good of a person. Wolfson's other major discussion of providence coincides with his interpretation of the passage *Decal.* 58, in which Philo asserts that the beginning of the cosmos is "its destruction, even though by the providence of God it be made immortal." Wolfson thinks that Philo combines Aristotle's dictum that

to belong to a discussion of Philo's theory of creation. But none of these scholars attempts in any way either to identify and formulate the pertinent questions or else to correlate the idea of providence to the theory of creation. The more specific issue of the relationship between God's providence and activity is addressed in the brief remarks by Sorabji<sup>7</sup> in the context of his interest in Philo's theory of creation.

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"whatever is generated must be destructible" (cf. *De Caelo* 282b) and Plato's statement that the cosmos is "indissoluble save by my will" (cf. *Timaeus* 41b). But unlike Plato, says Wolfson, according to whom the will of God can never change, Philo assumes "that God can always change His will for some good reason", but "we can rely upon God's promise that He would not destroy it [the cosmos]" (316).

<sup>6</sup>David Winston, "Philo's Theory of Creation" in: *Selections*, 7-21. Winston focuses on the two questions whether Philo espouses a *creatio ex nihilo* or a creation from primordial matter (Winston's view) and whether Philo holds to a temporal or eternal creation (Winston's view). The theme of God's providence is not touched upon except for a tangential reference in the context of his discussion of the possibility of miracles. Winston rejects Wolfson's view that, according to Philo, God can act outside the laws of nature and argues instead that Philo explains God's miraculous deeds "within the framework of the existing natural order by simply expanding its parameters" (19). Because of the limitation of human perception miracles may be misjudged. A proof-text cited by Winston is *Mos.* 2:261, in which the notion of God's providence is mentioned, but not further discussed. Like Wolfson, Winston also analyses the passage *Decal.* 58, a text that contains a reference to providence, but which he deleted from his extant citation and ignores in his discussion (17).

<sup>7</sup>Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London, 1983), 249-52. Sorabji argues that God "must not be thought of as idle" was common in Greek philosophy. Plato insisted that God "cannot be lazy, but must, on the contrary, be provident" (cf. *Laws* 901a-903a), an argument "repeated in later antiquity as an argument for divine providence" (250). Philo, notes Sorabji, "makes a particularly large contribution to the 'idleness' question" because it can be used in either of two opposite directions. Either, to say that the world is uncreated leaves God with nothing to do, or, to say that God created the world leaves God with nothing to do before its coming into being (cf. *Prov.* 1:6-7). In Sorabji's view, Philo seeks to solve the question by postulating "that the intelligible world was created *simultaneously* with the material world" (250).

There are, however, two enduring accomplishments in the studies of Horovitz<sup>8</sup> and, in particular, Runia.<sup>9</sup> Although Runia's comments resemble more a mosaic of scattered statements than a thematic treatment, as a whole they amount to the most valuable compendium on Philo's doctrine of providence. Because of their importance, and because they touch upon nearly all the questions identified in the other studies mentioned, it is useful to summarize Runia's comments. (1) The troublesome passage *Prov.* 1:6-8 is carefully annotated as part of Runia's discussion of the cosmogony in *Timaeus* 30a (pp. 148-55). After providing a concise survey of the history of interpretation over the last century and a translation from the Armenian original rather than Aucher's Latin version, he provides several observations on the significance of this text. Pivotal is the context in which these statements occur. They are part of the dialogue *De Providentia* and mark the beginning of the larger section 6-23 in which Philo addresses the issue of the createdness and possible destruction of the world. The theme generally, therefore, is the defense of God's providence. For Philo, there can

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<sup>8</sup>Jakob Horovitz, *Untersuchungen über Philons und Platons Lehre von der Weltschöpfung* (Marburg 1900), 7-8. Horovitz's thesis is that Philo's idea of the origin of the cosmos (*Weltbildung*) is largely indebted to Plato's dialogue, the *Timaeus*. According to Horovitz, Philo identifies the Biblical ἐποίησεν with the Platonic ἐδημιούργησεν and thereby construes the demiurge of Plato, the ποιητής καὶ πατήρ, as the God of the Bible. The differences between these, says Horovitz, Philo synthesizes on two grounds. First, he finds the idea of God as the creative artist (*als werkbildender Künstler*) in the Biblical narrative. Second, Philo then utilizes the doctrine of God's πρόνοια, a notion that originates with Plato and is central in Stoic philosophy, because it closely ties the creative act of the demiurge to the goodness of God, a thought that appears to be one with the spirit of Scripture (*wie aus dem Geiste der Schrift geschöpft*).

<sup>9</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*.

be no inactivity in God, because then God could not be said to be providentially active in the design and maintenance of the cosmos. (2) Runia devotes a short section (pp. 241-2) to the term *πρόνοια* in *Timaeus* 41a-b. Philo takes from Plato the idea that the indestructibility of the cosmos is assured by the creators' providential care. The doctrine of providence "is intrinsically connected to both the doctrines of the creation and the indestructibility of the cosmos" (p. 241). Philo's reliance in these matters may be seen in the passages *Mig.* 181 and *Decal.* 58. The refusal to acknowledge both the cosmos' creation and indestructibility "results from a failure to recognize the providential activity of the creator" (p. 241). Runia then situates the doctrine of providence in Middle Platonic thought (Seneca, Pseudo-Plutarch, Atticus), where the demiurge's speech (*Timaeus* 41a-b) is consistently associated with the idea of providence. (3) Runia considers the idea of providence in light of the structure of the human body in *Timaeus* 73a (pp. 314-16). As a living organism participating in the cosmos the human body is structured by the providential design of the creator. Philo adapts this Platonic conception to his view that the intestines have been made by the providence of the creator (cf. *QG* 2:7). The fact that Philo includes this structural element of the *Timaeus* is seen by Runia as a "precious indication" of Philo's careful reading of the dialogue. Finally, (4) Runia provides concise remarks on the thematic importance of providence in Middle Platonism (p. 494). "The doctrine of Providence", he writes, "is the obverse of the doctrine of creation. All Middle Platonists hold to the view, derived from *Tim.* 41a-b, that the cosmos is indestructible through the agency of God's *pronoia* or will." A second Middle Platonist tenet,

namely the "unconditional conviction" that God is not at all responsible for evil, is also shared by Philo. He approaches the question of theodicy with arguments taken from "the extensive repertoire" of the Stoa (p. 494).

The result of Runia's study of Philo's conception of the cosmological role of providence is two-fold. First, Philo's conception of providence must be understood in response to Plato's dialogue on the origin of the cosmos, the *Timaeus*, but also in response to Middle Platonist interpretive traditions of the *Timaeus*. Second, and more significant, the central question Philo inherited from Plato and his interpreters is *the issue of time and creation in relation to God's providential activity*. The question converges on how the notion of providence can best be made intelligible given the three possible scenarios that the cosmos is created and destructible, or uncreated and indestructible, or created and indestructible. Wolfson, Sorabji, and Runia agree that, for Philo, the doctrine of providence requires that the cosmos has a beginning and is indestructible; Winston, however, supposes that Philo's view is that of an eternal creation.

The overarching result of our survey is that because of the far greater interest in Philo's ideas of cosmology, the issue of the relation of providence to these cosmological matters has been assessed from the narrow angle of Philo's theory of creation. Without exception the theme of providence is at best secondary in all these studies, and hence explanations of the cosmological role of providence are limited to the extent that they are prompted by the concept of providence being mentioned in a specific text under discussion. In what follows, we shall review the issues of the

beginning, the duration, and the destruction of the cosmos as well as the vexing question of the role of providence in relation to Philo's view of the role of the Logos.

### 3.2 Providence and the Createdness of the Cosmos

There are several important issues which impinge upon Philo's view of the createdness of the cosmos in relation to his doctrine of providence. These are (1) Philo's rejection of the idea that the cosmos came into being automatically, (2) the affirmation that the cosmos was created by the mind of God, its father and creator, and (3) that the cosmos has a temporal beginning.

#### 3.2.1 The Cosmos was not created Automatically

In the doxographical passage *Ebr.* 199, Philo recapitulates the various views of contemporary philosophy. Some philosophers, he notes,

assert that the universe is infinite, others that it is finite, and some declare it to be created, others uncreated; when some refuse to connect it with any ruler or governor, but to make it dependent on the automatic action (ἀπαντοματιζούσης) of an unreasoning force (ἄλόγου φορᾶς), while others postulate a marvellous providence (πρόνοιαν), caring for the whole and each part, exerted by a deity who guides and steers it and makes safe its steps.

As will become clear in the ensuing analysis of key passages, the views that Philo recounts here in *Ebr.* 199 as those of the "multitude of so-called philosophers"<sup>10</sup> essentially demarcate the conceptual framework within which he himself treats the theme of providence in relation to the issues of the origin and governance of the

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<sup>10</sup>*Ebr.* 198.

cosmos. He develops his own view on the cosmological function of providence in response to these positions, which, according to Colson,<sup>11</sup> may be classified as follows. The Epicureans hold that the universe is created, infinite and without providence, the Peripatetics espouse that the universe is uncreated (and indestructible) and the Stoics believe that the cosmos is created, finite and under the administration of providence both as a whole and in all its parts. Philo, of course, is not so much concerned to align his own convictions on these issues with any particular philosophical tradition as he is interested in making these cosmological issues coherent with his concept of God, his theory of creation, and the doctrine of providence.

Philo's principal criticism in the above passage is that some philosophers make the genesis of the cosmos "dependent on the automatic action of an unreasoning force." In two other passages, Philo takes up the same issue. In the passage *Praem.* 42 Philo presents the opinions of a group of people who acknowledge--by means of their contemplation of the created order--the Maker and Ruler of all.<sup>12</sup> These people confess that

all these [cosmic] beauties and this transcendent order has not happened automatically (οὐκ αὐτοματισθέντα) but by the handiwork of an architect and world maker; also that there must be a providence (ὅτι πρόνοιαν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι), for it is a law of nature that a maker should take care of what has been made.

And again, in the passage *Spec.* 3:189, Philo says that the spectacle of creation was

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<sup>11</sup>LCL, *Philo*, vol. 3, 508.

<sup>12</sup>At *Praem.* 43 Philo's remarks suggest that he identifies with their position: "These are no doubt admirable persons and superior to the other classes... by reason and reflection [they] happily inferred the Creator from his works."

not brought together automatically (οὐκ αὐτοματισθέντα) by unreasoning forces (φοραῖς ἀλόγοις), but by the mind of God (διανοίᾳ θεοῦ) Who is rightly called their Father and Maker... also that a Father Who begat them [fixed stars] according to the law of nature takes thought for his offspring, His providence watching (προνοούμενος) over both the whole and the parts.<sup>13</sup>

In all three quotations, Philo takes issue with the postulate of some philosophers that the origin of the cosmos happened automatically. In two texts, the automatic genesis of the cosmos is also assigned to what Philo calls "unreasoning forces." Such a view, however, is in direct opposition to the view that the origin of the cosmos is dependent on providence.

But what group of philosophers makes the origin of the cosmos "dependent on the automatic action of an unreasoning force" we are not told by Philo. We might conjecture, however, that Philo wishes to repudiate the cosmological views that originated with the Atomists and were taken up by the Epicureans. In the cosmological accounts of Leucippus and Democritus there is no attempt to explain the atomic motion that exists eternally in the void with reference to an external cause or moving force.<sup>14</sup> They were already faulted for such negligence by Aristotle who blames them for not explaining "with what motion they [atoms] move and what is their natural motion" (*De Caelo* 300b). Although Leucippus says that everything

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<sup>13</sup>It may go back to Plato, *Timaeus* 47a-c; cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 426.

<sup>14</sup>For a general introduction to the philosophy of the Atomists, see Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York, 1962), vol. 1, 91.

happens out of reason and by necessity (ἐκ λόγου καὶ ὑπ' ἀνάγκης),<sup>15</sup> or according to some necessity (κατὰ τινα ἀνάγκην),<sup>16</sup> he does not mean thereby that everything happens according to chance, but according to the merely mechanistic swerve of the atoms. As Copleston points out, this view is idiosyncratic not so much because Leucippus denied chance, but because he denied chance *and yet* posits an eternal unexplained motion.<sup>17</sup> For the Atomists, the swerve of the atoms occurs simply because of the inherent movement of the atoms apart from any external cause. The Epicureans, likewise, largely follow Atomist cosmology and thereby eliminate "the need for divine causation and any form of teleology"<sup>18</sup> and, as a logical consequence, divine providence. Philo probably polemicizes against the Epicureans in the passage *LA* 3:29-30. He speaks of two minds, "that of the universe, which is God and the individual mind." A person might declare God

to be the cause of nothing, and himself to be the cause of all things that come into being. The view, for instance, is widely current that all things in the world tear along automatically (ἀπαντοματίζοντα) independently of anyone to guide them.

A first point of this passage is that those who espouse the Epicurean view of the automatic genesis and preservation of the world forfeit the truth that "the universal Mind, uncreate and immortal" (*LA* 3:31) is the sole creator of this world. Philo thus

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<sup>15</sup>Fragment 67, Diels-Kranz. English edition by Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, MA., 1983), p. 91.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Diogenes Laertius 9:33.

<sup>17</sup>Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 92. See also A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 35.

<sup>18</sup>A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 39.

connects the genesis of the cosmos with an intrinsically rational cause, the mind (νοῦς) of God. The second point is that "the miscreant" depicted in this text "has all the earmarks of one who rejects providence."<sup>19</sup> That "things in the world tear along automatically" and that the cosmos is unconnected "with any ruler or governor" (*Ebr.* 199) is again directed against the Epicurean view of the gods and providence. In *Conf.* 114-15, Philo ascribes the following views to those people who built the tower of Babel. They believe

either that the Deity does not exist, or that it exists but does not exert providence (προνοεῖω), or that the world had no beginning in which it was created, or that though created its course is under the sway of varying and random causation.

The issue for Philo with such a view is not only that the cosmos is said to be without beginning, but also that even though created the cosmos is not preserved by rational causation. Here, as elsewhere, Philo's problem is with the characterization of the powers of causation as being "random" or "unreasoning." This shows that for Philo it is impossible that the cause of the universe be devoid of νοῦς or λόγος, the very principle that is so critical in his explanation of the ordering of the cosmos. The description of "unreasoning" could well be an allusion to the term ἀνάγκη in Leucippus. Plato understood the term as a mechanistic principle that by itself cannot account for the ordering and perfection of the cosmos.<sup>20</sup> In *Timaeus* 48a, he insists that the origin of the cosmos is the result of the combination of necessity (ἀνάγκη)

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<sup>19</sup>Alan Mendelson, *Philo's Jewish Identity*, 48.

<sup>20</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 280, for a brief discussion of Plato's reworking of the Atomist theory of creation in the *Timaeus*.

and reason (νοῦς) inasmuch as reason was controlling necessity. The difficulty Philo has with the idea ἀνάγκη is that it does not "denote a principle of causation",<sup>21</sup> at least in the sense that Philo understands causation.

### 3.2.2 The Cosmos was created by the Mind of God

Philo's idea of causation is the very opposite of automatic action. His juxtaposition of the unreasoning forces to the "mind of God" (*Spec.* 3:189) reveals his assumption that the origin of creation depends on a rational ordering cause of the cosmos. The unreasoning forces (φοροῖς ἀλόγοις) are incapable of bringing the cosmos into existence by virtue of being without the λόγος; they do not have the power of rationality to order matter from chaos into cosmos, nor does the idea of ἀνάγκη entail a rational principle of causation.<sup>22</sup> The task of ordering primal matter<sup>23</sup> is alone the prerogative of the mind of God which Philo identifies here as δῖονοια, but which he elsewhere calls the λόγος or νοῦς of God as the noetic place for God's thinking-acting.<sup>24</sup> In *Opif.* 8, for example, we find the telling statement that as "active Cause", God is "the perfectly pure and unsullied Mind (νοῦς) of the universe,

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<sup>21</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 280. Philo identifies ἀνάγκη with εἰμαρμένη (cf. *Heres* 300, *Mig.* 179, *Somn.* 2:44), the Stoic dogma of the inexorable chain of cause and effect, which he completely rejects.

<sup>22</sup>In *Mig.* 179 Philo rebukes those who make fate (εἰμαρμένη) and necessity (ἀνάγκη) divine because they must not be understood as "originating causes."

<sup>23</sup>James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 1, 306-307, who concludes his survey of Philonic passages dealing with matter by asserting that "Philo believed in the eternity of matter".

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 229-45, 253-54.

transcending virtue, transcending knowledge, transcending the good itself and the beautiful itself." In *Mig.* 192-93, Philo says as explicitly as he possibly could that "the Mind of the universe, God... has brought the universe into existence (ὁ δὲ τῶν ὅλων νοῦς τὸ πᾶν γεγέννηκε)." The coming into existence of the universe by God's rational design is thus clearly established in Philo's cosmogony. He is more specific about the kind of rationality necessary for creation of the cosmos in the passage *QG* 2:34. Philo allegorizes (Genesis 8:6, "What is the 'window of the ark' which the righteous man (Noah) opened?") that our senses first recognize that there is "the one true certain Creator" which they report to our reason (λογισμός).

And this (reason), seeing with a sharp eye both these (celestial phenomena) and through them the higher paradigmatic forms (τὰ ἀνώτερα παραδειγματικά εἶδη) and the cause of all things (τὸν ἀπάντων αἴτιον), immediately apprehends them and genesis (γενέσεως) and providence (προνοίας), for it reasons that visible nature did not come into being by itself (οὐκ αὐτοματισθέντα); for it would be impossible for harmony and order and measure and proportions of truth and such concord and real prosperity and happiness to come about by themselves. But it is necessary (ἀνάγκη εἶναι) that there be some Creator and Father, a pilot and charioteer, who both begat and wholly preserves and guards the things begotten.

Prompted by the senses, argues Philo in *QG* 2:24, the human intellect deduces from contemplating the celestial bodies their underlying paradigmatic forms,<sup>25</sup> the corporeal ideas (the sum of which is the λόγος), and from them the existence of their underlying cause, God. Connected to the apprehension of these is the "immediate"

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<sup>25</sup>On Philo's adaptation of *Timaeus* 47a-c, see David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 272-3.

conclusion that there must be a "genesis and providence".<sup>26</sup> Proof that there is genesis and providence is in visible nature, that is, that its perfection could not come into being by itself. Further, because of cosmic harmony, it is "necessary" that the "Creator and Father"<sup>27</sup> both creates (genesis) and preserves (providence) what he has created. Throughout the Philonic corpus it is evident that the excellence and perfection of the universe, its cosmic sympathy, could not be better, and therefore is a proof for the highest rationality of God and deserving of the name of God's "handiwork" (*Praem.* 42).

The rational and artistic element of the creation of the world by the mind of God is further implicit in Philo's use of numerous divine epithets, such as father (*Spec.* 3:189; *QG* 2:34), architect (*Praem.* 42), maker (*Spec.* 3:189), world-maker (*Praem.* 42), creator, pilot and charioteer (*QG* 2:34). By calling God "father", Philo stresses God's ability to be the cause of generation and thus brings God in relation with the world. The image of "architect" suggests the activity of designing and planning, those of "creator" and "maker" the ability and power to carry out that which the architect designs. Méasson suggests that the idea that providence cares "for the whole and each part, exerted by a deity who guides and steers it" (*Ebr.* 199) is an allusion to the Platonic idea of providence being the pilot of the universe.<sup>28</sup> Her view is confirmed

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<sup>26</sup>Abraham's vision is also a perception "not of God's essence, for that is impossible, but of His existence and providence" (*Virt.* 215-6).

<sup>27</sup>In *Virt.* 216, God is the "one Cause above all."

<sup>28</sup>Cf. Anita Méasson, *Du char ailé de Zeus à l'Arche d'Alliance. Images et mythes platoniciens chez Philon d'Alexandrie*, Études Augustiniennes (Paris, 1986), 102-3.

in the statement in *QG* 2:34 that there is a Creator and Father, a pilot and charioteer, who both created (genesis) and wholly maintain (providence) what has been created. Philo's notion of the ordering of the cosmos thus entails the idea that the highest form of rationality, God's mind, is responsible for the conception, the design, the act of creating, and the preservation of the cosmos.

### 3.2.3 The Temporal Beginning of the Cosmos

If the cosmos did not come into existence automatically by unreasoning forces, but by the mind of God, then, of course, it is a logical consequence that Philo must hold the view of the temporal<sup>29</sup> genesis of the cosmos.<sup>30</sup> In a cosmological context, the createdness of the cosmos is the critical foundation upon which Philo builds his argument for the existence of providence. Decisive for Philo's development of thought is the passage *Opif.* 7-10.<sup>31</sup> In *Opif.* 7 Philo polemicizes against the Aristotelian

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The reference to "the whole and the parts" is also Stoic. Cicero, for example, speaks of the perfection of the "structure of the world in all its parts", a perfection possible because it is "controlled by intelligence and by divine providence." (*De Natura Deorum* 2:66).

<sup>29</sup>In *Decal.* 58 Philo remarks explicitly that "there was a time when it [the cosmos] was not."

<sup>30</sup>Several times in his corpus Philo uses the phrase ἀρχὴ γενέσεως, which denotes the principle of creation and is taken from Plato, *Timaeus* 28b. As David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 97, points out, Philo makes use of the phrase eight times, usually in a temporal sense (i.e. the beginning of creation), but once (cf. *LA* 3:78) in an ontological sense (i.e. the principle of becoming).

<sup>31</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 100, thinks that the *Timaeus* might be Philo's interpretive background for the entire section *Opif.* 7-10. Less convincing is the view of Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 297-9, that Philo transformed a Stoic argument for providence (cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2:76) into an argument for

view of a *creatio aeterna*, the idea that the cosmos is without beginning (ἀγένητος) and everlasting (ἀίδιος). But to say that the cosmos has no temporal beginning is to bring against God the charge of inactivity (ἀπραξία).<sup>32</sup> Philo's premise, however, that "God is uncreated (ἀγένητος) and ever active (ποιῶν ἀεί)"<sup>33</sup> precludes this very charge of divine inactivity. For if the cosmos is ἀγένητος then God is inactive because neither is he its creator nor can he exercise his providence in a world he did not create.<sup>34</sup> But creation and providence cannot be separated because both depend on God's ceaseless activity in the cosmos.<sup>35</sup> For, as Philo emphasizes in *Prov.* 1:7, God's thinking, his will, and activity are simultaneous, a view that corresponds to his statement in *Opif.* 8 where God is said to be the active cause and mind of the universe. By designating God as the "active Cause" Philo exploits the idea of God's creatorship and brings forth another argument against divine inactivity. Then he

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creation.

<sup>32</sup>In *Prov.* 1:6—a very important passage for Philo's theory of creation, but obscured by textual difficulties—Philo seems to address the same issue. "For it is fitting, they said, for the Deity ever to be inactive—since this indicative of laziness and inactivity—but they said that without beginning God made all things, not having previously realized the absurdity of such an hypothesis; for in wishing to clear God of a trivial accusation, they direct a very serious accusation against him" (Translation Runia/Weitenberg, in: David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 150-1). Given the wider context of *De Providentia* 1, the "very serious accusation" is almost certainly a denial of God's providential activity; so also David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 152-3.

<sup>33</sup>*Gig.* 42.

<sup>34</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 100, note 6.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 154.

charges in *Opif.* 9-10 that such a view of the cosmos' uncreatedness obliterates the need for God's providence in the world.

Those who assert that this world is unoriginate unconsciously eliminate that which of all incentives to piety is the most beneficial and the most indispensable, namely providence. For it stands to reason that what has been brought into existence should be cared for by its Father and Maker.

Philo's defense of providence hinges on the idea "what has been brought into existence should be cared for by its Father and Maker". Hence, just as preservation necessitates a creator and genesis, providence necessitates a caring father. The idea of the care of the creator and father for his creation is equivalent to Philo's notion of providence (an aspect that underlies the idea of God's fatherhood and providence; see above, 1.2.3), while the act of creation presupposes in turn that the cosmos has a beginning.

It is apparent that Philo's view of God's providence is indispensably linked to his concept of God. It is difficult to judge whether Philo's main premise is that God is provident and is as such incorporated into his theory of creation, or whether his theory of creation requires a creator who would continue to maintain what he has created and thus shapes the doctrine of providence.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately Philo's denial of the

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<sup>36</sup>In Middle Platonism the doctrine of providence is to a great extent religiously motivated. Willy Theiler ("Philo von Alexandria und der hellenisierte Timaeus", 27-28, and David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 101, note 7) assume that Atticus (cf. fragment 4:2) utilizes the view that belief in the uncreatedness of the cosmos amounts to a denial of providence. Taurus, a defender of the eternity of the cosmos (cf. John Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 242-46), records explicitly that belief in the beginning of the cosmos is religiously motivated in order not to shatter peoples' trust in divine providence.

uncreatedness of the cosmos lies in his attempt not to sever the relation between God the creator and his creation. In Philo's own words, "but between that which has never been brought into being and one who is not its Maker no such tie is formed" (*Opif.* 10). Hence, the relation between creator and creation is essentially a providential one. For if the cosmos is ἀγέννητος, it follows that God can neither be its cause and creator nor its providential maintainer. If no relation between God and creation exists, providence is also eliminated.

### 3.3. Providence and the Destruction of the Cosmos

In our survey of Philonic research on the cosmological role of providence we cited Runia's view that "all Middle Platonists hold to the view, derived from *Tim.* 41a-b, that the cosmos is indestructible through the agency of God's *pronoia* or will."<sup>37</sup> Philo adapts the view of the cosmos' indestructibility in Middle Platonist fashion to his doctrine of providence in a significant manner. The most important passage in which Philo correlates the issues of the beginning and the possible destruction of the cosmos with the theme of providence is *Decal.* 58.

For the world has become what it is, and its becoming (γένεσις) is the beginning (ἀρχή) of its destruction (φθοράς), even though by the providence of God (προνοία τοῦ πεποιηκότος) it be made immortal, and there was a time when it was not.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 494.

<sup>38</sup>*Decal.* 58

Philo's view on the origin of the cosmos is succinctly expressed in this passage. The two statements, that "the world has become what it is" and that "there was a time when it was not", bear evidence of Philo's conviction of the temporal γένεσις<sup>39</sup> of the world. As Wolfson has shown,<sup>40</sup> Philo treats the issue of the origin of the cosmos, like Plato and Aristotle, in relation to the issue of the duration of the cosmos. In Plato's *Timaeus* 41a-b, the demiurge gives the following speech.

Gods of gods, those works of which I am a framer (δημιουργός) and father (πατήρ) are indissoluble (ἀλυτα) save by my will (μη ἐθέλοντος). For though all that is bound may be dissolved, yet to will to dissolve that which is fairly joined together and in good case were the deed of a wicked one. (LCL)

In his commentary on this text, Cornford suggests that among the things created up to this point in the *Timaeus* are the body and soul of the living cosmos and the heavenly gods. Only these are said by Plato to be indissoluble because of the demiurge's will.<sup>41</sup> But Plato gives no reason why the demiurge will not change his will to dissolve the universe. Perhaps we may surmise that the things thus far created are as good as possible and without evil and cannot, therefore, be improved upon (cf. *Timaeus* 30a).

Aristotle, in his treatise *De Caelo* sharply criticizes Plato, however, for his view that the cosmos is generated and indestructible.

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<sup>39</sup>On Philo's interpretation of the Platonic phrase ἀρχὴ γένεσεως, see note 30.

<sup>40</sup>See above footnote 5.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. Francis Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*, 140-41.

Whatever is destructible (φθαρτόν) must be generated (γενητόν), for it must be either ungenerated (ἀγένητον) or generated, but if it is ungenerated we have already said<sup>42</sup> that it must be indestructible (ἀφθαρτον); and whatever is generated must be destructible, for it must be either destructible or indestructible, but if it is indestructible we have already said<sup>43</sup> that it must be ungenerated.<sup>44</sup>

Aristotle's discussion of the correlation of generation and destruction culminates in his view of *creatio continua*, the belief in everlasting creation. "It is now clear", he summarizes his discussion of these matters, "that the world cannot at the same time be everlasting (ἀίδιον) and have had a beginning (γενέσθαι)",<sup>45</sup> and hence, "the view that it has had a beginning but is everlasting is an impossible one."<sup>46</sup>

To return to *Decal.* 58, Philo is in principle committed to the fundamental axioms of Greek cosmology that (1) genesis (γένεσις) entails destruction (φθορά) and (2) binding (σύνδεσις/σύνθεσις) entails loosing (διάλυσις).<sup>47</sup> But it is also evident in *Decal.* 58 that Philo is not unconditionally committed to these axioms in the sense that they are mutually inclusive. He states the first axiom unambiguously, and the second one, though absent in this context, he uses elsewhere (cf. *Mig.* 181; *Heres* 23). His interest lies not in confirming these principles, but makes use of them only inasmuch

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<sup>42</sup>*De Caelo* 279b-281a.

<sup>43</sup>*De Caelo* 281a-b.

<sup>44</sup>*De Caelo* 282b.

<sup>45</sup>*De Caelo* 280a.

<sup>46</sup>*De Caelo* 279b.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 236. A third fundamental principle of Greek cosmology is that nothing can come into being from nothing and nothing is destroyed into nothing; Philo makes explicit reference to it in *Aet.* 5.

as they support his assumption of the indestructibility of the cosmos. We have seen already that Philo is fully committed to the view of the createdness (γένεσις) of the cosmos, but, he does not draw from it the conclusion, according to the first axiom of Greek cosmology, that it must also be destructible. The cosmos is not destroyed because of God's providence. Runia writes about our passage, that the very phrase πρόνοια τοῦ πεποιηκότος is Philo's short-hand method of alluding to what was considered in the Middle Platonic tradition to be the meaning of Plato's words in *Timaeus* 41a-b.<sup>48</sup> According to the Middle Platonist reading of this text, "the doctrine of providence was regularly associated with the words of the demiurge's speech."<sup>49</sup> The term πρόνοια does actually not occur in the demiurge's speech, but various Middle Platonists (Pseudo-Plutarch 572; Calcidius, *Tim.* 176) equated the idea of πρόνοια with the idea of will (βούλησις).<sup>50</sup> On this reading, Philo's expression in *Decal.* 58, that by the providence=will of God the cosmos be made immortal, virtually echoes the demiurge's saying in *Timaeus* 41a, that the cosmos is "indissoluble save by my will." Hence, Philo's view of the duration of the cosmos resembles closely that of the Middle Platonist Atticus, who not only emphasises the

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<sup>48</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 242.

<sup>49</sup>For a brief discussion, cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 242. Cf. Seneca, *Epistle* 58:28; Plutarch, *Moralia* 927a-c; Apuleius, *De Plat.* 205-206; Atticus, fragment 4).

<sup>50</sup>Cf. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 284. The decisive element in Harry Wolfson's understanding (*Philo*, vol. 1, 316) of *Decal.* 58 is also the will of God. He takes the idea of will from the demiurge's speech, but does not identify it with providence in the Middle Platonist manner.

importance of βούλησις, but also believed that if something is created it does not imply that it will never perish, and if something does perish, it does not imply that it has no beginning of creation.<sup>51</sup> In any case, the indestructibility of the cosmos is ensured because of God's providential will.

A second passage that is reminiscent of the demiurge's speech is *Mig.* 181. The creator has made the universe by "invisible powers" which

reach from the ends of the earth to heaven's furthest bounds, exercising providence (προμηθεύμενος) that what was well bound should not be loosened.

Runia discerns "a loose rephrasing" of *Timaeus* 41b in the clause "that what was well bound should not be loosened."<sup>52</sup> The point Philo wishes to make is again that the cosmos is indestructible because of God's providence. The Greek text does actually not read πρόνοια but προμηθεύμενος, "taking forethought". But given the intention of this passage, and the parallel passage *Decal.* 58, the idea of God "foreseeing" that the cosmos should not be loosened is virtually identical to the idea that God exercises his providence for the same purpose. Both passages, *Decal.* 58 and *Mig.* 181, are modelled after the demiurge's speech and brought into association with the theme of divine providence along the lines of Middle Platonist interpretation.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 237-38.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 241. Philo's τοῦ μὴ ἀνεθῆναι τὰ δεθέντα καλῶς roughly parallels Plato's τὸ μὲν οὖν δὴ δεθὲν πᾶν λυτὸν, τό γε μὴν καλῶς ἀρμοσθέν.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 241-2

Another passage in which Philo addresses the issue of the destruction of the cosmos in relation to the idea of providence is *Aet.* 47-51. This passage is part of the philosophic treatise *De Aeternitate Mundi*, perhaps the most difficult of Philonic writings. It raises as many questions as it answers because of the difficulty to determine when Philo express his own view and when he merely narrates, often without indicating, a philosophic dogma.<sup>54</sup> In our passage he argues against the Stoic dogma of periodic conflagration and palingenesis of the cosmos.<sup>55</sup>

And indeed those who propound the doctrines of conflagration and rebirth... fail to observe that in their inconsistent philosophizing they are imposing destruction on providence also which is the soul of the world... For by reproducing this form of argument and applying it to the whole world one can very clearly show that providence itself is also

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<sup>54</sup>For a substantiated attempt to articulate the most important problems, questions, and methodological avenues, see David Runia, "Philo's *De aeternitate mundi*: The Problem of its Interpretation", in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981):105-51, now reprinted in: idem. *Exegesis and Philosophy* (Hampshire, 1990).

<sup>55</sup>The question of the Stoic dogma of the cycles of conflagration and palingenesis is an extremely intricate one because both of its subject matter and fragmentary state of source material. (The pioneering studies are Jaap Mansfeld, "Providence and the Destruction of the Universe in Early Stoic Thought. With Some Remarks on the 'Mysteries of Philosophy'", in: M. J. Vermaseren (ed). *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden, 1979), 129-88 and A. A. Long, "The Stoics on World-Conflagration and Everlasting Recurrence", in: *Southern Journal of Philosophy* [Supplement, Spindel Conference: Recovering Stoics] 23 (1984):13-38). Apart from the technical details of this dogma, its reception in subsequent Greek philosophy seems to have varied. Philo himself, for example, is drawing on "second or even third hand" (Mansfeld, 187) interpretations in *Aet.* 76-78, a passage that is noteworthy for Philo's own rejection of the Stoic dogma of conflagration. He mentions by name the Stoics Boethus of Sidon, Panaetius, and Diogenes the Babylonian and praises them because they "abandon the conflagrations and regenerations and deserted to the more religious doctrine that the whole world was indestructible" (*Aet.* 76-78; cf. *Heres* 228).

destroyed... Now to say that providence is destroyed is an atrocity but if providence is indestructible the world also is indestructible.<sup>56</sup>

Philo's defense of providence and the indestructibility of the cosmos within the context of the ideas of conflagration and palingenesis is exceptionally complex.<sup>57</sup> The train of thought actually starts at *Aet.* 39 where Philo recalls the question that "thousands" ask: "What motive will God have for destroying the world. It must be either to cease from world-making or to construct another."<sup>58</sup> Philo responds to the first motive in *Aet.* 40. It is incompatible with the God's nature for the two reasons that God only changes disorder to order but not order to disorder and that he does not change his mind. In case of the second motive, another world could either be worse, the same, or superior; but this is an altogether unsatisfying motive, for God's "power admits neither relaxation to make it worse, nor tension to make it better".<sup>59</sup> From *Aet.* 45 on, Philo addresses, as he says "further", the question of the destructibility of creation, the gods, and providence. He sets up his argument in this way. If the earth

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<sup>56</sup>*Aet.* 47-51.

<sup>57</sup>David Runia, "Philo's *De aeternitate mundi*: The Problem of its Interpretation", 126, summarizes the doctrines that are related to Philo's view that the cosmos is generated and destructible. (1) the creation of the cosmos by God, (2) the validity of the axiom that everything that is born must die, (3) the eternity of the cosmos guaranteed by God's βούλησις, (4) the intimate connection of the eternity of the cosmos with the doctrine of providence, (5) the Logos as the bond which holds the world together.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Jaap Mansfeld, "Providence and the Destruction of the Universe", 140-3, who argues that Philo deals here with Aristotle's argument for the eternity of the cosmos as found in his lost treatise *De Philosophia* (so also David Runia, "Philo's *De aeternitate mundi*: The Problem of its Interpretation", 110, note 29. *Aet.* 39-42 constitute the third of three arguments.

<sup>59</sup>*Aet.* 43.

is destroyed during conflagration, then the moon, the sun, the other planets and the fixed stars are also destroyed. But since the latter are recognized from of old as "visible gods... that the gods should lose their indestructibility is impossible whatever the mischievous ravings of men's philosophies may say" (*Aet.* 46). If, finally, the gods are destroyed, it follows that providence is also destroyed.

The particular argument Philo now employs to show that providence is indestructible is based on Chrysippus' premise (*Aet.* 48), "that there cannot be two individuals qualifying the same substance." As Colson's extraordinarily long appendix regarding this premise indicates,<sup>60</sup> it is nearly impossible to ascertain its precise meaning, either for Chrysippus himself or for Philo, and would require a separate study. Suffice it to say, that for our purpose, we may rephrase it as follows.

One person, called Dion, has all the members of his body, but another person, called Theon, has only one foot. If now Dion has a leg amputated, who has suffered destruction? The answer is that Dion suffered destruction because "he has passed over to the defective substance of Theon. Two individuals cannot qualify the same substratum and so Dion must remain and Theon has been destroyed." (*Aet.* 49). Philo now applies this premise to the world and providence. The world is complete like Dion, and the soul of the world (= providence, cf. *Aet.* 47) is like Theon. If the world suffers destruction it is not destroyed, like Dion, but providence is destroyed, like Theon. The world "has passed over into a lesser state of being" and providence is destroyed because "two individuals cannot qualify the same substratum" (*Aet.* 51).

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<sup>60</sup>Cf. LCL, *Philo*, vol. 9, 528-29.

Philo concludes by saying "that providence is destroyed is an atrocity but if providence is indestructible the world also is indestructible."

It is extremely difficult to decipher the philosophical meaning of the phrase that "two individuals cannot qualify the same substratum" and to know what Philo intends by it. The conclusion of the premise is the destruction of providence, given the destruction of the world. But this is a conclusion Philo wishes to avoid at all costs. At the end of his presentation of this Chrysippean premise, Philo simply reverses the logic of the conclusion and maintains that it is an atrocity if providence is destroyed and that, therefore, the cosmos must also be indestructible.<sup>61</sup> For whatever reason he employs this argument, it is critical to note that Philo's *underlying* premise for the indestructibility of the cosmos is a theological premise. If providence is indestructible, it follows that the cosmos is likewise indestructible because God's providence is directed toward the cosmos. In sum, therefore, *Aet.* 47-51 bears witness to Philo's clever convergence of traditions: the occasion is Stoic (question of conflagration),<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>In *Aet.* 83-84, Philo employs the idea that conflagration entails the impious thought of God's inactivity as an argument for his defense of the indestructibility of providence. Mansfeld points out that this is ultimately an Aristotelian argument employed by the Stoic Boethus, whom Philo mentions by name in *Aet.* 76, in order to show that during conflagration there is no divine activity (Cf. Jaap Mansfeld, "Providence and the Destruction of the Universe", 187). If, however, God is inactive, it follows that there is neither God's creative nor providential activity; but since it is impossible for God not to be thus active, Philo's necessary conclusion is that God must always exercise his providence for the world.

<sup>62</sup>For the Stoics, the critical question is how god can be the agent both of the destruction and reconstruction of the universe. Since god is identical to providence, "a benevolent, beneficent, wholly good power caring and watching over all beings. In what way [then] is the exercising of providence to be reconciled with such a grim event ... as the destruction of heaven and earth and all the living beings found

the arguments are Stoic (Chrysippus' premise) and Aristotelian (impossibility of God's inactivity), the result is Platonic (cosmos is generated and indestructible), and the aim is biblical (God the creator does not cease to be provident).

In the passages *Decal.* 58, *Mig.* 181, and *Aet.* 47-51, Philo declares the idea of providence indestructible because of the indestructibility of the cosmos. But in the fifth creedal statement in *Opif.* 172 he says positively that providence is continuous (ἀεί). Similarly, because "God is uncreated (ἀγέννητος) and ever active (ποιῶν ἀεί)" (*Gig.* 42). The result of God's never-ending action and his unceasing providence<sup>63</sup> is the knowledge that providence never fails. This is one of the proofs the builders of the tower of Babel request for their belief in providence. "Providence demands, they say, more than a rare occasional success. Human providence frequently achieves its purpose, the divine should do so always (ἀεί) and without exception, since error is admitted to be inconsistent with divine powers" (*Conf.* 115)

### 3.4 Providence and the Logos

A final issue that arises from Philonic texts dealing with the cosmological role of providence concerns the precise relation between the ideas of the λόγος and πρόνοια. The particular problem is whether Philo understands the dative προνοίᾳ in the sense of providence functioning as the instrument of creation, a function that he typically

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therein." (Jaap Mansfeld, "Providence and the Destruction of the Universe", 137).

<sup>63</sup>Wisdom 17:2 speaks explicitly of God's eternal providence (τῆς αἰωνίου προνοίας).

assigns to the λόγος, and which is expressed by the dative λόγῳ.<sup>64</sup> This ambiguity arises from the fact that Philo employs the dative προνοία five times in a cosmological context, in the passages *QG* 2:7, 3:18; *Deo* 5, 12; *Decal.* 58. Such usage is telling because it is quite different from Philo's typical description of providence as an attribute of God, which he expresses in a subjective genitive construction, such as πρόνοια τοῦ θεοῦ. As our analysis of the following texts shows, this issue defies a simple solution. We shall briefly discuss the role of the λόγος as instrument of creation before we turn to the texts which contain the dative προνοία.

Philo's position on the role of the Logos as the instrument of creation—a role that bridges the transcendent and immanent aspect of the Logos<sup>65</sup>—is made very explicit in the important passage *Cher.* 125. He explains the four causes of creation on the basis of a word play with four Greek prepositions:

For to bring anything into being needs all these [causes] conjointly, the "by which (τὸ ὑφ' οὗ)," the "from which (τὸ ἐξ οὗ)," the "through which (τὸ δι' οὗ)," the "for which (τὸ δι' ὃ)," and the first of these is the cause (αἴτιον), the second the material (ὕλη), the third the tool or instrument (ἐργαλεῖον<sup>66</sup>), and the fourth the end or object (αἰτία).<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>As Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie*, 268, observes, it is characteristic of Philo to employ the dative of instrument (λόγῳ) to convey the meaning of instrument, the idea that the world is created "through" the λόγος.

<sup>65</sup>See above 2.3.1.

<sup>66</sup>Philo's usual term for instrument is ὄργανον.

<sup>67</sup>*Cher.* 125. See the parallel accounts in *QG* 1:58 and *Prov.* 1:23.

Philo then specifies precisely: the cause is God, the material are the four elements (τὰ τέσσαρα στοιχεῖα), the instrument is the λόγος of God (ὄργανον δὲ λόγον θεοῦ)<sup>68</sup>, and the final cause is the goodness of the creator (ἀγαθότης τοῦ δημιουργοῦ). On the basis of the passage *Cher.* 124-7 we can construct the table below providing a concise outline of the prepositional scheme:<sup>69</sup>

First Cause	τὸ ὑφ' οὗ - by which	cause (αἷτιον)	God
Second Cause	τὸ ἐξ οὗ - from which	material (ὕλη)	4 Elements
Third Cause	τὸ δι' οὗ - through which	instrument (ἐργαλεῖον) λόγος	
Fourth Cause	τὸ δι' οὗ - for which	object (αἷτία)	goodness

As a glance at this scheme makes evident, and as the rest of the Philonic corpus affirms, for Philo the instrument of creation is the λόγος. Throughout his writings Philo declares that "God's shadow is His Word, which he made use of like an

<sup>68</sup>See the discussion on the λόγος as instrument in Hans-Friedrich Weiss, *Untersuchungen zur Kosmologie des hellenistischen und palästinischen Judentums*, TU 97 (Berlin, 1966), 269-72. Note also Thomas H. Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation*, The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 14 (Washington, 1983), 66-71, and Georgios D. Farandos, *Kosmos und Logos nach Philon*, 267-71.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. *Cher.* 127. For a discussion of the scheme, see David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 173. The origin of this prepositional scheme is uncertain although it probably originated with the Peripatetics (formal, material, efficient, final cause) and was later modified by the Platonic and Stoic traditions; cf. the discussions in Thomas H. Tobin, *The Creation of Man*, 66-68; Heinrich Dörrie, "Präpositionen und Metaphysik: Wechselwirkung zweier Prinzipienreihen", in: *idem, Platonica Minora* (Munich, 1976), 124-36.

instrument, and so made the world",<sup>70</sup> and that when God "was fashioning the world, He employed it [λόγος] as His instrument".<sup>71</sup> Philo differentiates consistently between God as the cause of creation and the λόγος as the instrument of creation. The reason for this difference lies in Philo's notion of God's absolute transcendence. His conception does not allow for another and equal principle to co-exist besides God; even more significant is that it is impossible for the incorporeal God to be in contact with corporeal things, and hence everything created. For Philo, God alone is the cause of creation and the λόγος his instrument.

A passage in which Philo uses the dative προνοία is *QG* 2:7. Following Plato's teaching (cf. *Timaeus* 73a) that the structure of the human body is dependent on the creator's providential design, Philo makes a statement to the effect that even a person's intestines are made by the providence of the creator.<sup>72</sup> Philo grossly allegorizes the biblical account (cf. Genesis 6:16) of Noah's construction of the ark with second and third-level decks.

But the intestines have been made second-storey and third-storey chambers by the providence of the Creator (τῆ τοῦ ζῳοπλάστου

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<sup>70</sup>*LA* 3:96: σκια θεοῦ δὲ ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ ἐστίν, ᾧ καθάπερ ὄργανῳ προσχρησάμενος ἔκοσμοποιεῖ. In *Spec.* 1:81, the λόγος is spoken of as the "image" of God through whom the world is being created (λόγος δ' ἐστὶν εἰκὼν θεοῦ, δι' οὗ σύμπας ὁ κόσμος ἐδημιουργεῖτο).

<sup>71</sup>*Mig.* 6: καὶ ὅτε ἔκοσμοπλάσσει χρησάμενος ὄργανῳ τούτῳ.

<sup>72</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 316, remarks that Philo's explicit reference to providence is an indication of his careful reading of the *Timaeus* because, although providence is a central theme in the dialogue as a whole, the term πρόνοια occurs only at 30b, 44c, and 73a. The last reference is the background to Philo's views in this text.

προνοία) for the preservation of created things. For if He had made straight receptacles of food from the stomach to the buttocks, something terrible might have happened.<sup>73</sup>

Should we interpret the phrase that the intestines were formed by providence of the creator (τῆ τοῦ ζωοπλαστοῦ προνοία) as Philo's identification of προνοία with the idea of the λόγος as the instrument of creation? Or else, is it possible that the phrase implies Philo's usual view that God's immanent activity, hence also the creation of the intestines, is carried out by the creative and providential power? An easy answer is impossible. The context of the text suggests that Philo is speaking of the most suitable design of the intestines in the human body, rather than the actual creation of the intestines. προνοία is thus more akin to the task of the Logos than the immanent activity of the powers. The fact that Philo employs the verb "made" in this text should not detract from this view. He employs it also when speaking of the Logos as instrument. In *LA* 3:96, to repeat this citation, he explains that "God's shadow is His Word, which he made use of like an instrument, and so made the world."

The only other parallel text dealing with the structure of the human body and providence is the passage *Spec.* 1:28 where Philo specifies that the five senses are most suitably located in the face. The reason is that "nature", an epithet for God, exercises forethought in all things (ἡ πάντα κορηθουμένη φύσις) including the placing of the senses in a person's face.<sup>74</sup> The intent of the text is again on the

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<sup>73</sup>*QG* 2:7.

<sup>74</sup>Although Philo does not utilize the term πρόνοια in this passage, the idea of providence is certainly in the foreground of his argument. Indeed, David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 266-7, suggests that the context of the argument points to Platonic

providential design of the senses in the face rather than the actual creation of these. In both texts (*QG* 2:7; *Spec.* 1:28), therefore, it seems plausible that Philo speaks of providence in analogy to the task of the Logos as the instrument of creation.

In *QG* 3:18, another text that contains a dative of the idea of providence, Philo exegetes the verse, "Why did not Sarah the wife of Abraham bear him children?" (Genesis 16:1). According to Philo, this is the literal meaning:

In order that the conceiving and bearing might not be so much through union with a man as through the providence<sup>75</sup> of God. For when a barren woman gives birth, it is not by way of generation, but the work of the divine power (θείας δυνάμεως ἔργον).<sup>76</sup>

The interpretation of this passage is less difficult because of the distinction Philo makes between the role of providence and the role of the divine power. The conception and bearing of Sarah is "through the providence of God", the actual birth "the work of the divine power." The distinction between providence and power is our interpretive clue. Providence, it seems, is the instrument in the sense that it signifies God's will to heal Sarah's barrenness. It may thus be characterized either as God's virtue, that is the transcendent aspect of providence, or as the instrument. The "work"

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teleology reminiscent of *Timaeus* 44c-45b, one of the passages in which Plato speaks explicitly of the προνοίας... θεῶν. Runia notes, however, that Philo could also have obtained the idea of the body's teleological design and providence from other philosophical sources. Cicero, for example, employs it *De Natura Deorum* 2:140 as a Stoic argument.

<sup>75</sup>Without giving a reason, Ralph Marcus suggests προνοία or ἐπιμελεία as the most original reading, rather than the ἐπιφροσύνη of the Greek fragment.

<sup>76</sup>*QG* 3:18. Sections of this passage are extant in a Greek fragment, cf. *Questions and Answers on Exodus*, LCL, supplement vol. 2, 208.

of the physiological aspects of conception and birth, however, is accomplished by an immanent divine power, which according to Philo's understanding of the divine powers can only mean the hierarchy of the creative, gracious and providential powers.

That Philo's interpretation of this verse depends on his correlating of God's goodness and his providential power may also be seen in another comment he made on the verse Genesis 16:1: "And so, if a centenarian and (a woman) of ninety years produce children, the element of ordinary event is removed, and only the divine power and grace clearly appear."<sup>77</sup> Here Philo employs the distinction between power and grace. The latter, as we saw, denotes the side of providence that belongs to God's transcendent nature, that is his goodness. It is thus possible that Philo understands the role of providence both on the level of God's transcendent nature, on the immanent level of the powers, and possibly, as *προνοία*, even as an instrument of creation.

There are two instances of the dative *προνοία* in the neglected fragment *De Deo*.<sup>78</sup> The first occurs in *Deo* 5. In this passage, Philo exegetes the verse "I will speak to you from above, from the propitiation, from the midst of the cherubim"

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<sup>77</sup>*QG* 3:56. Note the cosmological function of the powers in *Spec.* 4:187: "For He and His beneficent powers ever make it their business to transmute the faultiness of the worse wherever it exists and convert it to the better."

<sup>78</sup>Cf. one of the two studies of this fragment, Marguerite Harl, "Cosmologie grecque et représentations juives dans l'oeuvre de Philon d'Alexandrie", in: *Philon d'Alexandrie*. Colloques Nationaux du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, à Lyon du 11 au 15 Septembre 1966 (Paris, 1967), 194.

(Exodus 25:22), a verse which he interprets to represent God and his powers.

Abraham Terian kindly provided a translation from the Armenian for this section:<sup>79</sup>

And (Scripture) says that he speaks "from above," who (nonetheless) is in the midst, because the Self-existent has adorned [διοικοσμέω] all things through (his) word [λόγῳ], and through his providence [προνοία] they have become both articulate and rational. (Scripture) makes clear in whose midst he is, calling them "cherubim." One of them is consecratedly designated "the Creative Power" and is rightly called "God"; while the other (is designated) "the Ruling and Royal (Power)" (or) "Lord."<sup>80</sup>

Only in this text does Philo mention the ideas of the Logos, providence, and the powers. The ontological hierarchy is clear inasmuch as the Self-existent is above the Logos and the powers, and the Logos is above the powers. The statement that God made "all things through his word" refers to the notion of the λόγος<sup>81</sup> as the instrument of creation. But how does Philo think of the precise relation of providence to the Logos? The statement that through providence "they [things created by the Logos] have become both articulate and rational", suggests that in this instance providence functions also as an instrument of creation.

What is the meaning of the expression that providence made the things created by the Logos "articulate and rational?"<sup>82</sup> A possible answer could be in Philo's

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<sup>79</sup>Private communication.

<sup>80</sup>*De Deo* 5 (lines 57-62). The Greek words in square brackets are added from Folker Siegert's Greek retroversion from the Armenian.

<sup>81</sup>Cf. Folker Siegert, *De Deo*, 84-85.

<sup>82</sup>Folker Siegert, *De Deo*, 34, translates this sentence in this way: "... weil der Seiende durchs Wort das Universum ausgestaltet hat und dieses (seinerseits) durch seine Vorsehung sprechend und vernünftig geworden ist."

understanding of the *λόγος* in relation to the human being. In his dialogue *De Animalibus* and elsewhere<sup>83</sup> he distinguishes, following the Stoics, between man's *λόγος ἐνδιάθετος* and *λόγος προφορικός*. The first one corresponds to man's thinking faculty, the mind, the second to man's capability to verbalize thought, namely speech. The statement, therefore, that providence made some of the things created by the Logos rational and articulate applies only to human beings, as we shall see further in Chapter Five. The point of that statement is thus that providence functions as an instrument in respect to the providential design of man's capability to think and to act; its function is thus equivalent to the design of the intestines as part of the human body (cf. *QG* 2:7). This is not to suggest that Philo does not differentiate between Logos and providence. Yet it seems that the idea of providence is subsumed in the Logos' function as instrument of creation and has the specific task of making rational some of the things created by the Logos.

In *Deo* 12, Philo allegorizes the biblical narrative of Abraham's visitation by the three angels (cf. Genesis 18:2): "He [Abraham] lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men stood in front of him." Philo comments:

Do you see what magnificent accomplishment he affirms to Abraham? The Creator has the earth and the water and the air and the heaven extend from himself; he spreads them out above through his providence and lifts up the world as with guards [his powers]...<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Cf. *QE* 2:110, 111, 116; *Det.* 39-40, 66; *Conf.* 52.

<sup>84</sup>Translation by Abraham Terian. Folker Siegert, *De Deo*, 37, offers this translation: "Erde und Wasser und Luft und Himmel läßt der Schöpfer an sich hängen, spannt sie durch (seine) Vorsehung auf und hebt die Welt empor wie mit Wächtern: mit seinen Wächtern, den Kräften."

For Philo, the shaping and rational ordering of the universe (earth, water, air, heaven) is sometimes the task of wisdom,<sup>85</sup> more often of the Logos.<sup>86</sup> But in most cases, as also in *Deo* 6, the ordering of the universe is the function of the all-pervasive powers.<sup>87</sup> Because of the textual difficulties in the transmission of this text it is impossible to determine the original meaning of the term "spread out", the activity ascribed here to providence.<sup>88</sup> The context suggests that the function of providence lies in the plan and layout of the parts of the universe. Siegert proposes in his commentary on the term πρόνοια that the specific function of providence is to ensure the order of the cosmos (*Weltordnung*) and hence speaks of the idea of a "cosmic providence";<sup>89</sup> in this sense, the function of πρόνοια resembles that of an instrument of creation.

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<sup>85</sup>Cf. *Fuga* 109.

<sup>86</sup>Cf. especially *Fuga* 110, *QE* 2:120, *Plant.* 9-10. In the latter passage Philo states that because of the Logos's ordering of the disarrayed στοιχεῖα, "the universe may send forth a harmony like that of a masterpiece of literature". On the identification of wisdom and λόγος, see Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light*, 22-23, and Harry A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 258.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. *Conf.* 27, 137; *Mut.* 8, 23; *Heres* 166. On the powers' cosmic omnipresence and the possible Stoic background, cf. Harald Hegermann, *Die Vorstellung vom Schöpfungsmittler*, 58-59.

<sup>88</sup>Whether the original Greek text had the perfects ἀνατέτακε and ἤσκη is questionable because they are not characteristic of Philo's usual style, as David Runia observes, in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 43 (1989):401, in his review of Folker Siegert's edition of *De Deo*. In addition, whenever Philo speaks of God "extending" his powers throughout the universe he *never* employs the compound verb ἀνατείνω, but always τένω (cf. *Conf.* 136; *Post* 14; *LA* 1:37; *Deus* 77, 79; *Plant.* 9; *Ebr.* 106; *Mut.* 28; *Somn.* 1:70).

<sup>89</sup>Folker Siegert, *De Deo*, 135.

The final Philonic text which mentions *προνοία* is *Decal.* 58. To recall this text, Philo says that the genesis of the cosmos is the beginning of its destruction, "even though by the providence of God (*προνοία τοῦ πεποιηκότος*) it be made immortal." Is the dative to be understood as a dative of instrument in analogy to the Logos, or as a reference to the providential power? The first meaning is the more likely one. Since we concluded that the destruction of the cosmos is a matter of providence understood in parallel to the *will* of God (see above), then it is more likely that in this instance Philo thought of *προνοία* in terms of God's goodwill or grace toward the world, and thus as belonging to the mind of God which Philo usually describes with the term *λόγος*.

Does the analysis of the above texts lead to the conclusion that Philo perceives of the dative *προνοία* in analogy to the Logos as the instrument of creation? The answer must be a qualified yes. To show how Philo may think of providence as an instrument of creation, let us first review how he understands the Logos as an instrument of creation. In the previous chapter we said that Philo's doctrine of the Logos must be understood with reference to different levels. Runia speaks of three levels of the Logos. On the highest, transcendent level, the Logos is the mind of God, and on the lower immanent level, the Logos administers the cosmos with its attendant powers. Combining both of the levels on a second level is the Logos as the instrument of creation (this is the function epitomized in the prepositional scheme in *Cher.* 124-27, see above). Now concerning Philo's doctrine of providence, we have established that there is also a transcendent and an immanent aspect; the former is God's provident

nature, his virtue of being provident, the latter is his immanent gracious power, once called the providential power. But combining both of these aspects is the aspect of providence when described as participating in the providential design of the cosmos.

Level	Logos	Providence
Transcendent	Mind of God	God is provident
Instrument	Instrument of Creation	Instrument of Logos
Immanent	Administers the Powers	Gracious/Providential Power

By ascribing to providence the role of an instrument of creation we are not, however, suggesting that the ideas of Logos and providence are equivalent and may in fact be used interchangeably. It is more likely that when Philo speaks of providence as an instrument that he subordinates that function to the Logos as the chief instrument. It is perhaps in this way that we must understand Runia's view that "we must certainly regard the Logos as the agent of divine Providence".<sup>90</sup> Providence as an instrument of creation can be perceived as an aspect of the Logos's function as instrument of creation.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>*Philo and the Timaeus*, 242; so also 482, note 35. Wolfson argues (see chapter 2.3) that while in its second stage the Logos is the instrument of creation, in its third stage, the Logos "is the instrument of divine providence or of the preservation of the world." His view is unlikely (cf. *Cher.* 125) because on the Logos's third stage, providence is worked out by the divine powers, but it is not part of the providential design of the cosmos.

<sup>91</sup>Philo never assigns the task of exercising providence directly to the Logos. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 242, believes he does once in *Agr.* 51. But in that text only the Logos not providence is mentioned. The latter, arguably, may be deduced from the idea that the cosmos is in the "hand of God its King and Shepherd."

### 3.5 Conclusion: Providence and Creation

In Philo, the doctrine of providence is part of a theologically interpreted notion of cosmology. In the texts analyzed Philo's cosmological views reveal just as much about his underlying assumptions of God's nature as they reveal about technical details pertaining to his theory of cosmology. The doctrine of providence is in a sense the Achilles' heel of Philo's thought as a whole. For the idea of providence is inextricably linked to the concept of God as it is dependent on the theory of creation. In order for the world to have come into being there needs to be a creator and for it to exist continually there needs to be a providential maintainer. If there were no creation, Philo could hardly speak of divine providence, and were there no providence, it would be hard to make intelligible the perfection of the created order. Philo's theory of creation is therefore most appropriately expressed as *creatio continua*. Should God fail to be providentially active in the cosmos, the result would be the return of the ordered cosmos to primordial chaos. This would imperil not only Philo's doctrine of cosmology, but also his concept of God's goodness and the notion of providence.

Philo's view of the mutual dependence between his doctrine of providence and his concept of God comes close to the position of the Middle Platonist Atticus.<sup>92</sup> His theory of cosmology "began with an argument about *πρόνοια*."<sup>93</sup> According to his

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<sup>92</sup>For a general introduction to his thought, see John Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 247-58.

<sup>93</sup>Gregory Sterling, "Creatio Temporalis, Aeterna, vel Continua?", 27.

interpretation of the *Timaeus* 30a, Plato asserts the genesis of the cosmos ἵνα μὴ ἀποστερήσῃ τὸν κόσμον τῆς προνοίας ἀφείλε τὸ ἀγέννητον αὐτοῦ,<sup>94</sup> "in order that he might not rob the world of providence, he rejected its uncreatedness" (my translation). It is significant that Atticus *began* his deliberations on cosmology with an argument that safeguards the idea of providence. Primary is his assumption of God's providence, secondary but corresponding to this assumption, is his interest in formulating a theory of cosmology. Given Philo's theocentric thought as a whole, his primary assumption is that God is both creator and a providential maintainer; what is at stake, therefore, is to conceptualize a coherent theory of creation which does not imperil either the idea of God's creatorship and or the belief in his ongoing providence over the world.

We said that the doctrine of providence is in a sense the Achilles' heel of Philo's thought as a whole. We may characterize it in this way because in this doctrine converge two most important other doctrines: the concept of God and the theory of creation. By studying providence in a cosmological context Philo's idea of God comes also into sharper focus. God is the sole creator of this universe. Though being wholly transcendent in essence God designs the universe by his Logos, has the powers to bring it into being, and has the will to keep it always ordered by his providence. By thus creating the cosmos, humanity can be assured that it will not perish. The concept of providence is nothing else but the articulation how God's goodness originated in the beginning with the createdness of the cosmos and never abates because of the

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<sup>94</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 27-28.

gracious dealing of God with both nature and human affairs. The doctrine of providence thus magnifies the creator rather than the creature and is "of all incentives to piety the most beneficial and the most indispensable" (*Opif.* 9).

## Chapter Four

### Providence and Astral Fatalism

Since Plato,<sup>1</sup> the Greeks' discussion of the doctrine of providence was typically interwoven with the two questions of astral fatalism and theodicy (see below Chapter Five). Like the Greeks, Philo deals with these issues in relation to his theology of providence.<sup>2</sup> Externally, the issue of astral determinism is imposed on him because of its widespread prevalence in the Hellenistic world,<sup>3</sup> including his native Alexandria,<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>On Plato's introduction of the themes of the goodness of the demiurge, theodicy, and the divinity of the stars in relation to the providential design of the universe, cf. Myrto Dragona-Monachou, "Divine Providence in the Philosophy of the Empire", 4421.

<sup>2</sup>This is the case, for example, in Philo's treatise *De Providentia* 1 in which he discusses the issue of astral determinism in the passage 1:77-88 (for an examination of this text, see below 4.3).

<sup>3</sup>For a concise survey and presentation of the issue, see Francesca Rochberg-Halton, "Astrology in the Ancient Near East", in: *ABD*, vol. 1, 504-507; also F. Struntz, "Astrologie", in: *RGG*, vol. 1, 664-66; O. Rühle, "Astralreligion", in: *RGG*, vol. 1, 662-64.

and could for this reason hardly be ignored by him. Yet internally, and far more important to the coherence of his thought, Philo perceives of the idea of astral fatalism as a radical challenge to his concept of God, the idea of causation and the postulate of human freedom. These Philonic concepts stand in such stark contrast to the main assumptions of astral fatalism--namely, the ideas of the stars' divinity and their supposed causal powers over human affairs--that any admission of these assumptions would jeopardize Philo's structure of theology as a whole including the doctrine of providence.<sup>5</sup>

To comprehend Philo's reasoning--that is to say, his assumptions, arguments and conclusions--behind his rejection of the idea of astral fatalism, we shall be guided in our examination by the primary text on the subject, the passage *De Migratione Abrahami* 176-195. The context of this passage is Philo's allegorical interpretation of Abraham's migration from Chaldea through Haran to the land of Israel. The following quotation outlines Philo's programmatic understanding of the issue.

The Chaldeans have the reputation of having, in a degree quite beyond that of other peoples, elaborated astronomy (ἀστρονομία) and the casting of nativities (γενεθλιαλογική). They have set up a harmony (ἀρμόζω) between things on earth and things on high, between heavenly

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<sup>4</sup>The classic study of the ancient city of Alexandria is that of Peter M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1972). For a discussion of the origin and prevalence of astrology in Alexandria, cf. vol. 1, 434-44.

<sup>5</sup>The seminal discussions of Philo's views on astronomy and astral fatalism are Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars. A History of an Idea*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, 1991), 63-75; Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo of Alexandria*, Monographs of the Hebrew Union College 7 (Cincinnati, 1982), 15-24; David Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque* (Amsterdam, 1973), 81-95.

things and earthly. Following as it were the laws of musical proportion, they have exhibited the most perfect symphony (συμφωνία) of the universe produced by a concord (κοινωνία) and sympathetic affinity (συμπαθεία) between its parts, separated indeed in space, but housemates in kinship. These men imagined that this visible universe was the only thing in existence, either being itself God or containing God in itself as the soul of the whole (ἡ τῶν ὅλων ψυχή). And they made Fate (εἰμαρμένη) and Necessity (ἀνάγκη) divine, thus filling human life with much impiety (ἀσεβεία), by teaching that apart from phenomena there is no originating cause (αἴτιον) of anything whatever, but that the circuits of sun and moon and of the other heavenly bodies determine for every being in existence both good things and their opposites. Moses, however, while he seems to confirm the sympathetic affinity of its parts displayed throughout the universe, is at variance with their opinion concerning God.<sup>6</sup>

These comments reveal how Philo conceives of the Chaldeans' main assumptions and arguments regarding the matters of astronomy and astral fatalism. The aim of this chapter is to discuss these assumptions, in three main sections, and to show how each contributes to Philo's rejection of the notion of astral determinism.

First, we shall examine, in section 4.1, the meaning of and the distinction between Philo's statements that the Chaldeans practice both astronomy and the casting of nativities. Second, we shall explore, in section 4.2, why only the casting of nativities, with its underlying assumption that the universe is god or contains god as its soul, is critically at variance with Philo's theological premise of the utter transcendence of God. And third, in section 4.3, we shall discuss—drawing in addition to the above text also on the important passage *Prov.* 1:77-88—how the assumption that heavenly bodies determine every person's fate stands in direct opposition to Philo's ethical premise that every person is a free moral agent.

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<sup>6</sup>*Mig.* 179-80 (translation slightly altered).

## 4.1 Astronomy and Astral Fatalism

In *Mig.* 178, Philo ascribes to the Chaldeans the practice of "astronomy (ἀστρονομία) and the casting of nativities (γενεθλιαλογική)." As we shall see, the first term represents what Philo considers with the Greeks the encyclical discipline of astronomy, the second what he rejects as the idea of horoscopic astrology. The distinction Philo thus makes between these two ideas is pivotal for understanding why he regards the discipline of astronomy as a legitimate undertaking, but the casting of nativities as an illegitimate practice which is wholly irreconcilable with his own theological premises.

### 4.1.1 The Discipline of Astronomy

In the Philonic corpus, the term ἀστρονομία occurs eight times. It is a somewhat problematic term because it can denote two opposite things; positively it denotes the encyclical study of astronomy<sup>7</sup> and negatively the idea of what Philo considers as the inauthentic use of astronomy, namely, the peril of astral fatalism.<sup>8</sup> In *Mig.* 179, Philo

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<sup>7</sup>In *Congr.* 11, Philo introduces the term ἀστρονομία as one of the encyclical disciplines and in *LA* 1:57, Philo introduces it as a theoretical science (θεωρητικὴ τέχνη) in contrast to the practical sciences.

<sup>8</sup>In *Heres* 97, *Congr.* 49, *Somn.* 1:161 and *Abr.* 77, the term ἀστρονομία is used in the pejorative sense of astral determinism; in *Abr.* 69 it is not clear whether the term has a positive or negative connotation. The verb ἀστρονομέω occurs three times (*Congr.* 50, *Somn.* 1:53 and 54) in the positive sense of a discipline, and the adjective ἀστρονομικός in a negative sense once in *Virt.* 212.

To express the idea of astral determinism, Philo does not, however, employ the noun ἀστρολογία and only once (cf. *Abr.* 82) the adjective ἀστρολογικός in a pejorative sense. He employs several other terms that denote both the authentic study of astronomy and the inauthentic application of such a study. The most frequently

charges the meaning of the term ἀστρονομία in good Greek fashion as one of the seven encyclical disciplines, the discipline or science of astronomy.<sup>9</sup> This is evident from his description following the term itself and from his understanding of the notion of astronomy elsewhere in his writings.

Regarding the latter, the Philonic corpus as a whole, Philo draws on several philosophical traditions to frame his understanding of astronomy as an encyclical discipline.<sup>10</sup> He explains in broad terms that astronomers seek to understand "the

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used of these terms is Χαλδαῖοι and cognates (Χαλδαῖοι occurs 23 times, Χαλδαϊκός 16 times, and χαλδαῖζω seven times). As Chan-Kok Wong, ("Philo's Use of Chaldaioi", in: *SPhA* 4 (1992), 10) has shown, Philo indiscriminately employs this term when referring to the idea of the study of astronomy and the idea of astral determinism. The same double meaning characterizes also the terms μετεωρολογικός (occurs seven times), μετεωρολογία (occurs twice; cf. *Ebr.* 92; *Heres* 97), and μαθηματικός (occurs five times). The implication of Philo's terminological imprecision is that the interpreter must discern the contextual and conceptual nuances underlying words such as ἀστρονομία, μετεωρολογικός, and μαθηματικός, rather than focusing strictly on the semantic analysis of the term itself.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. *Congr.* 11 and the discussion by Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo*, 19-21. On one occasion, Philo calls astronomy "the queen of the sciences" (*Congr.* 50).

<sup>10</sup>For an account of Philo's indebtedness to the Greeks, see Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 64-65. Philo adapted in particular the following views to his idea of astronomy. The idea that the earth is the centre of the cosmos surrounded by seven planets and the star-filled fixed sphere (cf. *Mos.* 1:12; *Conf.* 5; *Cher.* 22) which marks (as in Plato's *Phaedrus*) the boundary between the cosmos and the purely intelligible world of divinity; the idea that the revolutions of the stars are brought about by the movement of ether (as in Aristotle's *De Caelo*); the idea that the sun leads the other planets, the moon marks the division between air and ether and is seen as a mixture of "ether-like and air-like substance" (as in Stoic thought; cf. *Somn.* 1:145 (= *SVF* 2:674)). On Philo's failure to present a cogent view of these matters, Scott, 74, notes that "the cosmological inconsistencies which were present individually in Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoa come to a crescendo in Philo, and this happens in part because he is not able to criticize and correct his teachers, and because he has sometimes combined his sources in a clumsy way."

revolutions and circlings of the stars"<sup>11</sup>, how the sun "regulates the seasons of the year... [and how] the moon, its phases, its waning and waxing, and the movements of the other stars"<sup>12</sup> impact life on earth. Philo even includes within the discipline of astronomy,<sup>13</sup> for reasons we shall discuss below, the study of the signs of the zodiac (see 4.1.2) and the view of the divinity of the stars (see 4.2.3).

Regarding the former, the definition of astronomy in *Mig.* 179-180, Philo ascribes to the Chaldeans the notion of the "harmony between things on earth and things on high, between heavenly things and earthly." The idea that there is harmony between heaven and earth is already present in Plato,<sup>14</sup> but the reference to the term *συμπάθεια* in this context suggests that Philo has in mind the Stoic notion of cosmic sympathy.<sup>15</sup> For both Plato and the Stoics, the notion of cosmic sympathy is a matter of the discipline of astronomy because of their understanding of the inexorable laws of causality.<sup>16</sup> For the Stoics, in particular, the possibility of forecasting events is

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<sup>11</sup>*QG* 3:43; cf. *Gig.* 62.

<sup>12</sup>*Mut.* 67, cf. *Spec.* 2:230.

<sup>13</sup>For a concise discussion of what constitutes the Philonic understanding of the encyclical discipline of astronomy, see Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo*, 22-23.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Matthias Baltes, *Die Weltenstehung des Platonischen Timaios*, vol. 1, 36, on *Timaeus* 32c, 56c. On Philo's indebtedness to Plato's *Timaeus* in matters regarding astronomy, cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 225-6.

<sup>15</sup>See Colson's remarks in *Philo*, LCL, vol. 4, 565. In its Stoic form the argument about cosmic sympathy is found in Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* 9:78 (= *SVF* 2:1013). The argument entails that if the cosmos is one it must be made of the same elements throughout which, it is implied, bring about cosmic *συμπάθεια*.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Heinrich Dörrie, "Der Begriff 'Pronoia'", 66.

rooted in the axiom that "all events are causally related to one another, and therefore anything that happens must in theory be a sign of some subsequent effect."<sup>17</sup> Since the harmony between cause and effect permeates the entire universe, whatever happens in the heavens can be thought of as having an effect on earth.

Philo's belief that Moses is in agreement with the idea of cosmic sympathy (cf. *Mig.* 180) reflects of course his own position that *ἀστρονομία* is an authentic discipline when it is understood as a *natural* science. That is to say, as long as astronomy has as its central object of inquiry the knowledge of the circuits and sympathy of celestial phenomena, it does not conflict with Philo's concept that God is the creator and providential maintainer of the harmony between heaven and earth. But once the discipline of astronomy is construed by ascribing to the heavenly bodies *supernatural* powers over human fate, the problem looms large. And such is precisely Philo's problem with the notion underlying the term *γενεθλιαλογική*.

#### 4.1.2 The Casting of Nativities

Philo attributes to the Chaldeans also the casting of nativities (*γενεθλιαλογική*), a term that occurs only twice in the Philonic corpus, in *Mig.* 178 and 194. In the latter passage, Philo defines the term as part of his allegory of Abraham's migration from

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<sup>17</sup>A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 212. Peter M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, vol. 2, 435, speaks of "the marriage of astrology with Stoic philosophy", respectively the ideas of an inflexible fate and cosmic sympathy. But one of the Middle Stoics, Panaetius, rejected the idea of astrology altogether while upholding his belief in divine providence; cf. Long, 212.

Chaldea to Israel. To reach the goal of his migration, the knowledge of God, Abraham had first to

relinquish astrology (γενεθλιαλογική), which betrayed it [the human mind] into the belief that (1) the universe is the primal God, instead of being the handiwork of the primal God, and that (2) the courses and movements of the constellations are the causes (αίτια) of bad and good fortune to mankind.<sup>18</sup>

Colson's translation of the term γενεθλιαλογική as "astrology" lacks precision and rather veils than reveals its true meaning. The proper meaning behind this term is more precisely that of "horoscopic astrology" or "personal horoscopy", the idea of astral determinism based on one's personal horoscope. This meaning can be determined from the correspondence between its usage in the Hellenistic world and from Philo's own description of the term.

According to one scholar, the Hellenistic idea of "genethliological [γενεθλιαλογική] or horoscopic astrology stems from the notion that the positions of the planets at the moment of an individual's birth directly influence the future course of that person's life."<sup>19</sup> The origin of this understanding is found in the late Babylonian ideas of "the zodiac and the derivation of personal predictions from celestial phenomena," two ideas, "which may be seen as the rudiments of what the Greeks developed as personal horoscopy (genethliology)."<sup>20</sup> Although the Greeks took the signs of the zodiac as the essential instrument of the horoscope, it is plain

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<sup>18</sup>*Mig.* 194.

<sup>19</sup>Francesca Rochberg-Halton, "Astrology in the Ancient Near East", in: *ABD*, vol. 1, 506.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 505.

from Philo's description of the term γενεθλιαλογικῆ that he takes issue only with its underlying theological and ethical premises, and not with the powers ascribed to the signs of the zodiac.<sup>21</sup> Philo articulates his real objection very explicitly when he remarks that "we should not allow the movements of the stars to haunt mankind. Now, the so-called zodiacal circle itself is derived from Providence, as we implied in the preceding discussions."<sup>22</sup> Philo's view of the problem is made clear here. As everything else in the universe, the stars of the zodiacal circle owe their existence to God's providence. They are thus part of the great design of cosmic sympathy and hence of what Philo considers the discipline of astronomy. The issue is that Chaldeans

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<sup>21</sup>Philo refers to the zodiac (ζῳδιακός) eight times in his Greek corpus, always as the object of astronomical inquiry rather than the idea of the horoscope (for a discussion of zodiacal circle and horoscope, see below 4.1.2). In the passage *Somn.* 2:112-13, Philo remarks that "the students of the upper world (μετεωρολογικοί) tell us that the Zodiac, the largest of the circles of heaven, is formed into constellations out of twelve signs, called *zodia* or "creatures" (ζῳδια) from which also it takes its name" (cf. *Fuga* 184, *Opif.* 112, *Mos.* 2:126). In all these passages, Philo gives no hint that the zodiacal circle possesses causal powers over human destiny. The same is true in *QE* 2:109 and *Spec.* 1:87 where Philo compares the 12 stones of the high priest's breast plate to the 12 signs of the zodiac, which are "to remind us of divine beings (θεῶν φύσεων)" (*Heres* 176).

There is one more reference to the Zodiac in the passage *Somn.* 2:6. Here Philo interprets the saying that "the sun and the moon and eleven stars worshipped me [Joseph]" (Genesis 37:9) and says that it "has to do with the zodiac." What the reference to the zodiac implies Philo does not say except that the dream "incurs well-merited displeasure" (*Somn.* 2:7). Since Philo considers the zodiac as a legitimate object of astronomical study, we might surmise that his displeasure is rooted in the undue worship rendered to the signs of the zodiac instead of God.

<sup>22</sup>*Prov.* 1:88. Contrary to his own claim, Philo does not discuss the issue of the origin of the zodiac anywhere else in the treatise *De Providentia* or in the rest of his corpus.

and Greeks endow these zodiacal signs with powers that neither they nor other stars possess, namely, the powers over human destiny by means of their constellations.

That the premise of fatalism is indeed Philo's main problem with the expression *γενεθλιαλογική* is further evident in his remarks in *Mig.* 178 and 194. In both instances he notes that the Chaldeans identify astral constellations as the causes (*αίτια*) which determine for every person both good and evil fortunes. Philo's main concern is thus with the premise that the constellations of the stars are said to have causal powers which influence human destiny. In other words, Philo makes a distinction between the discipline of astronomy (ie. the objective study of planetary constellations) and the illegitimate conclusions derived from such study (ie. that constellations have causal powers over human affairs). Philo attacks therefore only what he conceives of as "the *perversion* of astronomical science",<sup>23</sup> which materializes when the scientific facts of the observation of the heavenly movements are *interpreted* to possess causal powers which determine the fate of a person's life. The "perversion" consists in drawing erroneous theological conclusions from astronomical facts, thus turning science (*ἀστρονομία*) into superstition (*γενεθλιαλογική*).

Essentially, the notion of astral determinism raises two fundamental problems for Philo's thought. The first problem is an attack on his theological conviction of the utter transcendence of God, the second one is a challenge to his ethical premise of a person's freedom in making morally responsible decisions. Our aim in 4.2 and 4.3 is

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<sup>23</sup> Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo*, 17.

to draw the lines that separate Philo from the theological and ethical premises implied in astral determinism.

## **4.2 Philo's Concept of God and the Idea of Astral Fatalism**

Philo's comment in *Mig.* 180 that Moses is at variance with the Chaldeans' "opinion concerning God" encapsulates the hermeneutical key by which Philo judges and finally rejects the idea of astral fatalism, namely, the concept of God. Because of the theocentric premise underlying his thought as a whole, all facets of Philo's thought stand or fall in relation to the concept of God. As we saw in Chapter One, Philo conceives of God as the utterly transcendent being to whom no other principle can be equal, either logically or ontologically. The consequence of Philo's theological position is that it is irreconcilably at odds with the premises implied in astral fatalism in three ways. We shall first examine in section 4.2.1 how Philo's theology conflicts with the idea that God is contained in or is himself the soul of the universe. Second, in section 4.2.2 we shall comment on Philo's rejection that there exist other divine causes besides God, and third, in section 4.2.3, we shall discuss the issue of the divinity and worship of the stars.

### **4.2.1 God's Transcendence and Incorporeality**

The first step in relinquishing horoscopic astrology (*γενεθλιαλογικη*) is, to repeat Philo's words in *Mig.* 194, to abandon the view that the cosmos is the primal God

instead of the handiwork of the primal God (ὁ πρῶτος θεός).<sup>24</sup> In *Mig.* 179 and 181, Philo remarks likewise that those who practice γενεθλιαλογική believe falsely that the cosmos is itself God, but then adds, as a second point, the equally false view that the cosmos contains God as the soul of the world. Although his official attack is directed against the Chaldeans, these views represent the heart of Stoic materialism. According to Diogenes Laertius (7:137), the Stoics generally employed the term κόσμος in the sense "of God himself"<sup>25</sup> and the idea that the cosmos contains God as its world-soul<sup>26</sup> can be traced to Cleanthes who employed the expression ἡ τοῦ κόσμου ψυχή.<sup>27</sup> Chrysippus, an Early Stoic, bears witness to both ideas when he calls "the world itself a god, and also the all-pervading world-soul."<sup>28</sup> The Stoics hold, moreover, that the soul of the world "is also perfect intelligence and wisdom, which they entitle God, and is a sort of 'providence' knowing the things that fall within its province, governing especially the heavenly bodies, and then those things on earth that concern mankind."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>In *Abr.* 69, Philo says that the Chaldeans "concluded that the world itself was God, thus profanely likening the created to the Creator."

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1:37 (also 3:40) who attributes the view to Cleanthes. On Philo, cf. *Heres* 97; *Congr.* 49.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. *SVF* 2:774.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. *SVF* 1:532.

<sup>28</sup>Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1:39.

<sup>29</sup>Cicero, *Academica* 1:29. In addition to *Mig.* 179-81, Philo employs the idea of the world soul when he cites other sources (cf. *Aet.* 47, 50, 73, 84; *Somn.* 2:2; *Prov.* 1:33, 40, 45), but prefers to speak of the divine Logos (cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 204).

The view that the cosmos is God and that the cosmos contains God as its soul reveals the Stoics' main theological assumption. Stoic philosophy is based on the assumption that God is immanent in matter, a position which is in direct opposition to Philo's fundamental premise of God's utter transcendence. But Philo objects to this Stoic identification of God as a *material* principle or as the world-immanent reason or as providence not so much because it is Stoic, but because it undercuts his understanding of the *transcendent* nature of God. Runia comments that Philo opposes "the fact that in its theology the Stoa makes no distinctions between... God, Logos, cosmic νοῦς, cosmic ψυχή, providence, fate, πνεῦμα."<sup>30</sup> Against the Stoic identification of God with these ideas, all of which are embedded in Stoic materialism, stands Philo's conviction that God is distinct from these ideas and transcendent above the created order.<sup>31</sup> Precisely because God is postulated as being transcendent above matter, as we saw in Chapter One, God cannot be said to be the cosmos itself or its substance. The premise of God's utter transcendence leads, moreover, to the conclusion that God cannot be the soul of the cosmos.<sup>32</sup> For, as we concluded in Chapter Three, God is not immanently involved in the created cosmos in a direct manner.

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<sup>30</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 204.

<sup>31</sup>Philo's description of God as ὁ πρῶτος θεός in *Mig.* 194 is probably an attempt to emphasize the uniqueness of God. The adjective πρῶτος positively characterizes God as "primary, above all" in terms of divine essence.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 345-47. Wolfson thinks that Philo equates the ideas that God is the mind or the soul of the universe only to indicate that God is the incorporeal ruler of the universe.

#### 4.2.2 Divine Causation

The second step in relinquishing horoscopic astrology (γενεθλιαλογική), is to forsake the opinion that "the courses and movements of the constellations are the causes (αίτια) of bad and good fortune to mankind."<sup>33</sup> Because the Chaldeans start from the assumption that apart from the circuits of planetary motion "there is no originating cause of anything whatever",<sup>34</sup> they ascribe "to the world powers of action which it [a person's weak mind] regarded as causes"<sup>35</sup> and identify these causes with "Fate (είμαρμένη) and Necessity (άνόγκη)."<sup>36</sup> Philo articulates the relation between the ideas of cause, fate and necessity even more clearly in *Heres* 301 when he recapitulates that [those who have a "weak mind" charge that] Moses "represents fate (είμαρμένη) and necessity (άνόγκη) as the cause (αίτια) of all events".<sup>37</sup>

The Chaldean view that fate and necessity are divine causes is altogether incompatible with Philo's notion of God. For Philo, God alone is the cause of all things, and hence, fate and necessity cannot be thought of as divine causal powers. Philo's attack on astral determinism is a rejection of ascribing to planetary

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<sup>33</sup>*Mig.* 194. For a discussion of the Greek idea of good and bad powers in heaven, cf. Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 76-103.

<sup>34</sup>*Mig.* 179.

<sup>35</sup>*Mut.* 16.

<sup>36</sup>*Mig.* 179.

<sup>37</sup>The idea that fate and necessity are divine is a reference to the common Stoic thought that "God is one and the same with Reason and Fate (είμαρμένη)" (Diogenes Laertius 7:135). The term άνόγκη is used by Plato but replaced by the Stoics with the term είμαρμένη; see Heinrich Dörrie, "Der Begriff 'Pronoia'", 69-70.

constellations powers of causation that only God possesses. Philo denies that astral constellations have powers which cause either good or evil things to happen in a person's life. This is apparent, for example, in the way in which he counters the charge that Moses divinizes fate and necessity and makes them the causes of all things.<sup>38</sup> "As a philosopher and interpreter of God", says Philo, Moses "understood that causes have their sequence, connexion and interplay, [but] he did not ascribe the causation (αἰτία) of events to these subsidiary factors."<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Moses is said to espouse the view that "the constellations or their [the stars'] revolutions are not the primary causes (τὰ πρῶτα αἰτία) of the things that happen to men."<sup>40</sup> Philo does not mean to suggest that the constellations of heavenly bodies do not have any influence at all. That they do influence the created order, and in this way also human life, is clear from Philo's definition of astronomy as an encyclical discipline. What he wants to say is that stellar constellations are not the primary causes<sup>41</sup> over human affairs; for ultimately there is only one primary cause, God.

Philo explicitly connects the recognition of God as primary cause with the idea of rejecting astral fatalism. He portrays Abraham as having recognized God as the "one Cause above all (ἐν αἰτίῳ τὸ ἀνωτάτω), and that it exercises providence (προνοέω) for

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<sup>38</sup>Cf. *Heres* 300.

<sup>39</sup>*Heres* 300-301; cf. *QG* 3:43.

<sup>40</sup>*Mig.* 181.

<sup>41</sup>For a discussion of the significance of Philo's distinction between primary and secondary causes, see below section 5.3.2.

the world and all that is therein."<sup>42</sup> Philo's point is that Abraham, "a Chaldean by birth, the son of an astrologer"<sup>43</sup> left the impious ways of astral religion and came to believe in God as the creator and providential administrator of the cosmos. For Philo, God is the "Maker of all (ποιητής τῶν ὅλων)"<sup>44</sup> by his providence. The entire universe is designed and preserved by God's providential activity, both the celestial and terrestrial realms. Philo spells out very clearly the importance of God's providential activity in the summation of his discourse on astral determinism in the treatise *De Providentia*.

We should not allow the movements of the stars to haunt mankind. Now, the so-called zodiacal circle itself is derived from Providence, as we implied in the preceding discussions. Providence awes by means of these stars; these created beings do her biddings, these recipients which take the cause of their genesis from another. Providence is the cause of all in all. She is the one of whom existence and being are born; in fact, those that are created acknowledge the Creator.<sup>45</sup>

Philo offers a clear reason for rejecting astral fatalism when he says that "providence is the cause of all in all" and elsewhere he puts the matter succinctly: "Just then as the sun and moon have come into being through the action of providence (προνοία) so too have all the heavenly bodies (τὰ ἐν οὐρανῷ πάντα)."<sup>46</sup> Everything, therefore, that is created by God is under the administration of his providence. Because

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<sup>42</sup>*Virt.* 216.

<sup>43</sup>*Virt.* 212.

<sup>44</sup>*Virt.* 213.

<sup>45</sup>*Prov.* 1:88 (translation Abraham Terian).

<sup>46</sup>*Prov.* 2:52 LCL.

"everything" includes things terrestrial and celestial, Philo implicitly rejects the Aristotelian view that providence is not operative in the sublunar realm.<sup>47</sup> The revolutions of the stars, the signs of the zodiac that make up the notion of the horoscope, therefore, cannot have causal powers over human destiny. Ultimately all celestial bodies and their movements are caused by the providence of God who, as Philo asserts in *Virt.* 216, is the one cause (ἐν ἄκρῳ) above all.

#### 4.2.3 The Divinity of the Stars

It is appropriate to end our discussion about Philo's concept of God vis-à-vis the concept of god presupposed in astral fatalism with the issue of the divinity of the stars. This issue is important for two reasons. On the one hand, Chaldeans and Greeks deduce the causal powers of the stars' constellation from their belief of the stars' inherent divinity. Because the stars are seen as heavenly gods, they are believed to possess powers over human destiny. The stars' divinity thus functions as the foundation for the notion of astral determinism. On the other hand, Philo, too, speaks of the divine nature of the stars in several places in his writings. But unlike Chaldeans and Greeks, he does not draw the conclusion that, therefore, the stars must possess causal powers over human affairs. The question is what Philo means when he speaks of the divinity of the stars. To state the answer first, whatever he says about the stars' divinity, ultimately his position is that "the stars are distinctly inferior to God, who is

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<sup>47</sup>Cf. Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 65.

above heaven."<sup>48</sup> Philo "refuses to put anything (even the stars) on the same level as God."<sup>49</sup> In short, how can Philo's concept of the utter transcendence of God be reconciled with his recognition of the stars' divinity?

Philo's view of the divinity of the stars follows his philosophic predecessors in many respects. Plato, for example, thinks of the stars as living beings who are divine and eternal (ζῶα θεῖα ὄντα καὶ ἀίδια) and possess intelligence (φρόνησις)<sup>50</sup> and Aristotle considers the stars as possessing life (cf. *De Caelo* 292a) while the Stoics<sup>51</sup> presume that the fixed stars are a "mighty host of visible gods whose blessedness from of old has been recognized."<sup>52</sup> With "those who have made philosophy their study", Philo regards the stars likewise as "living creatures (ζῶα), but of a kind entirely composed of Mind (νοερά)."<sup>53</sup> In *Gig.* 7, he explains in more detail that just as the earth has living beings, so likewise are the stars the living beings of the universe. For the stars, he says, "are souls divine (ψυχὰι θεῖαι) and without blemish throughout... each of them is mind (νοῦς) in its purest form." (*Gig.* 8). Taken

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<sup>48</sup>Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 74.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. *Timaeus* 40a-b; cf. *Republic* 508a; *Laws* 821b, 899b. On Philo's dependence on Plato in matters of astronomy and astrology, cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 226.

<sup>51</sup>On the Stoics' belief in the divinity of the stars, see Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 3:39-40, "but that gods should lose their indestructibility is impossible."

<sup>52</sup>*Aet.* 46. Philo's comments are part of his rejection of the Stoic dogma of the periodic conflagration and palingenesis of the world. For a discussion of this issue in relation to the notion of providence, see above 131-5.

<sup>53</sup>*Plant.* 12.

together, these passages show Philo's refusal to ascribe to the stars a kind of divinity that is equal to the transcendent nature of God himself. The designation of the stars as being "visible (αἰσθητός) gods" limits their divinity.<sup>54</sup> They are visible because they are perceptible by the senses, they can be seen,<sup>55</sup> but in his transcendence God is invisible. This puts the stars on a lower ontological level than God in his transcendence. Philo deems the stars divine<sup>56</sup> only inasmuch as they consist of a noetic substance and have thus the most God-like nature of all created beings. That is to say, in relation to God, they may be considered the most divine of created things, but they are not divine in an absolute sense that would rival the divinity of their creator and call into question monotheism, the pillar of Philonic orthodoxy.

Wolfson is reluctant to recognize that Philo would even hold the view of the stars's divinity and all too quickly dismisses the issue by arguing that Philo is carelessly rehearsing the view of his source.<sup>57</sup> It is questionable, however, whether

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<sup>54</sup>In *Congr.* 50 heaven, the best of created things, is sense-perceptible. In *Opif.* 27 Philo justifies the temporal priority of the creation of heaven because it is "both best of created things and made from the purest of all that is, seeing that it was destined to be the most holy dwelling-place of manifest and visible gods." In *Opif.* 29 the nature of heaven is incorporeal (ἀσώματος).

<sup>55</sup>Plato, *Timaeus* 40d, speaks of the stars as the "visible and generated gods (περὶ θεῶν ὁρατῶν καὶ γεννητῶν)."

<sup>56</sup>H. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 365, remarks about Philo's statement (in *Gig.* 8) that stars "are souls divine (ψυχὰι θεῖαι)", that the term "divine" is used by Philo in the special sense of "imperishable". Philo employs the term in the same sense in the saying (*LA* 2:95) that the soul has two offsprings, "one divine (θεῖον), the other perishable (φθαρτόν)." We can add that Plato (*Timaeus* 41c), too, understands the term θεῖον in the sense of "immortal" (ἀθάνατος) in his description of heavenly beings.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 363.

Philo would be indecisive "on such a momentous issue."<sup>58</sup> A much more balanced position on this momentous issue is that of Goodenough who supports his position with an analysis of the passage *Spec.* 1:13-20.<sup>59</sup> In short, Goodenough holds the view that Philo presumes the stars to have a divine nature, but with a major qualification. Philo qualifies his belief in the stars' divinity by limiting their powers to the realm of the created order but not over human destiny.

In this passage *Spec.* 1:13-20, the Philonic position may be outlined as follows. In the context of the exegesis of the first commandment of the decalogue, Philo raises the issue of astral fatalism with the aim to refute the thesis that "the sun and moon and the other stars were gods with absolute powers (εἶναι θεοὺς αὐτοκράτορας)" and are responsible for "the causation of all events."<sup>60</sup> According to Moses, says Philo, the planets do not have "unconditional (ἀντεξουσίους) powers."<sup>61</sup> Now Goodenough's interpretation of these statements stresses the point that the stars are subordinate to God because they are not omnipotent as God himself is. They lack "absolute power", that is "autocratic power" (αὐτοκράτεια), which means "self-originating power. The power of all created beings, including even that of the universe, is not self-originating, but is derivative from the One."<sup>62</sup> For Philo, the

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<sup>58</sup>Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo*, 18.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. Erwin Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo*, 82-83.

<sup>60</sup>*Spec.* 1:13.

<sup>61</sup>*Spec.* 1:14, so also 1:19.

<sup>62</sup>Erwin Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo*, 83.

fact of the stars' createdness entails that they possess less power than their creator. Specifically, although they have some power over the created order, they do not have power over human destiny. Just as important, the stars' createdness also curtails the degree of their divinity to the extent that they must be seen as existing on an ontological level below God. And precisely because they have a divinity inferior to that of God, the stars are not to be worshipped.

Philo finds support for his view that planetary worship is forbidden in the Torah. He cites Deuteronomy 4:19, the verse saying that upon the contemplation of the heavenly bodies one should "not go astray and worship them." Philo comments about this injunction that "the acceptance of the heavenly bodies as gods [is] a going astray or wandering",<sup>63</sup> and also that those who support the worship of stars "have wandered infinitely far in supposing that they [the stars] alone are god."<sup>64</sup> If, then, the stars are not worthy of worship, the only legitimate road on which to proceed is

to give honour to the Immaterial, the Invisible, the Apprehended by the understanding alone, who is not only God of gods (ὅς οὐ μόνον θεός θεῶν), whether perceived by sense or by mind, but also the Maker of all. And if anyone renders the worship due to the Eternal, the Creator, to a created being... he must stand recorded as infatuated and guilty of impiety (ἀσεβεία) in the highest degree.<sup>65</sup>

Although Philo acknowledges the stars' divinity he refuses to concede that they are worthy of being worshipped when compared to the transcendent God of the Bible.

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<sup>63</sup>*Spec.* 1:15.

<sup>64</sup>*Spec.* 1:16.

<sup>65</sup>*Spec.* 1:20. In *Congr.* 49 Philo polemicizes against those who honour "the created before the creator, and the world before God"; so also *Heres* 99.

The contrast between creator and creature is too stark. Only ὁ θεὸς θεῶν is worthy of worship, who alone is the eternal, uncreated, immaterial, invisible, beyond perception; the stars, however, are temporal, created, material, visible, and perceptible by sense, wholly subordinate to God himself.<sup>66</sup>

### 4.3 Astral Fatalism and Moral Responsibility

The second main challenge that presents itself to Philo from the premise of the casting of nativities (γενεθλιαλογική) is that such a premise wreaks havoc with the notion of moral responsibility by denying the idea of human free will. In Philo's own words, "we ought to know before every activity... whether man's self-conduct is decisive or whether everything is to be ascribed to the powers of nativity."<sup>67</sup> Philo seeks to answer this question in the passage *Prov.* 1:77-88.<sup>68</sup> There he rejects the idea of

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<sup>66</sup>In his comments on the first commandment in *Spec.* 1:13-14, Philo calls the heavenly bodies "magistrates" (ἀρχοντες). David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 250-1, thinks that, drawing on *Timaeus* 41-42, Philo concedes that these beings are called θεοί in virtue of their tasks in the universe, but he refuses to consider them objects of worship. Runia further notes that Philo is the first to describe the heavenly bodies as ἀρχοντες; but note that already Plato, *Laws* 903b, calls them ἀρχοντες and has the gods assign them tasks in the universe.

<sup>67</sup>*Prov.* 1:79.

<sup>68</sup>For a very thorough examination of Philo's philosophical sources in this section, see Paul Wendland, *Philos Schrift über die Vorsehung*, 24-37. He has demonstrated that Philo's rejection of astral determinism is very similar to the sceptical position of Carneades as epitomized in Cicero, *De Fato* 23, 31, *De Republica* 3:14-16, and *De Natura Deorum* 3:32-39. David Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque*, 84-85, identified four arguments Philo employs in the passage *Prov.* 1:77-88 against astral determinism. The idea of human freedom, the fact that different ethnic groups (consisting of individuals with different birth constellations) practice the same customs, the impossibility that the citizens of a decimated city all share the same

astral fatalism by arguing for the two critical ideas of personal freedom and moral responsibility.

#### 4.3.1 Human Freedom

The assertion of the freedom of the human will is a major factor in Philo's refutation of astral fatalism and in his defense of divine providence. Indeed, as in Plato<sup>69</sup> and Aristotle,<sup>70</sup> the notion of free will is so basic a premise in Philonic anthropology that Philo does not spend much effort in justifying it. Philo gives the hint that "personal freedom is from her [providence]",<sup>71</sup> but he does not explain how personal freedom originates from providence. The only thing he says is that even those who deny the existence of providence can only do so, paradoxically, because they themselves possess free will.<sup>72</sup> He focuses instead on the nature of that freedom and the implications it has for human existence.

That Philo understands the idea of "personal freedom" as the freedom of the will is evident from his remark that "freedom is the ability to do whatever one wills."<sup>73</sup>

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horoscopic constellations, and the impossibility of calculating the precise moment of a person's conception.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Wolfgang M. Zeitler, *Entscheidungsfreiheit bei Platon*, Zetemata 78 (Munich, 1983).

<sup>70</sup>Cf. David Winston, "Freedom and Determinism in Greek Philosophy and Jewish Hellenistic Wisdom", *SP 2* (1973), 43, especially note 8 for further bibliography.

<sup>71</sup>*Prov.* 1:77.

<sup>72</sup>In *Prov.* 1:77.

<sup>73</sup>*Prov.* 1:83.

The idea of human freedom, therefore, is for Philo crucially linked to the will and "the ability to do", in other words, to human action. Every action pivots on the exercise of one's free will, but one's free will pivots in turn on the exercise of one's intellect. This Philo stresses explicitly when he speaks of personal freedom as "the free reason for each individual." (*Prov.* 1:88).

The moral dimension underlying Philo's premise of the freedom of the will comes to the surface in his appraisal of a criminal's choice between good and evil. "But since judges *can* quell the wickedness of evildoers through fear", declares Philo, "the powers of nativity *cannot* rule over all... [Evildoers] *are capable* of determining their own conduct by turning in the direction each of them *wishes*" (*Prov.* 1:83, italics added). Philo's rebuttal depends here on the empirical observation that evildoers can change their evil behaviour because they are able to do so if they wish. Without exception they possess personal freedom and the ability to exercise it if they are inclined to do so. In other words, for Philo, even evildoers are capable of making morally responsible judgements on the basis of their inherent freedom of will. On what basis Philo perceives it possible for a person to make free moral judgements is, however, a question to which we must return in the next chapter in our discussion of the rational soul.

#### 4.3.2 Moral Responsibility

By arguing for the existence of the freedom of the will in every person, Philo provides an implicit justification for the notion of moral responsibility. Although he

does not use the word "responsibility", it is certainly part of his conception of freedom when contrasted with the fatalistic dimension of horoscopic astrology. Philo refuses to ascribe human behaviour to the revolutions of the stars because it undermines the moral basis for individual and societal existence. Astral fatalism is flawed, alleges Philo, because

if everything is dispensed at birth, then laws, piety, justice, and the verdicts of judges should be abrogated, since man's will is not free when he does what has been predestined for him. For when the power of self-conduct is denied and every act is attributed to powers of nativity, there will be no glory in virtue, no besetment of sin, no courage, no sagacity to speak of--everything being done involuntarily.<sup>74</sup>

The tone of this passage is critical. If the power of voluntary self-determination is denied, there is no foundation to speak intelligently about the merits of virtue or the malice brought about by vice. In other words, on the theoretical level, the notion of astrological fatalism leads to the impossibility of articulating an ethical framework while, on the practical level, it may promote moral chaos.<sup>75</sup> In essence, if human actions--whether good or evil--are ineluctably governed by the stars, then the idea of moral responsibility collapses at once. Indeed, for Philo the whole idea of justice is called into question if a judge "hands over to punishment those who sin against their will, who have committed their acts involuntarily, having no control over their

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<sup>74</sup>*Prov.* 1:82.

<sup>75</sup>Philo argues that astral fatalism is tantamount to "sophistical endeavors" because the idea of fatalism offers "ostensible grounds for those who wish to find pretexts boldly to commit some related acts of injustice" (*Prov.* 1:78).

conduct." (1:80).<sup>76</sup> In this case, for Philo the ramifications of the premise of astral determinism are utterly incomprehensible; there is no foundation on the basis of which anyone could mete out judgement or acknowledge virtue. In short, the intelligibility of personal responsibility and the moral framework of a political community becomes absurd.

Finally, if the premise of astral determinism robs the individual and the community of its moral responsibility, the same must apply to any religious community. To avoid the atrocity of moral irresponsibility for his own religious community, Philo adamantly maintains the premise of human free will, especially in light of the intelligibility of Torah observance.<sup>77</sup> In the section *Prov.* 1:84, Philo underscores that the Jewish people adopted the practice of circumcision, keeping of the sabbath and abstaining from eating meat by their own free will.<sup>78</sup> But it is illogical to argue, says Philo, that all those who observe these customs are born under the same stellar constellations and are, therefore, under necessity to keep the customs God presented to Moses. If every individual Jew—Philo employs the same argument

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<sup>76</sup>Likewise, "would it be fair for city magistrates to pass the death sentence on evildoers had the evil they have committed not been in their power but due to the shifting of the stars in the position of aggression" (*Prov.* 1:79), or "which patricide or matricide... or adulterous woman" (1:81) could justly be condemned?

<sup>77</sup>The relation between freedom and Torah observance is well stated by David Amand, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l'antiquité grecque*, 84, when he maintains that "les obligations éthique et religieuses d'une *Torah* présupposent la liberté et la responsabilité de l'homme."

<sup>78</sup>Philo does not specify the dietary laws concerning the consumption of meat; he gives the inaccurate statement that the law does not permit the eating of meat, but he does not mention what kind of meat.

with reference to the customs of the Scythians and Egyptians<sup>79</sup>--had a distinctive stellar constellation at birth and yet follows the same customs, then it is indisputable that a person's way of life cannot be the result of the positions of the stars. Conversely, all people who had identical constellations at birth should have an identical way of life. In the end, the keeping of the same customs by many generations of individual Jews is Philo's weightiest proof that human beings are not under the law of horoscopic astrology, but that they possess free will. Philo's firm belief in human free will is at once an argument against the idea of astral fatalism and an argument for the rationality of moral responsibility. It is also a requirement for the divine-human relation, especially in light of the intelligibility of Torah observance. For if either the keeping or breaking of the commandments of Torah is accomplished under the compulsion of stellar constellations, then a person's relation with God is essentially beyond human control, responsibility and culpability.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

By way of conclusion we can say that Philo rejects the premise underlying horoscopic astrology (γενεθλιαλογικη) on two principal grounds. First, because the idea of god implied in astral determinism is beyond reconciliation with Philo's concept of the utter transcendence of God who is alone the cause and providential creator of the universe.

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<sup>79</sup>The Scythians tolerate the common, but abhorrent, incestuous practice of marrying one's mother (*Prov.* 1:85; In *Spec.* 3:13 Philo ascribes this custom to the Persians instead), and the Egyptians, Philo remarks rather generally, practice abominable cultic customs (*Prov.* 1:86).

Second, because the idea of astral fatalism renders absurd the human ability of exercising free will. In the first instance, Philo cannot accept the claim that "nature itself throughout this whole universe is managed by the stars"<sup>80</sup> because of his conviction that the creation and government of the natural order, including the stars, is due alone to God's providence, for "providence is the cause of all in all." (*Prov.* 1:88).<sup>81</sup> For if Philo admits the divine nature of the stars and their causal powers over nature and human destiny, his belief in God as the sovereign cause of creation and providential maintainer of the world is called seriously into question. In the second instance, if the stars possess causal powers over human action, Philo's anthropological premise of human freedom is undermined, as is the logic of his concept of moral responsibility. For if free will is beyond the capability of human beings, the very notion of ethical justice is rendered meaningless and the intelligibility of obeying the law revealed by God is undermined. Philo thus resolutely maintains human free will both because of the observance of the Torah and because of the principle of moral responsibility. But, as we shall see in the next chapter, the concept of free will is also the basis for his conviction that the origin of evil is not to be found in God.

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<sup>80</sup>*Prov.* 1:77.

<sup>81</sup>Failure to understand this leads to four possible consequences: astral determinism, materialism, atheism, or pantheism. For a discussion of Philonic evidence, see Alan Mendelson, *Secular Education in Philo*, 23-24.

## Chapter Five

### Theodicy and Providence

In an important study, Heinrich Dörrie draws attention to the fact that the issue of theodicy belonged from the very beginning in Greek thought to the complex discussion involving the ideas of creation, providence and free will.<sup>1</sup> Philo inherited from the Greeks the questions of God's justice and the origin of evil as a critical aspect of the doctrine of providence. Like the Greeks, he makes every effort to deflect the origin of evil from God in order to avoid the consequence of theodicy, namely, the theologically unacceptable position that God is the cause of evil. But

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Heinrich Dörrie, "Der Begriff 'Pronoia'", 61. He maintains that in Greek philosophy "durfte die Willensfreiheit, verstanden als Freiheit zu ethisch begründeter Entscheidung, [nicht] geleugnet werden; noch konnte zugegeben werden, daß der Weltenschöpfer das Böse mit eingeplant habe. Dieses Dilemma hat der Platonismus nie zu überwinden vermocht." According to Albinus, the Middle Platonist whose work *Didaskalikos* is the only extant summary of Plato's doctrines, it appears that the Middle Platonists correlated the theme of divine providence with fate, free will, and pronounced God, by definition, never the cause of evil; cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 54.

Philo's correlation of the perfect goodness of God's nature with the goodness inherent in the providential direction of the world renders the issue of the existence of evil a particularly vulnerable and poignant problem for the doctrine of providence. Indeed, because for Philo God and providence are mutually implicated in the doctrine of the *providence of God*, it is impossible to attribute something to God but not to providence and vice versa. That is, consistent with the premise that God is not the cause of evil, it is Philo's logical conclusion that providence is not the cause of evil.

How, then, does Philo's doctrine of divine providence accommodate the issues raised by theodicy? Specifically, how does the Philonic doctrine of providence account for the existence of evil? Although Philo does not treat the issue of theodicy in any systematic manner in either the treatise *De Providentia*<sup>2</sup> or his corpus as a whole, his explanation of evil hinges on the Platonic axiom that God is not the cause of evil and on the distinction between the category of physical and moral evil. As a physical category, theodicy raises the issue that if God indeed created and administers the cosmos by his goodness, how then can natural catastrophes and disasters befalling large masses of people be explained without compromising the goodness of God and without making him accountable for the origin of evil? As an ethical category, theodicy raises the issue of the existence of moral evil and the question of its origin in human nature, especially in the soul. When Philo explains the existence of physical evil the Platonic axiom is fused with four Stoic arguments, namely the cosmological,

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<sup>2</sup>For a good introduction to the topic of theodicy in this treatise, cf. Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *De Providentia I et II*, 93-114.

physical, logical and ethical; when he explains moral evil, the axiom is fused with the idea of the soul. We shall first discuss Philo's use of the Platonic axiom and Stoic arguments in relation to physical evil, second, examine Philo's effort to explain moral evil, and third, attempt to articulate the conceptual correlation between the doctrine of providence and these two categories of evil.

### 5.1 God is not the Cause of Evil

Like every other facet of Philo's thought, the issue of theodicy is conceptually prescribed by the theocentric structure of his theology as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Given his concept of the transcendent nature and perfect goodness of God, it is Philo's resolute conviction that God is not responsible for evil in any way. To understand the framework within which he addresses the issue of theodicy, we shall begin with Philo's principal outline on the subject.

When Providence is said to govern the universe, it does not mean that God is the cause of everything; certainly not of evil, of that which lies outside the course of nature, or of any of those things that are not at all beneficial... Violence, rapine, and the like are not caused by the law but by the lawlessness of the inhabitants. The same may be said of the governing of the universe by Providence. It is not that God is responsible for everything; nay, the attributes of His nature are altogether good and benevolent. On the contrary, the unruly nature of matter and that of vice is a product of deviation and not caused by God.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>This point is particularly emphasized by Luis Angel Montes-Peral, *AKATALEPTOS THEOS*, 108, 114.

<sup>4</sup>*Prov.* 2:82, translation by Abraham Terian, in: David Winston, *Selections*, 181. Note also the beginning of Seneca's treatise on providence. Seneca's interlocutor asks, "why, if Providence rules the world, it still happens that many evils befall good

This text reveals Philo's major assumptions and internal logic concerning the issue of theodicy. His most significant assumption, the "axiomatic principle",<sup>5</sup> is that God is not the cause of evil. Because God's essence is "altogether good and benevolent", it follows that God cannot be held responsible for any evil. In Philo's words:

God is the cause of good things only and of nothing at all that is bad, since He Himself was the most ancient of beings and the good in its most perfect form.<sup>6</sup>

Philo's view that there is no metaphysical evil--evil that is *a priori* and from the beginning a part of the structure of the universe--is thus rooted in God's good nature.<sup>7</sup> The philosophical roots for Philo's view that God has no share in evil are typically traced back in Philonic scholarship to several of Plato's writings. One of the sources is the mythical account of the creation of the soul in the *Timaeus*. Horovitz,<sup>8</sup> Dörrie,<sup>9</sup> Winston,<sup>10</sup> and Runia identify *Timaeus* 42d as the passage which prompted Philo's reflection on the issue of theodicy. Runia, for example, writes that "as the

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men?" (*De Providentia* 1:1).

<sup>5</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 139.

<sup>6</sup>*Conf.* 180.

<sup>7</sup>Philo does not, however, attempt to allegorize God's bewildering self-designation (Isaiah 45:7 LXX) that "I am the one who creates evil things" (ἐγὼ ὁ ... κτίζων κακά). This verse receives no comment in the Philonic corpus.

<sup>8</sup>*Philons und Platons Lehre von der Weltschöpfung*, 108.

<sup>9</sup>"Der Begriff 'Pronoia'", 61, note 3.

<sup>10</sup>"Theodicy and the Creation of Man in Philo of Alexandria", in: A. Caquot, et al (eds.), *Hellenica et Judaica. Hommage à Valentin Nikiprowetzky* (Leuven-Paris, 1986), 105. Winston reckons the conviction that God is not responsible for evil as belonging to the "canons of Plato's theology."

reminiscence in *Opif.* 75 shows, Philo has derived the theme of theodicy from Plato's words in [*Timaeus*] 42d3-4.<sup>11</sup> The reminiscence in Philo<sup>12</sup> refers to Plato's mythical account of the creation of the irrational part of the soul by the "young gods." Plato--and as we shall see also Philo--situates the origin of moral evil in that part of the soul and thus regards the demiurge, who did not create that part of the soul, as "blameless (ἀνοήτιος) in respect of the future wickedness (κακία)". The most important source, however, for establishing Philo's dependence on Plato on the issue of theodicy is the *Theaetetus*. Contrary to his usual practice, Philo actually identifies his source in the passage *Fuga* 63 as the dialogue *Theaetetus* and cites *expressis verbis* the Socratic principle that

evils can never pass away; for there must always remain something which is antagonistic to good (οὐτ' ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν--ὑπεναντίον γάρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ αἰεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη). Having no place among the gods in heaven, of necessity they hover around the mortal nature and this earthly sphere.<sup>13</sup>

Plato's stance that evil has no place among the gods in heaven but rather among mortal nature outlines very precisely Philo's own fundamental premise on the issue of theodicy. Finally, we must also consider the *Republic* as a possible influence on Philo's view on theodicy. Plato states that "for the good we must assume no other

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<sup>11</sup>*Philo and the Timaeus*, 247.

<sup>12</sup>Philo says in *Opif.* 75 that with respect to good deeds "God the universal Ruler may be owned as their Source; while others from the number of His subordinates are held responsible for thought and deeds of a contrary sort: for it could not be that the Father should be the cause of an evil thing to His offspring: and vice and vicious activities are an evil thing."

<sup>13</sup>*Theaetetus* 176 quoted in *Fuga* 63.

cause than God, but the cause (αἴτια) of evil we must look for in other things and not in God."<sup>14</sup> Similarly he asserts "that God is not the cause (αἴτιον) of all things, but only of the good"<sup>15</sup> and "the blame is his who chooses: God is blameless."<sup>16</sup> It is unclear whether these statements in the *Republic* might be considered to be the direct source for Philo's basic axiom on theodicy.<sup>17</sup> But there are striking echoes of the statements in the *Republic* in Philo's assertions that God "wills the good only",<sup>18</sup> that God is "innocent of evil and evil deeds, since His activity is to bestow only good first of all",<sup>19</sup> and that God "is the cause of nothing evil, but of all that is good."<sup>20</sup> At any rate, irrespective of the question of Philo's precise knowledge of the *Timaeus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Republic*, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Philo interpreted these sources in such a way that he could adapt Plato's main axiom that God is not the cause of evil as the basis for his own position on theodicy (cf. *Conf.* 180; *Prov.* 2:82). Whatever the Platonic meaning of "demiurge" in the *Timaeus* or the "gods of heaven" in *Theaetetus*, Philo reconceives these statements in terms of his own concept

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<sup>14</sup>379c.

<sup>15</sup>380d.

<sup>16</sup>617e.

<sup>17</sup>John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 140, notes that Philo "is steeped in Plato. His particular favourites are the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*, though he employs also the *Phaedo*, and key portions of the *Theaetetus*, *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Laws*."

<sup>18</sup>*Spec.* 4:187.

<sup>19</sup>*QG* 1:89.

<sup>20</sup>*Conf.* 161.

of God; that is, the Philonic God is not the cause of evil. But even if God is exculpated as the cause of evil, Philo is still faced with the predicament of explaining the undeniable phenomenon of the existence of evil in the world.

## 5.2 The Distinction between Physical and Moral Evil

Philo's attempt to resolve the predicament of the existence of evil is encapsulated in his subtle expression, at the end of the passage *Prov.* 2:82 (cited at the beginning of 5.1), that "the unruly nature of matter and that of vice is a product of deviation<sup>21</sup> and not caused by God." Here Philo reiterates his overarching thesis that God is not the cause of evil but he qualifies this thesis in saying that God is not the cause of evil in relation to *matter* and *vice*. Behind Philo's reference to matter and vice lies what Paul Barth and A. A. Long have identified as the chief characteristic of Stoic theodicy, namely the explanation of evil in terms of the two basic *categories* of evil, those of physical evil (matter) and moral evil (vice); in Stoic terminology, the distinction between cosmic κακία and moral κακία.<sup>22</sup> Underlying this distinction is the view that "cosmic *kakia* is not intrinsic but referable to the ultimate good end

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<sup>21</sup>On the technical significance of the term "deviation", see below footnote 39.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. Paul Barth, *Die Stoa* (Stuttgart, 4th revised ed., 1922), 48-55, and A. A. Long, "The Stoic Concept of Evil", in: *Philosophical Quarterly* 18 (1968), 334. See also G. B. Kerferd, "The Origin of Evil in Stoic Thought", in: *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 60 (1978), 482-94. Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *De Providentia I et II*, 113, notes that Philo proposes in the fashion of Stoic orthodoxy two solutions to the problem of evil, that of a person's free will (moral evil) and that of matter (physical evil).

which it subserves."<sup>23</sup> In the words of Long,

When the Stoics asserted that moral badness was the only *kakon* they were not overlooking natural disasters or disease, nor were they attributing moral badness to God. If moral badness is the only *kakon*, and something foreign to God's nature, cosmic *kakia* turns out to be only a human description of events necessary for the realization of the good on the universal scale.<sup>24</sup>

The consequence the Stoics drew from this distinction between cosmic and moral evil is that only the latter may be considered as true evil;<sup>25</sup> the former may appear as such from a human perspective, but strictly speaking, physical pain is empirically indifferent and not to be judged as evil in moral terms.<sup>26</sup>

In order to elucidate the category of physical evil the Stoics<sup>27</sup> used four basic arguments in their disputes with the Sceptics.<sup>28</sup> Barth has outlined these arguments,

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<sup>23</sup>A. A. Long, "The Stoic Concept of Evil", 334.

<sup>24</sup>"The Stoic Concept of Evil", 333.

<sup>25</sup>Paul Barth, *Die Stoa*, 53, 172. See also A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 111. For the early Stoics, summarizes Long, "the greatest evil is a bad condition of the soul."

<sup>26</sup>For primary sources, translation, and a detailed discussion of the Stoic understanding of what is considered good, evil and indifferent (*ἀδιάφορον*), see *LS*, vol. 1, 354-59, vol. 2, 349-55 (section 58).

<sup>27</sup>For our purposes, the term "Stoic" is used here in the following way. As Barth and Long have shown, the beginning of the questions of theodicy can be traced to the early Stoics, mainly Chrysippus. That his view was still normative with the late Stoics (Seneca, Epictetus) is evident in the many references to him in the sources of Late Stoicism (cf. *LS* 54Q-U) which includes Philo's own treatise *De Providentia* (cf. A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 117). In other words, in matters of the physical evil in theodicy there seems to be more or less continuity from the early to the late Stoics.

<sup>28</sup>For abundant documentation of Stoic parallels, see P. Wendland, *Philo's Schrift über die Vorsehung*, 1-37, 47-82.

all of which surface in Philo's theodicy.<sup>29</sup> (1) The cosmological argument, according to which evil is explained as part of the cosmic order and is experienced by those good and evil. (2) The physical (or mechanical) argument, according to which certain natural disasters are explained as effects caused by matter as an auxiliary result of providence. (3) The logical argument, which builds on the Stoic teaching of the paradoxes, according to which evil is the logical counterpart to the good. And (4), the ethical (or pedagogical) argument, according to which certain instances of natural evil are justified as a chastisement or a deterrent aimed at the moral improvement of a person.

Philo adapts these arguments to his own theodicy. Like the Stoics he employs all four arguments in his attempt to explain the category of physical evil in the created order.<sup>30</sup> But for two reasons, Philo's discussion of theodicy comes to a full crescendo in his explanation of the category of moral evil. First, Philo agrees with the Stoics that the only true evil is moral evil,<sup>31</sup> and second, only in the domain of moral behaviour do human beings possess autonomy over their actions and are hence

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<sup>29</sup>Cf. Paul Barth, *Die Stoa*, 48-55, on Philo, 170-72. See also, idem, "Die stoische Theodizee bei Philo", in: *Philosophische Abhandlungen*, M. Heinze zum 70. Geburtstag gewidmet (Berlin, 1906), 14-33. D. N. Sedley, *LS*, vol. 1, 332, outlines six Stoic explanations of evil which essentially correspond (if the last two types, oversights and evil spirits, are disregarded because they were "never wholeheartedly incorporated into Stoic theology") to the four arguments of Barth.

<sup>30</sup>The only argument that can also be used to explain the category of moral evil is the logical one, but whether Philo actually employed it is a matter of interpretation. Paul Barth, "Die stoische Theodizee bei Philo", 32-33, denies that Philo used the argument. For a discussion, see below 5.3.3.

<sup>31</sup>Philo says it positively in *Sob.* 68: "Moral beauty is the only good."

culpable for making a morally evil decision. Philo's explanation of the category of moral evil becomes thus the basis on which he is able to exonerate God from the charge of moral evil by placing it on the shoulder of humanity. We shall briefly examine how Philo understands the category of physical evil in light of these Stoic arguments and then turn to the more fundamental question of how he conceptualizes the category of moral evil in relation to human existence.

### 5.3 The Category of Physical Evil

#### 5.3.1 The Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument seeks to explain the existence of evil as a necessary part of the overall good of the cosmic order. This argument works on the assumption that whatever happens in the cosmos, including the evil that befalls human beings, must be explained in relation to the overall good of the created order; thus, human existence must be seen primarily as a part of the greater cosmic whole and not vice versa.<sup>32</sup>

Philo makes use of the cosmological argument in response to his interlocutor's charges that God is unjust by allowing good people to suffer through natural catastrophes such as violent torrents, famine, hail, snow, thunder and lightning, earthquakes, suffering, sickness etc.<sup>33</sup> All these calamities, Philo explains, must be

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<sup>32</sup>See also *Prov.* 1:45. For Stoic parallels, see Seneca, *De Providentia* 3:1: When evil occurs it must be seen in light of "the good of the whole human family, for which the gods have a greater concern than for single persons"; cf. *Epistulae Morales* 74:20.

<sup>33</sup>Alexander puts forward these charges in *Prov.* 2:86-97.

understood as belonging to God's care for the whole human race and thus for the benefit of the whole human race. To illustrate his thesis, Philo proposes that while torrents of rain might endanger sailors at sea, they are also nourishing plants and other organisms on earth and are hence for the greater benefit of the whole human race.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in another passage, Philo starts from the metaphysical premise that evil has no place in God, but that it exists nonetheless "for the good and serve[s] to preserve all that exists". He elucidates his point by explaining that a physician must sometimes amputate a part of the body for the health of the body as a whole.<sup>35</sup> In light of the cosmological argument,<sup>36</sup> the greater good is in the overall health of the body rather than the amputated body part. On a cosmic scale, every evil that occurs nonetheless benefits the good of the cosmos as a whole.

### 5.3.2 The Physical Argument

Unlike the cosmological argument, the physical argument sheds more light on the question of the origin of evil. According to the Stoic definition of the argument, natural disasters are explained as effects caused by matter, effects which are understood as the auxiliary results of providence. David Winston identifies the primary Stoic source as Chrysippus' opinion that some evil things "were created in

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<sup>34</sup>This is Philo's chief answer in *Prov.* 2:99 to his interlocutor's charges.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. *Praem.* 32-34.

<sup>36</sup>The example of the leg amputated from the body can also be interpreted in terms of the logical argument (on which see 5.3.3). It is possible to argue that the state of complete physical health can only be experienced in contrast to the pain of amputation itself.

accordance with nature, but through certain necessary 'concomitances' (which he calls *κατὰ παρακολούθησιν*).<sup>37</sup> In Stoic terms, the phenomenon of physical evil is explained as an auxiliary effect caused by the change of elemental matter. The argument attempts to vindicate God and providence as the primary cause. The cause of evil is located in the change of recalcitrant matter.

Philo uses the argument in the passage *Prov.* 2:102. He denies that natural catastrophes such as earthquakes and pestilences are divine visitations. On the contrary, he wishes to persuade Alexander that

God is in no way the cause of evil, but these things are engendered by changes in the elements (*μεταβολαὶ τῶν στοιχείων*). They are not primary (*προηγούμενα*) works of nature but consequent to her necessary works, and attendant (*ἐπακολουθοῦτα*) on the Primary.<sup>38</sup>

Again, Philo starts out with the metaphysical premise that God is not the cause of evil, but rather "the changes in the elements"<sup>39</sup> are the cause of evil. These changes are not primary works of nature, but brought about by an "attendant

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<sup>37</sup>Cf. David Winston, *Selections*, 360, note 365. The translation is taken from *LS* 54Q2 (Gellius, *NA* 7.1:8).

<sup>38</sup>*Prov.* 2:102 (= 2:53 LCL). Translation by Abraham Terian. Cf. also Seneca, *De Providentia* 1:2-4, who remarks that natural phenomena "do not happen without reason; nay, they also are the result of special causes (*sine ratione, quamvis subita sint, accidunt, sed suas et illa causas habent*)."

<sup>39</sup>The phrase occurs also in 2:100 (= 2:45 LCL). The idea of the changes in the elements which produce secondary effects probably lies behind what Philo termed rather loosely a "deviation" (Terian's translation of the Armenian term; the Latin *malitia* is translated into French as *déviaton* by Hadas-Lebel) in *Prov.* 2:82; unfortunately, there is no extant Greek source for that passage.

circumstance".<sup>40</sup> As an example of the changes of the elements Philo explains that although the interchanges of the elements are vital for the creation and operation of the cosmos,

frost and snow and similar phenomena are circumstances attendant (ἐπακολουθεῖ) on the refrigeration of the air as thunders and lightnings are on the clashing and friction of clouds. And none of these we may suppose is by providence (κατὰ πρόνοιαν).<sup>41</sup>

Philo's point is lucid. Frost and snow are not the direct result of God's providence, what Philo conceives of as the primary cause of creation, but they are brought about when the elements collide in a way they are not supposed to, a process Philo perceives as a secondary circumstance. Other examples of the idea of an attendant circumstance may be observed in reptiles,<sup>42</sup> fire and the eclipse. Fire, Philo explains, is a "most essential work of nature and smoke is a circumstance (ἐπακολουθήμα) to it",<sup>43</sup> while the "eclipses are concomitant circumstances (ἐπακολουθοῦσιν)" to the sun and moon.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Cf. also *Prov.* 2:100 (= 2:45 LCL). Colson's comments (*Philo*, LCL, vol. 9, 489, 545) on this passage that Philo makes recourse to the Stoic doctrine of primary causes (προηγούμενα) and incidental consequences, or attendant circumstances, for which the Stoics employ terms such as ἐπακολουθέω, παρακολουθέω, ἐπισυμβαίω, ἐπιγίνομαι).

<sup>41</sup>*Prov.* 2:100 (= 2:45 LCL).

<sup>42</sup>Venomous reptiles "have not come into being by providential design (οὐ κατὰ πρόνοιαν) but as secondary effect (κατ' ἐπακολουθοῦσιν)" (*Prov.* 2:104 (= 2:59 LCL). In reptiles, the elements change in this way: "the moisture already in them changes to a higher temperature. In some cases putrefaction breeds them."

<sup>43</sup>*Prov.* 2:100 (= 2:49 LCL), cf. 1:55.

<sup>44</sup>*Prov.* 2:100 (= 2:50 LCL).

Although the physical argument addresses the question of the origin of physical evil, it raises another significant issue,<sup>45</sup> namely, the question of the omnipotence of God. Does Philo's postulate that secondary causes are the actual causes of physical evil in the world exonerate God from being responsible for the secondary effects brought about by nature? Arguably, here we have an important theological issue that squarely affects Philo's view of the omnipotence of God as the primary cause. Specifically, is God--as the primary cause--able to control these secondary effects? Philo himself is simply quiet on this issue. But that it was a predicament for the Stoics of his time is evident from Seneca, a contemporary Stoic. Seneca is well aware of the issue of God's omnipotence and does not hesitate to propose that God is not all-powerful. God the creator of the universe cannot alter the laws of the universe and must follow them; in his own words, "it is impossible for the moulder (*artifex*) to alter matter (*materiam*)."<sup>46</sup> But Seneca's position that God is ultimately not omnipotent is irreconcilably at odds with Philo's conception of God. As Hadal-Lebel points out in her discussion of Philo's view of divine omnipotence in relation to

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<sup>45</sup>A second issue that arises from Philo's view of the physical argument is whether Philo espouses a kind of cosmic dualism. The answer to that question, however, must be resolutely in the negative because of Philo's concept of God's absoluteness. As Runia concludes, since it is an axiom for Philo that matter is not "a metaphysical entity somehow on a par with God ... there can be no question of an active opposition between God and ὕλη resulting in a true dualism. The chief characteristic of matter is not active maleficence but negativity and recalcitrance" (David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 454).

<sup>46</sup>*De Providentia* 5:9. According to Paul Barth, *Die Stoa*, 51, it was the Epicurean Philodemus who pointed out the tension between the Stoics' tenet of god's omnipotence and their escape in the view that god is not responsible for secondary effects in the chain of mechanical causes and their effects.

theodicy, "l'omnipotence divine est un dogme inébranlable."<sup>47</sup> The tension between the physical argument and God's omnipotence is never raised in Philo. But given Philo's notion of God's utter transcendence, one suspects that he would rather err on the side of the physical argument taken over, perhaps too uncritically, from the Stoics, than compromise his concept of God's omnipotence.

### 5.3.3 The Logical Argument

The logical argument is based on the Stoic axiom of the paradoxes, according to which evil is the necessary counterpart to the good. The best source defining this argument is a fragment from Chrysippus' lost work *On Providence*.

There is absolutely nothing more foolish than those who think that there could have been goods without the coexistence of evils. For since goods are opposite to evils, the two must necessarily exist in opposition to each other and supported by a kind of opposed interdependence. And there is no such opposite without its matching opposite. For how could there be perception of justice if there were no injustices? What else is justice, if not the removal of injustice? Likewise, what appreciation of courage could there be except through the contrast with cowardice? Of moderation, if not from immoderation?... For goods and evils, fortune and misfortune, pain and pleasure exist in just the same way; they are tied to each other in polar opposition, as Plato said. Remove one, and you remove the other.<sup>48</sup>

In essence, the logical argument synthesizes the epistemological thesis that paradoxes are only intelligible in relation to each other with the ontological thesis, said to be taken over from Plato,<sup>49</sup> that paradoxes exist necessarily on account of each

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<sup>47</sup>Cf. Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *De Providentia I et II*, 109.

<sup>48</sup>LS 54Q1 = SVF 2:1169 (Gellius 7.1:1).

<sup>49</sup>Cf. *Phaedo* 60b and *Theaetetus* 176 (cited by Philo in *Fuga* 63).

other.<sup>50</sup> The significance of the argument for the issue of theodicy lies in the exploitation of the principle that paradoxes--in both the physical and moral realm--are necessary for the whole, that evil is a necessary counterpart to the good.

According to Paul Barth, the logical argument was the most powerful one in Stoic theodicy, but he also maintains that Philo does not make use of it in his corpus.<sup>51</sup> Barth argues that although Philo lists many pairs of opposites (cf. *Heres* 214; *Ebr.* 186-7), he uses these only for his theory of epistemology. Barth certainly seems correct in saying that Philo makes no *obvious* use of the argument in his theodicy, but there is some evidence to challenge Barth's claim that Philo made no use of the argument at all. Two passages are worth reviewing.

In the passage *Gig.* 1-3, Philo discusses the rapid growth of humanity beginning with Noah and his sons (cf. Genesis 6:1) and allegorizes the biblical narrative in terms of "the nature of opposites." The pair of opposites is Noah and the race, representing rarity and abundance respectively. The former has skills in the arts and sciences and shows goodness and excellence, the latter are mostly deficient in these things. Then Philo says:

And so it is only natural that the birth of just Noah and his sons should make evident the abundance of the unjust. That is the nature of opposites; it is through the existence of the one that we chiefly recognize the existence of the other.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Cf. *LS*, vol. 1, 332.

<sup>51</sup>Paul Barth, "Die stoische Theodizee bei Philo", 32-33.

<sup>52</sup>*Gig.* 3. See also on this passage David Winston, *Selections*, 322, note 4.

Like Chrysippus, Philo proceeds from the epistemological insight that "it is through the existence of the one that we chiefly recognize the existence of the other." The pair of opposites Philo has in mind with "the one" and "the other" is a reference to "just Noah" and his "unjust descendants", i.e. the ideas of justice and injustice. The parallels between Chrysippus and Philo are striking. Both proceed from an epistemological assumption which they illustrate with the same ethical principles, namely that the logical counterpart to the idea of justice is the idea of injustice.

The logical argument might also constitute the background to the second passage, *LA* 3:73. There Philo says that the living creatures are made by the goodness of God (through the creative power) and then explains:

For it was necessary with a view to the clear manifestation of the superior beings that there should be in existence an inferior creation also, due to the same power, even the goodness of the First Cause.<sup>53</sup>

It is possible to interpret this passage on the basis of the principle of paradoxes.

Starting from the epistemological insight that God's inferior creation (the inanimate things) can only be distinguished in view of the superior beings (the animate beings),

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<sup>53</sup>*LA* 3:73. David Winston, *Selections*, 360, note 361, supposes that in this passage "Philo's view is identical with that of the Stoics," and cites as Stoic parallel a text that Plutarch, *Moralia* 1065b, ascribed to Chrysippus: "The evil which occurs in terrible disasters has a rationale (λόγος) peculiar to itself; for in a sense it too occurs in accordance with universal reason, and so to speak is not without usefulness in relation to the whole. For without it there could be no good." It is Winston's view that in this passage Chrysippus illustrates the logical argument. But as A. A. Long, "The Stoic Concept of Evil", 331, has shown, Chrysippus discusses the cosmological argument; this is evident in the emphasis that the existence of evil serves the purpose for the good of the whole.

Philo illustrates this point, nonetheless, in terms of the opposite pair of superior and inferior creation.

Although these two passages do not present conclusive evidence in favour of Philo's obvious use of the logical argument, the argument can still be seen to figure in these texts for the following reason. Like Chrysippus, Philo discusses the logical argument only in the context of epistemological theory. That is, although epistemology is the chief point of discussion, as Barth correctly notes, it does not follow that the logical argument is eliminated from such a discussion, as Barth falsely concludes. Indeed, the logical argument seems conceptually embedded in epistemology.

#### 5.3.4 The Ethical Argument

The Stoics and Philo both assume that the ethical argument explains physical evil in ethical or pedagogical terms. That is to say, the existence of physical evil is interpreted as a chastisement or a deterrent and has as its aim the moral improvement of a person. But by virtue of its own definition the ethical *argument* is not to be confused with the *category* of ethical or moral evil. The ethical argument is one of four arguments in Stoic theodicy and seeks to explain the category of physical evil in ethical terms while moral evil (for a discussion see below 5.4) is one of the two categories of evil. Strictly speaking, therefore, the ethical argument does not at all address the question of moral evil and is thus somewhat a misnomer.

In many instances, Philo generally rationalizes physical evil in ethical terms.<sup>54</sup>

He proposes that natural cataclysms are sent by providence in order that human beings might seek virtue. Thunder and lightning, for example, are visible signs of God's invisible providence. In the case of lightning, a small number of godless people are always so petrified that they deduce from it--on account of their intrinsic rationality-- the truth that providence exists. Philo thus interprets the cosmological phenomenon of lightning, as well as the phenomena of hail and locusts,<sup>55</sup> as having primarily a pedagogical function.

By way of summary, Philo employed in a manner typical of Stoic usage the cosmological, physical, ethical and possibly even the logical argument to explain the category of physical evil. But he reveals no knowledge of an argument's conceivable weakness, for example, the problem of maintaining God's omnipotence while separating him from the effects of secondary causes in the case of the physical argument. The purpose of these four arguments is to explain the category of physical evil, the kind of evil over which human beings have no control; but this leaves unexplained Philo's view of the category of moral evil. It is precisely in the realm of moral evil where Philo exploits the axiom that God is not the cause for moral evil, because only in matters of morality can Philo exonerate God as the cause of moral

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<sup>54</sup>In the treatise *De Providentia*, the ethical argument seems to be Philo's favourite of the four arguments.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. *Prov.* 1:47. The source for Philo's reference to hail, locusts, and one's stubborn mind is very likely the biblical story of the plagues of hail, locusts, and Pharaoh's hardened heart in Exodus 9-10.

evil and shift the responsibility for such evil to the human being, that is to one's soul.

#### 5.4 The Category of Moral Evil

Philo's answer to the question of the existence of moral evil is first apparent in his conclusion of *De Providentia* 1 where Philo's concept of the origin of moral evil appears in its important outline. The culminating idea of *Prov.* 1:89-92 is that the existence of moral evil does not come from providence. The ideal of virtuous living has deteriorated into base and wicked behaviour, remarks Philo, because human nature has given up belief in providence,<sup>56</sup> a belief which has its roots in the soul. For it is in the human soul, Philo asserts without giving an explanation, where a person severs belief in providence and where good and evil, or in moral terms, virtue and vice, originate. But because a person also possesses free will, by exercising that will, one can choose virtue over vice.

It is clear from Philo's cursory remarks that he locates the origin of moral evil in the soul of a person. But how this exactly happens is not addressed in *De Providentia* and must be gathered from the notion of the soul described elsewhere in his writings. To understand the significance Philo attaches to the soul in relation to moral evil, we

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<sup>56</sup>Because of the vast neglect of practising virtue, laments Philo, the appropriate consequence administered by providence is the eschatological dissolution of the elements brought about by the retraction of the divine powers; in other words, the destruction of the cosmos. But this conclusion stands utterly in contradiction to Philo's view that the world is indestructible because of providence. See our discussion of *Decal.* 58 above in Chapter Three and David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 397, who notes perceptively that "it thus seems quite impossible to bring the main thesis [that the cosmos is destructible by providence] of *De Providentia* I into line with the systematic presentation of the same question in the *De aeternitate mundi*."

shall first discuss the distinction between the irrational and rational soul in Philonic ontology and anthropology and then draw out the consequences of this crucial distinction for Philo's conception of moral decision-making and the origin of evil.

#### 5.4.1 The Soul in Philo's Ontological Hierarchy

To apprehend why Philo's view of the category of moral evil is inextricably linked to his view that moral evil arises in the soul, it is indispensable to place the concept of the soul within Philo's general ontological hierarchy. The following table illustrates the Philonic understanding of ontological categories as expressed in *Agr.* 139.<sup>57</sup>

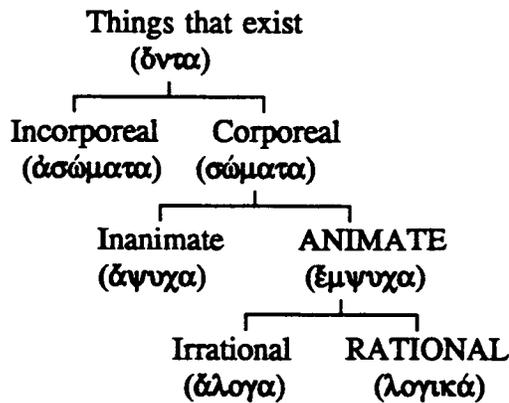


Table: Philo's Ontological Stemma<sup>58</sup>

<sup>57</sup>Philo deals in this treatise with the matter of ontological distinctions (διαρέσεις, cf. *Agr.* 129) in the course of which he introduces many philosophical opinions. For a good discussion, cf. Irmgard Christiansen, *Die Technik der allegorischen Auslegungswissenschaft bei Philon von Alexandrien*, Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Hermeneutik 7 (Tübingen, 1969), 99-133.

<sup>58</sup>Philo follows a handbook in providing such a detailed and accurate delineation of ontology. As he says himself in *Agr.* 140, these ontological distinctions "are set forth in the elementary handbooks which deal with them". Cf. Diogenes Laertius 7:51: "Another division of presentations is into rational (λογικαί) and irrational (ἄλογοι), the former being those of rational creatures, the latter those of the irrational. Those which are rational are processes of thought, while those which are

According to this hierarchy, the following ontological categories apply to human existence: being (ὄντα), corporeal existence (σώματα) and possession of a soul (ἐμψυχα) that is both rational (λογικά) and irrational (ἄλογα).<sup>59</sup>

But at this point we encounter a serious problem in Philonic thought, namely the issue of Philo's conception of the parts of the human soul. The issue is so complex that any adequate treatment requires a fresh book-length study. For our purposes it is sufficient to note the following. The problem of the conception of the soul arises because of Philo's indiscriminate use of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic ideas on the composition of the soul and because of his failure to analyze and incorporate these sources into a coherent doctrine of the soul. When Philo remarks that "our soul consists of three parts, and has one part given to reasoning (λογιστικόν), a second to high spirit (θυμικόν), a third to desire (ἐπιθυμητικόν)",<sup>60</sup> he is recalling Platonic psychology in the *Republic*. Here Plato maintains a tripartite composition of the soul of the rational part (λογιστικόν), the courageous or spirited part (θυμοειδής), and the appetitive part (ἐπιθυμητικόν).<sup>61</sup> But Philo draws also on Plato's mythical account of

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irrational have no name". For a discussion of various philosophical schemata of ontology, cf. G. D. Farandos, *Kosmos und Logos nach Philon*, 254.

<sup>59</sup>See also David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 34, for a summary of Philo's hierarchy of beings endowed with a soul.

<sup>60</sup>LA 3:15. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 174, remarks that in *Spec.* 4:92 the influence of the tripartite division of the soul in *Republic* iv is strongly reinforced by the myths in the *Phaedrus* and the *Timaeus*.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. *Republic* 436a, 504a, 550b, 580d-e.

the creation of the soul in the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*.<sup>62</sup> It is a controversial question whether Plato had himself a coherent conception of the soul throughout his corpus<sup>63</sup> and Philo certainly interprets Plato as he best fits his own purposes. Occasionally, Philo refers to the Aristotelian understanding of the three parts of the soul as the nutritive (θρεπτικόν), the perceptive (αἰσθητικόν) and the rational (λογικόν).<sup>64</sup> More often, however, Philo mentions the Stoic classification<sup>65</sup> of the soul. He explains that, in addition to the ruling part (ἡγεμονικόν), the soul "is divided into seven parts, namely five senses (πέντε αἰσθήσεις), the faculty of speech

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<sup>62</sup>Regarding the act of the creation of the human soul itself, Philo most likely combined the Platonic myth of the descent or fall of the soul (cf. *Phaedrus* 248a-d) with the passage in *Timaeus* 43a-d. In the latter passage, the image of the fast flowing water (river, flood, stream) engulfing the soul is allegorically interpreted as bringing about the sensations (αἰσθήσεις) of the soul (for Philo's use of the Platonic images of the fallen soul engulfed by rapidly flowing waters and on the etymological explanation of αἰσθήσεις, see David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 260-2). The sensations are but the irrational part of the soul (cf. *Timaeus* 69d) and are therefore closely tied to the corruptible human body.

<sup>63</sup>For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Andreas Graeser, *Probleme der platonischen Seelenteilungslehre. Überlegungen zur Frage der Kontinuität im Denken Platons*, *Zetemata* 47 (Munich, 1969).

<sup>64</sup>Cf. *QG* 2:59, *Opif.* 76 and James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 1, 319 (discussion of fragment 668 (Harris) for another Philonic reference to Aristotle).

<sup>65</sup>Stoic psychology divides the soul in eight parts. According to Diogenes Laertius 7:157, the early Stoics "count eight parts of the soul: the five senses (πᾶς πέντε αἰσθήσεις), the generative power (σπερματικούς λόγους) in us, our power of speech (φωνητικόν) and that of reasoning (λογιστικόν)" (For a more comprehensive understanding of the soul in Stoicism see, *LS* 53, especially 53F, 53H. The middle Stoic Posidonius divided the soul into as many as 17 different parts or faculties (δυναμείς). But he, too, perceived the main difference between the rational/irrational part of the soul. For evidence and interpretation, see, *EK*, frag. 147, especially Kidd's commentary in vol. 2, 544-8). For a good introduction to the Stoic notion of soul, see A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 170-75).

(φωνητήριον ὄργανον), last that of generation (γόνιμον)."<sup>66</sup> The Stoics considered the ruling part as the rational part of the soul and the other seven parts (five senses, speech, generation) as the irrational part of the soul.

What are we to make of Philo's incongruous use of the Greek philosophical speculation on the parts of the soul? Although Philo makes no effort to formulate these sources into a doctrine of the soul, he cannot be accused of being a naive eclectic. As Thomas Billings has said aptly, "the exigencies of the allegorical method lead him to adopt now one, now another point of view."<sup>67</sup> But for our purposes, far more important than what Philo did not do with these sources is what he actually did do with them. And what he did do is succinctly expressed, again by Billings:

This summary [of Philo's use of Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics on the soul] is sufficient to show how unimportant for Philo all divisions are except the main one which gives the two parts, rational and irrational... The one distinction which persists throughout is the one which is important for ethics, the distinction, that is, between the rational and the irrational parts of the soul.<sup>68</sup>

In other words, the relevance of the Greek classification of the soul for Philo's psychology fundamentally lies in the idea that the human soul is a compound of an undivided<sup>69</sup> rational part (the faculty of reasoning) and an irrational part (the passions, senses, speech, reproduction). There is wide agreement among Philonic

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<sup>66</sup>*Opif.* 117. In *LA* 1:39-40, Philo identifies the mind as the rational part and the five senses and speech and reproduction as the irrational part of the soul.

<sup>67</sup>*The Platonism of Philo*, 52.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup>Cf. *Heres* 232, the soul's "rational part, which was named mind, He [the Maker] left undivided (τὸ δὲ λογικόν, ὃ δὴ νοῦς ὠνομάσθη, ἀσχιστον)."

scholars that Philo adapts a basic bipartite division of the soul as the central aspect of his notion of soul (how Philo derives this bipartite division from these various philosophical sources is a question we shall address below in section 5.4.3). Besides Billings, Drummond notes that Philo consistently returns "to his permanent division of the soul into rational and irrational",<sup>70</sup> Dillon remarks that in Philo's view of the soul "the most basic truth remains the division into rational and irrational",<sup>71</sup> and Runia concludes that Philo is "influenced by the tendency in Middle Platonism to regard Plato's doctrine as affirming that the soul is essentially bipartite, i.e. divided into a rational and irrational part."<sup>72</sup>

Billings's view that the basic bipartite division of the soul "is important for ethics" means more precisely that the origin of moral evil is located in the tension between the rational and irrational part. To be in a position to make explicit why Philo locates the origin of moral evil in the tension between these two parts of the soul, we must clarify two important facets which are necessary to gain a complete understanding of his idea of soul. First, what is the importance of Philo's view that God created only the soul's rational part and, second, what is the precise relation between the soul's rational and irrational parts?

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<sup>70</sup>James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 1, 320. See also Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 1, 427-8.

<sup>71</sup>John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 175.

<sup>72</sup>David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 303; elsewhere, 263, Runia calls the bipartite division the "standard dogma" in Middle Platonism." The essential bipartite division of rational and irrational part of the soul is also emphasized by David Winston, "Theodicy and the Creation of Man", 108.

#### 5.4.2 The Creation of the Rational and Irrational Parts of Soul

A crucial aspect of Philo's theodicy is the assumption, taken over from his reading of Plato's *Timaeus*, that God is not the creator of the irrational part of the soul. For both Plato and Philo, the gist of their argument is to exonerate God as the cause for moral evil; that cause is located in the irrational part of the soul which is not created by God but by his subordinates.

"To the end that He [the demiurge] might be blameless in respect of the future wickedness (κακία)",<sup>73</sup> Plato assigns the task of the creation of the irrational soul, unlike the rest of the universe, not to the demiurge himself, but to the younger gods.

After the creation of the cosmos they received the task of

framing and controlling all the rest of the human soul which it was still necessary to add, together with all that belonged thereto, and of governing this mortal creature in the fairest and best way possible, to the utmost of their power, except in so far as it might itself become the cause of its own evils.<sup>74</sup>

For Plato, the demiurge is exculpated from the charge of being the cause of evil because the cause of evil is located in the soul itself. Philo adapts these Platonic principles to his own view of the rational and irrational parts of the soul. With respect to the creation of these parts, Philo's conviction is evident in his interpretation of the plural "let us make" (Genesis 1:26) by which the Bible describes God's activity in creating man. Philo deals with the troubling plural in several passages. Since the most

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<sup>73</sup>*Timaeus* 42d.

<sup>74</sup>*Timaeus* 42d-e.

important passages have received detailed scrutiny,<sup>75</sup> it will be sufficient to recapitulate here the most significant features of a possible answer to the question of why the biblical text uses the plural "let us make". In *Opif.* 72-75 Philo argues that it was improper for God to create man by himself because man (*ἄνθρωπος*) is of a mixed nature and the only rational being capable of both good and evil. Man was created by God and his fellow-workers (*συνεργοί*); with respect to man's virtue, God may be said to be the source, but with respect to vice, the fellow-workers are the source and God himself is blameless of evil toward his creatures. In *Fuga* 68-72, the fellow-workers are identified as the powers who form the mortal, that is irrational, part of the soul while God creates the immortal or rational part.<sup>76</sup> God created the rational part and not the irrational part because the irrational is susceptible to evil. In *Mut.* 30-31, Philo distinguishes between the good, the bad, and an intermediary soul. God made only the good soul because he is the cause of the good only, while the bad soul is "the handiwork of others." God did not participate in the creation of the intermediary soul because it is capable of both good and evil and God must be inculpable with respect to evil. The last passage in which Philo deals with the plural of Genesis 1:26 is the detailed section *Conf.* 168-83.<sup>77</sup> God assigned the creation of

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<sup>75</sup>Cf. Pierre Boyancé, *Dieu cosmique et dualisme: les Archontes et Platon*, in: U. Bianchi (ed), *The Origins of Gnosticism Colloquium of Messina 13-18 April 1966* (Leiden, 1967), 340-56, and especially David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 242-49, and David Winston, "Theodicy and the Creation of Man", 106-109.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. *LA* 1:41.

<sup>77</sup>For a concise outline of Philo's exegetical context and argumentation, cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 245.

the irrational part of the soul to his lieutenants (ὑπάρχοντες) or inferiors (τοῖς μετ' αὐτόν) because it is unfitting for God to be the author of vice.<sup>78</sup>

The most important conclusion that we must draw from these passages is that Philo reconceives the Platonic position that the demiurge did not create the irrational soul in terms of his belief that the God of Scripture did not create the irrational part and hence is not responsible for the evil which arises in it.<sup>79</sup> Philo's view that God created only the rational soul leaves unanswered, however, how he interprets Plato's statement that the soul becomes "the cause of its own evils." Philo never directly responds to the Platonic statement in a systematic manner, but that he has his own understanding of it is evident in his definition of the rational and irrational parts of the soul and the relation between them. Hence, to understand Philo's view about why he locates moral evil in the soul, we must first clarify Philo's view of the two parts of the soul and second, how this definition shapes his notion of moral responsibility.

#### 5.4.3 The Rational and Irrational Parts of the Soul

How does Philo derive the basic bipartite division of the rational and irrational part of the soul from his sources? The answer is not difficult to provide: Philo derived the bipartite division of the soul from Greek thought which maintained the rational and

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<sup>78</sup>On the ambiguity of Philo's language about the irrational part of the rational soul, cf. David Winston, "Theodicy and the Creation of Man", 106-107.

<sup>79</sup>Similar to our discussion of Philo's use of the physical argument (see above 5.3.2), Philo seems not to be bothered by the lurking critique that if God did not create the irrational part of the soul, then his omnipotence might be limited.

irrational part of the soul as its central division; this bipartite division was deemed more important than the speculations about the correct number of the total parts of the soul. Even Plato's tripartite conception of the soul can be interpreted in terms of a basic bipartite division. "When the crunch comes", says Dillon, "the spirit (*thymos*) and the passions (*epithymia*) are to be linked together in opposition to the Reason."<sup>80</sup> Aristotle's view of the soul is practically that of Plato in that reason is set above the nutritive and sensitive functions dependent on the body.<sup>81</sup> In Stoic philosophy, the bipartite division is clearly marked (see stemma above in 5.4.1) as the basic division of the soul. That Philo adapted the basic bipartite division maintained more or less by all Greek schools of thought to his own purposes is evident in that he makes more references to the division of rational and irrational parts of the soul than to any other division of the soul. Philo expresses his view precisely when he explains that the soul "is a whole consisting of two parts, the rational and irrational (τὴν ὅλην ψυχὴν ἐκ λογικοῦ καὶ ἀλόγου μέρους συνεστῶσαν)."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 175. So also Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo*, 47. He explains that "the common tripartite division of the soul is reached by subdividing the irrational part into *θύμος* and *ἐπιθυμία*. This is clear in the myth of the *Phaedrus*, where reason is the charioteer and *θύμος* and *ἐπιθυμία* are the two horses. Reason is in a different category from the other two."

<sup>81</sup>Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1102a and the discussion in Thomas Billings, *The Platonism of Philo*, 48-49.

<sup>82</sup>*Spec.* 1:333. In *Congr.* 26, Philo actually states that the soul has two parts (*διμεροῦς*), one part is rational, the other irrational. For other examples, cf. *LA* 2:6; *Det.* 82, 91; *Conf.* 111, 176; *Heres* 132, 232; *Sob.* 18; *Spec.* 1:201; 3:99; *Somn.* 2:151.

How does Philo define the rational and irrational parts and how does he conceive of the relation between them? Philo defines the rational part of the soul, the λογιστικόν, "commanding-faculty", as the highest and most important part of the soul and terms it variously ἡγεμονικόν<sup>83</sup> or νοῦς.<sup>84</sup> In a passage that is reminiscent of the Stoic definition of the soul, Philo remarks that the mind is the ruling part of the soul (οὐτως ψυχῆς ἡγεμονικόν ἐστὶν ὁ νοῦς),<sup>85</sup> and elsewhere he maintains that the soul's "rational part, which was named mind, He [the Maker] left undivided (τὸ δὲ λογικόν, ὃ δὴ νοῦς ὠνομάσθη, ἀσχιστον)."<sup>86</sup> Whatever terminology Philo uses to designate the rational part of the soul—he adopts from the Greeks terms<sup>87</sup> such as λόγος, λογισμός, ἡγεμονικόν, νοῦς, διάνοια—the main feature is that every person is an intrinsically rational being. This intrinsic human rationality is significant for Philo for two reasons. First, the rational part of the soul functions as the critical element in Philo's view of moral responsibility and the origin of moral evil (see below 5.4.4). In

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<sup>83</sup>Cf. *Opif.* 117.

<sup>84</sup>*Heres* 232, *Agr.* 30. On Philo's terminological variations for the rational part of the soul, cf. John Whittaker, "The Terminology of the Rational Soul in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria", in: *SPhA* 8 (1996), 1-20.

<sup>85</sup>*LA* 1:39. In Stoic thought, "by ruling part of the soul is meant that which is most truly soul proper, in which arise presentations and impulses and from which issues rational speech" (Diogenes Laertius 7:159).

<sup>86</sup>*Heres* 232.

<sup>87</sup>John Wittaker, "The Terminology of the Rational Soul in the Writings of Philo of Alexandria", 7, emphasizes the point that when they refer to the rational part of the soul, all these terms had the same meaning.

some instances, Philo characterizes the rational part of the soul, the νοῦς or λόγος,<sup>88</sup> in Stoic terms as the compound of both thought (the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος) and speech (λόγος προφορικός).<sup>89</sup> Second, the rational part of the soul, the mind, is the key element in the relation between God and man. Philo states explicitly that "every man, in respect to his mind, is intimately related to the divine Logos, being an imprint or fragment or effulgence of that blessed nature."<sup>90</sup> The rational part of the soul constitutes thus the part of the human being which is most closely tied to God. In Philonic terms, because the rational soul is an intrinsic part of the divine λόγος, it is responsible for the ascent of the soul to God (a point we shall return to in section 5.5). Philo contrasts the undivided rational part of the soul, the mind, with the soul's divided irrational part (τὸ ἄλογον), sometimes in Stoic terms as consisting "of seven parts, five senses, and the organ of speech,<sup>91</sup> and the genital organ",<sup>92</sup> and

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<sup>88</sup>In *Det.* 84, Philo says the rational part "has received the title 'mind' and 'reason'."

<sup>89</sup>For this distinction, see below note 91.

<sup>90</sup>*Opif.* 146 (translation by David Winston, *Selections*, 143). See also *Deus* 47-48, *LA* 1:39-41, *Heres* 184-85.

<sup>91</sup>Philo usually follows the Stoics (cf. Diogenes Laertius 7:157) and relegates the organ of speech to the irrational part of the soul. There is no clear distinction in Philo between speech as such and the organ of speech. Elsewhere, Philo makes it clear that he thinks of speech as a function of the rational part of the soul by locating it in the ruling part of the soul, the ἡγεμονικόν (cf. *Deus* 84). In *LA* 2:23, Philo says that "we are rational beings, on the one hand partakers of mind, and on the other as being capable of discourse." Physiologically, speech transpires when the ἡγεμονικόν activates breath (πνεῦμα) which is passed through the windpipe and shaped by the mouth. As such, speech is a "derivative manifestation" (Abraham Terian, *De Animalibus*, 125) of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος (= ὁ ἐν διανοίᾳ λόγος, that is to say, unexpressed thought still residing in the mind) (cf. Josef Groß, *Philons von Alexandria Anschauungen über die Natur des Menschen* (Tübingen, 1930), 28)

sometimes in Platonic terms as sense-perception (αἰσθησις)<sup>93</sup> and passions (also called πάθη or ἐπιθυμίαι). The latter understanding finds a vivid allegorical interpretation in Philo's exegesis of Genesis 3:12-13, the account of Eve's eating of the fruit in the garden of Eden. The serpent is a symbol of desire (ἐπιθυμία), the woman a symbol of sense (αἰσθησις) and the man a symbol of mind (νοῦς).<sup>94</sup>

What is the specific relation between the rational and irrational part of the soul? In essence, it is the conflict that arises when the mind takes control over the senses and the passions. Even though mind, senses and passions constitute together one soul, as Philo explicitly states, "for sense-perception and passions are parts and offspring of one soul with it [mind]",<sup>95</sup> they are at war with each other. Continuing his allegory of Eve's deception by the serpent, Philo remarks that

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because speech follows thought. On the Stoic idea of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος (innate reasoning power, thought) or the λόγος προφορικός (verbalized thought, speech), see Max Pohlenz, "Die Begründung der abendländischen Sprachlehre durch die Stoa", in: *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen, Philologisch-historische Klasse, Neue Folge I. 3,6* (1939), 151-98, especially 191-98 (reprinted in: *Kleine Schriften*, 39-86). See also Max Heinze, *Die Lehre vom Logos*, 140-45.

<sup>92</sup>LA 1:11 (cf. *Det.* 168).

<sup>93</sup>Philo prefers the term "sense-perception" (αἰσθησις) over Plato's term "spirited part" (θυμός). In LA 3:123, he consigns θυμός clearly to the irrational part of the soul when he says that the spirited element of the soul should first be guided by reason and not "by its own irrationality."

<sup>94</sup>In LA 3:67-68, Philo explains that sense-perception, "has no evil nature on its own account, but halts between good and evil, inclining to either side" while "the serpent, pleasure, is bad of itself." For a discussion of this text, see section 5.5.

<sup>95</sup>LA 2:8.

desire (ἐπιθυμία) becomes the evil origin of sins, and this first deceives sense (αἰσθησις), while sense takes the mind (νοῦς) captive.<sup>96</sup>

Similarly,

And desire has a natural enmity toward sense, which (Scripture) symbolically calls woman. And notwithstanding that desires seem to be critical of the senses, they are in reality flatterers who plot evil in the manner of enemies.<sup>97</sup>

This, then, is the crux of the bipartite division of the soul for Philo's view of moral evil. "The passions", says Philo, "tear the soul to pieces... for the assault of the passions is violent and irresistible"<sup>98</sup> and "hardly ever shall you find a soul which has never tasted of passions or vices."<sup>99</sup> Moreover, Philo holds the assumption that "the soul of every man from the first as soon as he is born bears in its womb the twins good and evil."<sup>100</sup> He thus supposes the conflict between good and evil to

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<sup>96</sup>*QG* 1:47. Plato, whom Philo follows (cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 262-6, 299-301), similarly postulates the interdependence of sensations and passions (*Timaeus* 69d) in the mortal (irrational) part of the soul.

<sup>97</sup>*QG* 1:48; cf. *LA* 2:24, *Cher.* 58-60. As John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 175, points out, behind the allegory might be a "distinctly Pythagoreanizing piece of imagery" which Philo adopted via Plato.

<sup>98</sup>*LA* 2:11.

<sup>99</sup>*Sacr.* 111. In David Runia's words (*Philo and the Timaeus*, 262-3), "through the functioning of the irrational part of the soul the rational part is exposed to the onslaught of the senses and the raging of the passions. Warfare is the most suitable metaphor for this mighty conflict in man's soul."

<sup>100</sup>*Praem.* 63.

belong to the human soul from the moment of birth; it is an inevitable phenomenon peculiar to every person.<sup>101</sup>

But what exactly happens in the soul when this "war" erupts, how is it prompted, how is it fought, and how can the evil arising from this war be explained? However crucial these questions might be for a detailed understanding of Philo's theory of moral evil,<sup>102</sup> the biological facts of the body-soul correlation are not of primary interest to Philo.<sup>103</sup> His interest in the duality of the soul is limited to two primary objectives: to absolve God as the cause of evil and to establish the cause for moral evil in a person's soul in order to be able to hold the human being morally accountable. The first, as we saw, he fulfilled by recourse to Plato's myth in the *Timaeus* that the irrational, sense-perceptible part of the soul is not created by the demiurge, but by his subordinates. To understand how he seeks to accomplish the second objective is our next task.

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<sup>101</sup>Harry Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. 2, 288-89, argues that *Praem.* 63 "undoubtedly reflects" the Hebrew notion of a person's good and evil נַצְי, "inclination", such as found in Genesis 8:21 LXX, a passage which says that a person's mind is set on wickedness from youth (ἡ διάνοια τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐπιμελῶς ἐπὶ τὰ πονηρὰ ἐκ νεότητος). Philo cites this verse in *Heres* 296 and evidently interprets it in the framework of the body-soul dualism; the soul is smouldered when overtaken by the passions.

<sup>102</sup>David Winston, "Theodicy and the Creation of Man", 108, concludes that "the question of the precise location of the evil component in the human soul is simply ignored."

<sup>103</sup>There is, however, the passage *Deus* 43-44 (cf. *Opif.* 166). Philo apparently follows Stoic logic when he says that the initial movement of the soul is impulse (ὄρμη) also called appetite (πάθος), i.e. a passion. A first passion or impulse leaves an impression (φαντασία) on the mind. Sometimes this impression has a good, sometimes an evil effect on the soul. For comments, see David Winston, *Selections*, 352, notes 252-55, and F. Colson, *Philo*, LCL, vol. 3, 30-31, 484.

#### 5.4.4 The Notion of Moral Responsibility and the Origin of Evil

The distinction between the rational and irrational parts of the soul serves Philo as the foundation for anchoring moral evil in human existence. Decisive is Philo's emphasis on the control of the rational over the irrational soul, one's existential struggle between passions and mind. Possessing an inherently rational soul is not only the uniquely human feature, but precisely because of it, human rationality has the faculty to overcome the passions. Building on the responsibility he puts on the rational soul, Philo substantiates his view of the origin of moral evil in two ways. First, rooted in a person's knowledge of good and evil, a person has the obligation of choosing only good. Second, and dependent on the first, is the fact that a person's inherent moral freedom, coupled with one's knowledge of good and evil, establishes the cornerstone for Philo's view of the origin and the notion of moral responsibility.

##### 5.4.4.1 The Knowledge of the Moral Good

The rational part of the soul<sup>104</sup> makes every person uniquely knowledgeable of the difference between good and evil. As a rational creature (λογική);

man is practically the only being who having knowledge of good and evil often chooses the worst, and shuns what should be the object of his efforts, and thus he stands apart as convicted of deliberate and premeditated sin.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup>In *Conf.* 176 Philo discusses the opposites unreasoning (ἄλογον) and reasoning (λογική) and assigns the human being to the latter.

<sup>105</sup>*Conf.* 178.

Here Philo assumes that a person's knowledge of good and evil is not a value-neutral phenomenon; good and evil are not morally equal categories. Inseparably tied to this assumption is Philo's conviction that the soul should choose good over evil. This is implicit in his words that the "soul shuns what should be the object" of deliberate choice.<sup>106</sup> This choice for the good is central to Philo's ethical theory and yet he makes no attempt to explain it in any way. Just as he takes for granted a person's possession of personal freedom, so likewise does he hold to the assumption, without explaining it, that the rational soul knows and should choose good over evil.

#### 5.4.4.2 The Choice between Good and Evil

We just concluded that the rational part of the soul possesses knowledge of good and evil and has the responsibility of choosing the first over the second. But in Philo's view of the origin of moral evil, the responsibility to choose good can only be exercised when there is a choice between good and evil. In other words, if the rational soul does not have a free choice between the alternatives of good and evil, it cannot be held morally accountable for choosing evil. For this reason, the idea that

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<sup>106</sup>In a fragment of the lost fourth book of *Legum Allegoriae*, Philo says, interpreting Deuteronomy 30:15, 19, that "it is a happy thing for the soul to have the power to choose the better of the two choices put forward by the Creator" (cf. Harris, *Fragments*, 8; translation by David Winston, "Freedom and Determinism in Philo of Alexandria", 53).

the rational soul possesses an inherent moral freedom becomes a critical feature of Philo's view of moral responsibility and his view of the origin of moral evil.<sup>107</sup>

The relation between soul, mind, and moral freedom is evident in Philo's statement that God judges only the mind (διάνοια) "worthy of freedom (ἐλευθερία)... and free-will (ἐκούσιον)", a freedom that is the "most peculiar possession" of the soul endowed with a mind (νοῦς), that is, the rational soul.<sup>108</sup> Philo explains the function of the rational soul in light of its freedom in these terms.

The soul of man alone has received from God the faculty of voluntary movement (ἐκούσιον κίνησιν), and in this way especially is made like Him, and thus being liberated, as far as might be, from that hard and ruthless mistress, necessity (ἀνάγκη), may justly be charged with guilt, in that it does not honour its Liberator. And therefore it will rightly pay the inexorable penalty which is meted to ungrateful freedmen.<sup>109</sup>

In this passage, two aspects emerge as basic to Philo's conception of moral responsibility, first, the idea of a moral freedom itself and, second, the moral significance resulting from making a free decision. Regarding, first, the very idea of moral freedom, Philo is quick to rule out the belief that in matters of morality human

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<sup>107</sup>In our discussion of astral fatalism we concluded that Philo supposes the existence of personal freedom as the foundation for his view of moral responsibility. Now we can further refine Philo's idea of personal freedom by adding that in the current context Philo conceives of freedom essentially as intellectual (rational) and moral freedom (choice between virtue or vice). Those two principles--intellectual freedom and moral responsibility--are brought together in Philo's explanation of the foundation of moral actions and the origin of moral evil. Cf. David Winston, "Philo's Ethical Theory", in: *ANRW* II 21.1 (1984), 378-81, for a good discussion of the idea of freedom as a decisive factor in Philo's ethical theory.

<sup>108</sup>Cf. *Deus* 47.

<sup>109</sup>*Deus* 47-48.

beings are under necessity,<sup>110</sup> that is to say, operate within a deterministic framework. To the contrary, he emphasizes a person's free will which, given by God to every soul, amounts to the faculty of "voluntary movement." For Philo, these qualities of the soul mean nothing else except a person's capability to make a "deliberate choice" in matters of morality within a relative freedom given by God.<sup>111</sup> The thrust of this Philonic view is that every moral action originates in the soul, including both good and evil actions. Philo's conception of moral responsibility hinges thus on the view that both good and evil actions originate from a free choice in the rational part of the soul. Put otherwise, in Philonic psychology, because a person cannot choose not to be morally free, the moral choice is in itself causative in relation to the result of a moral decision. In this sense, then, the fact of free choice can be interpreted as being a cause not only of a good, but also of an evil action.

Second, even more critical than the choice itself is the moral significance of a free choice. That is, the reality of being able to make a free choice does not in itself constitute a moral action. An action based on free choice becomes only a moral action in relation to the outcome of that choice, that is when the action proves to be good or

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<sup>110</sup>But as David Winston, "Freedom and Determinism in Philo", 56-57; "Philo's Ethical Theory", 380, has shown, there is in Philo also a train of thought which is deterministic in its ethical tone. Relative freedom, for Philo, means that "insofar as man shares in God's Logos, he shares to some extent in God's freedom" (380); cf. *Deus* 47-48, *Heres* 186, *Somn.* 2:252).

<sup>111</sup>On the issue of whether Philo espouses the view of a person's absolute or relative freedom, see David Winston, "Freedom and Determinism in Philo", in: *SP* 3 (1974-5), 47-70, and idem, "Philo's Ethical Theory", 377-381. Winston argues convincingly (against Wolfson) for the view of relative freedom.

evil. To this end, the fact that one can make a morally free decision is secondary to the imperative that one should make a morally *good* choice. Indeed, Philo's notion of moral responsibility is rooted in his belief that a person is accountable for the outcome of one's choice; to repeat his own words, a person "is with reason blamed for what he does wrong with intent, praised when he acts rightly of his own will." The context of the statement makes clear that the ultimate judge about the morality of an action is God. If a person fails to choose good over evil, then the consequence is divine retribution.<sup>112</sup>

The direct upshot of Philo's perception of the rational soul in relation to moral freedom and the notion of moral responsibility is that the entire process of making a morally evil decision is located in the soul. Philo never departs from Plato's axiom that God is not the cause of evil *and* that the blame for moral evil is on man. When a person chooses vice over virtue, "the blame is his who chooses: God is blameless."<sup>113</sup> God, therefore, is exonerated as the cause of moral evil. In Philo's view, the human soul is its own cause of moral evil.

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<sup>112</sup>In *Deus* 47-48 Philo is not addressing the issue of the unintentional evil on which he has a clear position (cf. his detailed discussion in *Fuga* 75-76); rather, he is examining the issue of wilful intent.

<sup>113</sup>*Republic* 617e. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 246, thinks that this Platonic reference is the background to Philo's emphasis on the free choice between good and evil.

#### 5.4.4.3 The Origin of Moral Evil

Philo's lack of systematic discourse makes his notion of moral evil a very complex issue which must be pieced together from scattered comments throughout his corpus. It is virtually impossible to synthesize all aspects that bear on the topic into a unified doctrine. Critical to his idea of moral evil is, nonetheless, the inextricable connection between a person's soul, knowledge of good and evil and the inherent moral freedom of the rational soul.

To sum up, then, our examination of Philo's conception of the origin of moral evil, the following are key elements. (1) Philo assumes that every soul is inflicted from the moment of birth<sup>114</sup> with the conflict between good and evil.<sup>115</sup> (2) More precisely, the struggle between good and evil can be defined as the struggle between the rational and irrational parts of the soul, the mind over the senses and passions. God created only the rational, but not the irrational part of the soul and is hence disassociated from the evil that can arise when the mind is unable to conquer the passions. (3) Although every person's soul experiences the onslaught of the passions over the soul, a person has the knowledge of the difference between good and evil and should choose only good. (4) In addition to the knowledge of good and evil a person's rational soul possesses inherent moral freedom. That is to say, moral freedom is a *conditio sine qua non* of both the idea of moral responsibility and the basis for divine judgement.

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<sup>114</sup>Cf. *Praem.* 63.

<sup>115</sup>Cf. *Sacr.* 111.

### 5.5 Theodicy and Providence

After discussing Philo's understanding of the categories of physical and moral evil, our final task is now to determine threads of correlation between Philo's concept of divine providence and the existence of these two categories of evil. Before we can address this question, however, a preliminary remark is in order. It is important to keep in mind that both the notion of theodicy and the doctrine of providence are part of the larger structure of Philo's thought as a whole. To judge, therefore, either Philo's view on providence or on theodicy, as Sandmel does,<sup>116</sup> exclusively in light of what he says in *De Providentia*, can only result in a seriously distorted picture. To be sure, Philo explicates the notion of providence in *De Providentia* largely in a manner of the *via negativa*, focusing on what providence is not: it is not responsible for any of the evils in the world. But our current question is more substantially concerned with how Philo's notion of providence can be reconciled to the existence of evil? That is, is it possible to go beyond Philo's negative conclusion that providence is not the cause of evil and draw out possible correlations--that Philo does not make himself--between his own conception of providence and the phenomena of physical and moral evil? The answer to this question is in the affirmative as long as we are cognizant not to overstep the boundaries set by Philo's doctrine of providence as defined so far and his notion of the soul. Concretely, our task cannot be to harmonize

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<sup>116</sup>Samuel Sandmel, "Some Comments on Providence in Philo", in: J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel (eds), *The Divine Helmsman. Studies on God's Control of Human Events*, presented to L. H. Silberman (New York, 1980), 84, laments that Philo's discussion of the issue in the treatise *De Providentia* is "striking in its general superficiality... and one needs to question the quality of what he says."

the dilemma of the existence of evil and the notion of soul into the concept of providence as if all these notions exist as a unified doctrine. In any doctrine of providence, including the one offered of Philo, the existence of evil can only be explained more or less successfully, but due to the complex nature of the issue itself, never completely resolved. In accordance with Philo's chief distinction between physical and moral evil, we shall first address physical evil and second moral evil.

#### 5.5.1 Providence and the Category of Physical Evil

What is the correlation between God's providence and the existence of *physical* evil? Put differently, what issues does the existence of physical evil pose for the coherence of the Philonic doctrine of providence? Philo is silent on this question except for his basic conviction that "when Providence is said to govern the universe, it does not mean that God is the cause of everything; certainly not of evil."<sup>117</sup> But this position raises the profound dilemma of how to square the premise of God's goodness and omnipotence with the existence of physical evil in a world created and governed by providence. Specifically, in light of Philo's concept of God and his theory of creation, the issue of the existence of physical evil in relation to the providence of God arises because of Philo's axiom of the perfection of the universe. "It is fitting", declares Philo, "that the greatest of works [the cosmos] should be made most perfect by the greatest Creator."<sup>118</sup> This statement makes apparent Philo's view that the perfection

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<sup>117</sup>*Prov.* 2:82.

<sup>118</sup>*Plant.* 2.

of God as creator is manifest in the perfection of the created cosmos. But if God is in essence perfectly good and provident (see 1.3.3.2), created the world because of his goodness (see 2.2), and bestows gifts of grace by his providential power (see 2.3.2), how is it then possible to reconcile the undeniable fact of the existence of evil in the natural order without jeopardizing the coherence of Philo's conception of divine providence? Philo's thought as a whole allows for several responses.

First, according to Philo's understanding of evil, what people perceive as *physical evil* is in reality not an evil.<sup>119</sup> This position can be derived from the fact that many times Philo refers to the Stoic axiom that moral beauty is the only good.<sup>120</sup> If moral beauty is the only good, the logical opposite to that position is that moral evil is the only evil. In fact, this position is also standard Stoic dogma.<sup>121</sup> If, further, moral evil is the only evil, physical evil may be perceived from a psychological perspective as evil, but in the strict sense of evil, physical evil (pain, suffering, catastrophes) is indifferent and cannot be considered "to be evil." The very notion of evil implies a moral judgement, an idea which cannot be applied to cosmological events. In effect, however, this position precludes any further questioning of God's goodness, omnipotence and justice.

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<sup>119</sup>Along similar lines, Samuel Sandmel, "Some Comments on Providence in Philo", 85, concludes that in his discussion of theodicy Philo overlooked a critical point. "The only contention he [Philo] does not introduce that he might have is that what man regards as evil may actually be good."

<sup>120</sup>In *Post.* 133, Philo mentions "the Stoic canon (τὸ στωικὸν δόγμα)" that "the morally beautiful alone is good (τὸ μόνον εἶναι τὸ καλὸν ἀγαθόν)." So also in *Sobr.* 60, 62, 68.

<sup>121</sup>See above 5.3.

Second, the fact that physical "evil" really occurs raises the question of the extent of God's goodness and omnipotence and, hence, the divine beneficence implicated in the doctrine of divine providence. How can it be that if God is good and omnipotent that evil occurs at all? Is God perhaps only good but not omnipotent, or else, is he only omnipotent but not good? The issue is principally in the fact that God either does not want to or cannot prevent physical evil from happening. As we noted in our discussion of the physical argument (see 5.3.2), Philo is silent on these issues. But given the centrality afforded to the concept of God in Philo's thought as a whole, it is inconceivable that Philo would compromise either God's goodness or omnipotence. The reason lies in Philo's perception of the utterly transcendent divine essence (see 1.1). God is beyond goodness,<sup>122</sup> he is perfect, without any evil in essence, or responsible for any evil in any way. If God is conceived as the perfect being, it follows that his providence must also be in accordance with his nature; that is, providence cannot be said to be deficient in goodness or in omnipotence. But Philo's conception of God's transcendent perfection and the goodness implied in the notion of providence does not so much explain the existence of physical evil as it separates God from being responsible for it. For Philo, in other words, there is an absolute difference between creator and created universe, a difference that takes conceptual preeminence over the explanation of physical evil.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup>*Praem.* 40.

<sup>123</sup>Paul Barth, *Die Stoa*, 171, writes that in his theodicy on physical evil Philo could have, but did not employ the powerful argument of the transcendence of God according to which there is the complete separation of the world from God. In our

Third, even if we concede that God is perfectly good and omnipotent, how then can physical evil originate and exist? This question raises the issue of *a priori* evil; in other words, is there an metaphysical source for the possibility of physical evil other than God? Philo could have raised this issue in connection with his allegory of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In *Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin* Philo does not raise the issue, but in *Legum Allegoriae* he makes a strange concession. Philo allegorizes Adam as mind, Eve as sense-perception, and the serpent as passion. Moral evil occurs when the evil passions take control over the senses and together they overcome the mind. Now Philo concedes that "the serpent, pleasure, is bad of itself",<sup>124</sup> and elsewhere, "doubtless, He [God] has made the serpent, our present subject, for the creature is of itself destructive of health and life."<sup>125</sup> Does Philo suggest that the serpent represents symbolically an evil metaphysical power, one even created by God? The answer must be in the negative for two reasons. First, the Greek term used to express the idea that the serpent is "bad" is *μολοῦνός*. This term is not equivalent to the term *κακία*, which expresses the idea of evil, and does therefore not describe the serpent as intrinsically evil. Rather, it denotes that the serpent was wicked in its intentions, villainous and the like. Second, and more

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view, this is exactly what he implicitly did do.

<sup>124</sup>LA 3:68.

<sup>125</sup>LA 3:76.

important, this isolated passage<sup>126</sup> cannot be taken as representative of Philo's repeated emphasis throughout all his corpus that God is in no way responsible for evil. Given his concept of God, Philo cannot hold the view of metaphysical dualism that would imply another principle (matter, god) in opposition to God.

Fourth, the fact that natural disasters befall both good and evil people beckons the question of divine justice, a concomitant issue to the doctrine of providence. But this issue is so closely tied to the points already discussed above that the answer here depends on those answers given above. If physical evil is not true evil, then the critique of God's injustice is without substance. If, moreover, God is good and omnipotent, as is Philo's view, then God is necessarily also just. Finally, since it is virtually impossible in Philo's thought to show that God is responsible for metaphysical evil, the charge of his injustice in regards to physical evil is not convincing.

The above four points indicate how extremely difficult it is to do justice to Philo's view of physical evil regarding its origin and existence, leave alone the issues of correlating them to each other and with a coherent concept of providence. More than likely, it amounts to unwarranted speculation to synthesize all of these points with Philo's convictions about God and his providence. To charge God of any shortcoming with respect to his goodness, omnipotence and justice goes against the very grain of the Philonic idea of God which in turn is the linchpin for all other facets of his

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<sup>126</sup>The exegetical exigencies of the context required Philo to explain why the senses, which he defined as neither good nor evil, can be overcome by evil. His answer hinges on the fact the passions (serpent) have a predisposition toward evil.

thought including the doctrine of providence. In Philo's thought, the belief in God's utter transcendence and the theory of creation (fundamentally in the idea of the *λόγος* and the divine powers) is deemed sufficient, it appears, to mark the difference between God and providence on the one hand, and the cosmos and evil on the other hand. The bridge that nonetheless connects God's providence in the cosmological realm to the psychological experience of that providence is in Philo's unique doctrine of the Logos (see below).

### 5.5.2 Providence and the Category of Moral Evil

What issues does the existence of *moral* evil pose for the coherence of the doctrine of providence? This is an extremely important question for our understanding of Philo's conception of providence on a psychological level. Unlike the issue of the relation between physical evil and providence, a question in which the human being is not directly involved, the issue of moral evil implicates a person directly because of the soul. Here the issue is how the decision of the rational soul is to be correlated to providence and how a morally evil decision is to be reconciled to providence's involvement in that decision? Again, Philo does not offer a fully thought out response on this issue, but only scattered bits of insight. Nonetheless, we are justified in making some assertions without violating the perimeters of his thought as a whole.

First, for Philo, the critical link that correlates providence as it operates on the cosmological level and the psychological level is the idea of the *λόγος*. We concluded earlier (see 2.3.1 and 3.4) that the doctrine of the *λόγος* is decisive for Philo's theory

of creation in that he conceives of the λόγος as both the transcendent mind of God and the immanent expression of the mind of God in a universe created through the powers.<sup>127</sup> But since Philo also conceives the mind or λόγος (or, equivalent to it, terms such as λογισμός, νοῦς, δianoia) as the critical element in the rational soul, the doctrine of the λόγος is the vital link between God and man. Philo puts it this way:

God is the Archetype (ἀρχέτυπος) of rational existence, while man is a copy (μίμημα) and likeness (ἀπεικόνισμα). By 'man' I mean not the living creature with two natures, but the highest form in which the life shows itself; and this has received the title of 'mind' (νοῦς) and 'reason' (λόγος).<sup>128</sup>

For Philo, the point of connection between a human being and God is the idea of rationality. Crucial to that idea is that the mind, conceived as λόγος and situated in the rational part of the soul, is both a copy and part<sup>129</sup> of the divine Logos of God.

Second, given that Philo conceives of the λόγος as both the instrument of creation and the crucial link between God and the human soul, how, then, must we conceive of the relation between this two-fold understanding of the λόγος and the idea of providence? Although Philo does not specifically state that providence created the

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<sup>127</sup>David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 25, concludes his discussion on Philo's doctrine of the Logos by saying that "the logocentric character of Philo's thought" is clearly manifest. He adds that for Philo, "it is through the Logos and the Logos alone that man is capable of participating in the Divine."

<sup>128</sup>*Det.* 83; cf. *Opif.* 146, *Deus* 47-48, *LA* 1:39-41, *Heres* 184-85. For a brief but excellent discussion, see David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 28-29.

<sup>129</sup>Cf. David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 29.

rational part of the soul,<sup>130</sup> this conclusion seems to be logically congruent with his theory of creation, specifically with the view that the cosmos was not created automatically, but by the providence of God (see 3.3.1). There is a passage that can be interpreted to support our view. Once—in the context of asserting a person's free will over against astral determinism—Philo mentions explicitly that "personal freedom is from her [providence]."<sup>131</sup> Just as providence is responsible for the cosmic harmony of the celestial realm, so likewise is providence the giver of a person's free will which, as we know from Philo's notion of the soul (see 5.4.4.2), is located in the rational part of the soul.

Third, since providence is involved in the creation of the rational part of the soul, is there any further evidence that providence has a psychological effect on the rational part of the soul, the mind? Put otherwise, does Philo conceive of providence as being involved in helping the mind to overcome the onslaught of the irrational passions, and hence, instruct a person in virtuous living? Philo establishes a brief though lucid

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<sup>130</sup>Perhaps, as with many features of Philo's cosmology, Philo's model for the creation of the soul is Plato's *Timaeus* (cf. David Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 259-66). In the two instances in which the notion of *πρόνοια* is explicitly mentioned in the dialogue it is in connection with the idea of soul. Plato assumes that the cosmos came into existence as "a Living Creature endowed with soul and reason owing to the providence of God" (*Timaeus* 30b). The idea that the world is a living macrocosm because of its possession of soul (*ψυχή*) and reason (*νοῦς*) brought about by providence is paralleled in Plato's view that the human soul is a microcosm created by god's providence (cf. *Timaeus* 44c). In Philo, cf. *Heres* 154-5; *QG* 4:188; *Aet.* 26, 74, 94-95.

<sup>131</sup>*Prov.* 1:77. Philo asserts free will—which he elsewhere undoubtedly locates in the rational part of the soul—against those who hold the position of astral fatalism in matters of morality.

correlation between the rational part of the soul and God's providence. In one instance he explains that "through the providence of God (ἐπιφροσύνη θεοῦ) the rational part of the soul is brought into a good condition",<sup>132</sup> in another instance, the soul of Aaron, "had already, through the providence of God (κατ' ἐπιφροσύνην θεοῦ), been predisposed to obedience, so that without hesitation he assented and followed"<sup>133</sup> his brother Moses to Egypt. In these two passages Philo is not very clear about how precisely God's providence affects the soul, or how it is that it is brought into a good condition, other than hinting that it happens in the rational part of the soul. The correlation between providence and rational soul is made more explicit, however, in Philo's allegorical interpretation of Noah's prayer for his son Japhet, the verse, "Let him [God] dwell in the house of Shem" (Genesis 9:27). In Philo's allegory, the house is the soul and God is the one who dwells in it.

For what more worthy house could be found for God throughout the whole world of creation, than a soul (ψυχή) that is perfectly purified, which holds moral beauty to be the only good and ranks all others which are so accounted, as but satellites and subjects? But God is said to inhabit a house not in the sense of dwelling in a particular place, for He contains all things and is contained by none, but in the sense that His special providence (πρόνοια) watches over and cares for that spot. For every master of a house must needs have the care of that house laid on him as a charge. Verily let everyone on whom the goodness of God's love has fallen as rain, pray that he may have for his tenant the All-ruler who shall exalt this petty edifice, the mind (νοῦς), high above the earth and join it to the ends of heaven.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>*Sob.* 18. The word ἐπιφροσύνη is used by Philo with God as the subject, hence in the sense of providence. Cf. *Fuga* 56.

<sup>133</sup>*Mos.* 1:85.

<sup>134</sup>*Sobr.* 62-64.

In this text Philo mentions several aspects that touch on the doctrine of providence without, however, specifying their precise relation. In accordance with his view that God cannot be contained in something created, the soul is indwelt not by God himself, but by his providence which "watches over and cares for that spot." That "spot" is the soul, more particularly the mind in the rational part of the soul. But divine providence indwells the soul that holds moral beauty to be the only good, in other words, the soul that is in pursuit of virtue. But precisely in what way does God's providence bring the mind into a good condition or influence the mind toward virtue? Philo does not develop this question at the psychological level of application. The only clue that he provides is a reference to "the goodness of God's love." The idea of divine goodness coupled with the idea of divine grace is an inextricable part of the doctrine of providence (see 2.2.1). We can speculate on good grounds, therefore, that the task of providence in relation to the virtuous moulding of the mind in the rational soul is achieved through the gifts (χάριτες) of grace by means of what Philo once described as the providential power.<sup>135</sup> This power, analogous to the gracious power that works out the goodness of God in the created universe (see 2.3.2), is perceived by Philo as the imminent aspect of the provident nature of God. Philo's statement that providence indwells the mind which is in pursuit of virtue is thus to be understood as God's bestowing of his essential goodness through the gracious or

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<sup>135</sup>So also John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 152-3.

providential power in order to facilitate the ascent of the soul, in Philo's own words, that the soul might be joined to heaven.

Fourth, can the role of providence in the mind's achievement of virtue be correlated in more detail? A possible answer might be found in Philo's idea that the mind of the rational soul is a copy and part of the divine mind. From a human point of view, since the acquisition of virtue depends on the rationality of the mind, it follows that the more rational the soul is the more virtue it can acquire. Indeed, Philo implies that the soul is trainable with respect to virtue as his allegorical interpretation of the lives of the patriarchs reveals.<sup>136</sup> Choosing good over evil is thus a matter of the training in the rationality of the mind, an intellectual task that does essentially not imply more involvement of God's providence. But from the point of view of God, there is another very important answer that involves providence directly. In a fragment of the lost treatise *Legum Allegoriae*, Philo says that, "strictly speaking, the human mind does not choose the good through itself, but in accordance with the providence (ἐπιφροσύνη) of God, since he bestows the fairest things upon the

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<sup>136</sup>Cf. James Drummond, *Philo*, vol. 2, 320-1. Underlying Philo's interpretation, according to Drummond, is the axiom ascribed to Aristotle (cf. Diogenes Laertius 5;18) that virtue can be acquired either by nature (φύσις), training or instruction (μύθησις) and practice (ἄσκησις). As John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, 152, observed, by the time of Philo, this Aristotelian axiom was received "into the bosom of Platonism." Cf. *Det.* 65: "Study or practice is a mean, a half-way stage, not a perfect final achievement. It is seen in souls that are not perfect, but bent on reaching the summit", and *Det.* 66: "The mind of the truly noble man will be guardian and steward of the teachings of virtue."

worthy."<sup>137</sup> Later in the same fragment Philo says that if in fact God's providence chooses good for the mind, then man has no real choice, that questioning is for those "who have not yet been initiated in the great mysteries about the sovereignty and authority of the Uncreated and the exceeding nothingness of the created."<sup>138</sup>

In a sense, this last statement puts into perspective all the above points in our attempt to correlate Philo's ideas on providence, moral evil and the soul. How this correlation happens exactly in the final analysis must remain a divine mystery. To speculate on why God bestows his providence on one mind more than on another, and to scrutinize how he does it or how it materializes that the mind chooses good and not evil, all these questions are alone the prerogative of the inscrutable and incomprehensible mind of God. Man must use his mind to the utmost in overcoming evil, but ultimately he must rest assured in God's unfailing providence. No more, but also no less, can be concluded about Philo's correlation between moral evil, the rational part of the soul and the doctrine of providence.

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<sup>137</sup>Fragment 8 (Harris), translation by David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology*, 51.

<sup>138</sup>*Ibid.*

## Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to show how Philo of Alexandria conceptualizes the doctrine of providence within the structure of his thought as a whole. In pursuit of this aim we began with the passage *Opif.* 171-72, one of the rare texts in the Philonic corpus that offers the reader a compendium of the most significant doctrines of Philo's theology. The three doctrines mentioned by Philo in this passage are, in this order, the concept of God, the theory of creation, and the notion of providence. That Philo mentions first the concept of God points to the significant fact, commonly accepted among Philonic scholars, that Philo's structure of thought is thoroughly theocentric. That is, the central aspect of Philo's overarching thought is the concept of God to the extent that every other aspect of his thought must be brought into correlation with Philo's conception of God. The two notions Philo explicitly mentions in the compendium that must be correlated with the concept of God are the theory of creation and the doctrine of providence.

To understand Philo's conception of providence it is crucial to examine how the concept of God and the theory of creation shape his thinking on providence. It is, however, not enough to study the treatise *De Providentia* which Philo composed on the topic of divine providence. For in *De Providentia* Philo does not give us either a thorough nor a systematic presentation of how he conceptualizes the idea of providence. His immediate concern was to refute his apostate nephew, Tiberius Alexander, who sought to demonstrate that the existence of physical evil in the cosmos requires the conclusion that divine providence cannot exist. The issue of evil in relation to providence is an important question, as we saw, but it is only one aspect of what Philo has to say on the intricate subject of divine providence.

The first task, therefore, in order to understand Philo's conception of providence is to correlate it with the concept that he himself defines as the centre of his structure of thought, the concept of God. As we saw in the first chapter, Philo establishes the correlation between God and providence in a double way based on his view of the utter transcendence of God and the crucial distinction between the existence of God and the essence of God. Based on his interpretation of God's self-designation to Moses in Exodus 3:14, the statement *ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν*, ("I am He who IS"), Philo derives the notion of God's utter transcendence. God has alone true being and has unique being unlike any other being. God is the wholly other, in no way directly apprehensible. But in order to demonstrate the relation that is still possible between God thus conceived and creation, Philo draws the line between God's existence and his essence. That God exists as the most perfect being can be deduced from the contemplation of the cosmos created by him. The creation of the universe points to God as the creator and cause of the universe whose essential attributes must be such that he is able to conceive of

and actually create the universe. This points to the question of the nature of God, about which Philo says it is impossible for the human mind to apprehend. Human beings are ontologically inferior and epistemologically limited to the extent that they cannot comprehend any aspect of the nature of God. To be able to articulate the relation between God and humanity, it is inevitable, though strictly speaking impossible, to predicate anything positive about God's nature. On that basis, Philo does not hesitate to predicate about God that he is both good and provident. Philo thus accomplished the integration of the very conception of providence into his concept of God's transcendence. The contemplation of the natural order necessitates the existence of a providential God; the fact that this order seems providentially administered necessitates that God must be provident in his nature.

But Philo's concept of God's utter transcendence raises the question of how to make explicit God's extending of his providence in the created order. How does God, who is by nature provident and utterly transcendent and not in actual contact with his creation, extend his providence to the created order? As we saw in the second chapter, Philo explains the immanent aspect of God's providence in these terms. The reason for the creation of the cosmos is God's goodness and grace, ideas which essentially also belong to God's nature. Divine goodness and grace are given to humanity by what Philo took over from the Greeks as the idea of the deeds of grace, the *χάριτες*. These deeds of God's grace are bestowed on the cosmos by means of the Logos and the divine powers. The Logos represents the mind of God in its transcendent aspect, and it represents the administrator of the powers in its immanent aspect. The deeds of grace are administered through the guidance of the Logos by the divine powers. One of these powers is identified by Philo as the gracious power, or

analogous to it, the providential power. It is through this power that the providence of God is immanently bestowed on the cosmos.

In light of Philo's compendium in *Opif.* 171-72, the doctrine of divine providence is also to be correlated with the theory of creation. The overarching issue is the question of time and the genesis of the cosmos in relation to the role providence plays in creation. More specifically, Philo responds to the question of the createdness of the cosmos by rejecting the automatic genesis of the cosmos in favour of a temporal genesis brought about by the mind of God which designed and continually sustains the cosmos by its providence. Philo addresses the second issue, the question of the destruction of the cosmos, by maintaining that the cosmos is indestructible because of the will and providence of God; for if the cosmos were to be destroyed, there follows for Philo the inadmissible conclusion that providence would also be destroyed. In sum, then, Philo conceives of the role of providence in cosmological matters as being responsible for the design, administration and continuous existence of the created universe.

There are, however, two issues, as we saw, that are not mentioned in Philo's compendium in *Opif.* 171-72, but which are critically important for his conception of divine providence. These are the issues of the correlation between providence and astral fatalism and theodicy.

In Chapter Four we addressed how Philo rejected the assumptions implied in astral fatalism as irreconcilable with the conception of divine providence for two reasons. The first reason is that astral fatalism supposes the divinity of the stars, an idea which runs against the grain of Philo's concept of God. Unlike God, the stars have corporeal existence and cannot

therefore be transcendent or have causal influences over human lives. The second reason why Philo rejects astral fatalism as incompatible with the doctrine of providence is that the acceptance of the idea that stars can influence human lives renders absurd the notion of moral responsibility. If human actions are determined by the stars, then human beings are not truly free nor can they be held accountable for the evil deeds they commit.

But that human beings are accountable for the evil actions they commit is precisely the key point of Philo's theodicy. As we saw in Chapter Five, Philo proceeds from the Platonic premise that God is not the cause for evil in any way, neither for physical evil in the cosmos nor for moral evil among human beings. Philo explains the category of physical evil by means of the Stoic arguments according to which cosmic evil serves for the good of the whole cosmos, a concomitant result of the primary causes in nature, the logical opposite to evil, or simply a deterrent to keep a person from committing evil deeds. Unlike the category of physical evil, the category of moral evil incriminates human beings directly. As we saw, for Philo, the existence of moral evil does not only exonerate God as the cause for this kind of evil, but allows Philo to anchor the blame for moral evil in the person, that is, in the rational part of the soul. Moral evil originates in that part of the soul when the mind, assaulted by the senses and the passions, makes a decision that results in a morally evil deed. A person is culpable for a morally evil decision because the mind, as an inherently rational entity, has knowledge of the difference between good and evil. Moreover, because the mind is also free to make a choice that results in either a morally good or evil action, Philo has placed both the origin and the responsibility for moral evil on the shoulder of the human being.

The overarching conclusion of our study is that Philo of Alexandria's conception of divine providence is central to his theology as a whole. While Philo did not present us with a thoroughly argued concept of divine providence, it is clearly evident in his corpus that he has a coherent pattern of thinking on the question of providence that takes into considerations all facets of his theology. For this reason, the doctrine of providence is both shaped by and in turn shapes many crucial aspects of Philo's thought. Although this doctrine is first and foremost rooted in Philo's concept of God, it is related to most other important facets of Philo's thought. It is not only critically correlated with Philo's unique doctrines of the Logos and the divine powers, but also with the theory of creation, the problem of astral determinism, the issue of physical and moral evil, the notion of the soul, and the theory of ethics. In other words, there is hardly a facet of Philo's thought that is not influenced in one way or another by the conception of providence. Given this extensive correlation between the notion of providence and the main features of Philo's thought, it is no exaggeration to declare the doctrine of providence the structural pillar which gives Philonic theology its coherence.

How, then, does the concept of providence help us understand in greater depth the life and thought of Philo of Alexandria? The answer, in short, is that Philo conceptualizes the idea of divine providence as the bridge between his understanding of the utter transcendence of God and the belief that God immanently cares for his creation and his creatures. In other words, the doctrine of providence does justice to Philo's desire to formulate a theology that pays sufficient attention to the truth of Scripture and the tenets of Greek thought without compromising his personal faith embedded in ancestral customs.

That it is indeed Philo's aim to make intelligible the unfailing providence of God in tangible ways within a theologically comprehensive framework is evident in his introduction to the treatise *Legatio ad Gaium* 3-7. Near the end of his life, Philo reflects on the embassy to Gaius, of which he was a member, and the possible course of events the Jewish people might face in Alexandria.

The present time and the many important questions decided in it are strong enough to carry conviction even if some have come to disbelieve that the Deity exercises providence (προνοείω) for men, and particularly for the suppliants' race which the Father and King of the Universe and the Source of all things has taken for his portion.

With ease, it seems, Philo integrates theology and personal faith. In a few lines he makes reference to God as Father, King, source of all things, then continues (in *Legat.* 4-7) to refer to God's goodness, transcendence, unnamability and ineffability, and finally offers a short outline of his doctrine of powers. All of these aspects, as we saw, are critical in Philo's conception of providence. But here the emphasis is not so much on how Philo conceptualizes the notion of providence, but rather on how he applies the concept of providence developed over a lifetime as a source of encouragement and hope for his fellow believers in a time of political uncertainty.

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