

DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY AND HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY IN PHILO

Analysis and Method

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I

Both theology and philosophy wrestle with the tension that stands between the concept of divine sovereignty and the concept of human responsibility. In one sense, the problem is not restricted to theism (whether monotheism or polytheism): the atheist may not wrestle with *divine* sovereignty, but he struggles with questions of determinism and freedom. Within religious systems, although the sovereignty/responsibility tension is not restricted to monotheistic religions¹), it is nevertheless particularly acute there because pure monotheism excludes cosmological dualism and normally pictures God as both omnipotent and good.

When such questions are examined from the perspective of the documents which constitute the New Testament, there is a tendency to focus on only one small part of the problem: election (by which I mean predestination to salvation, however that salvation be conceived). This is intrinsically unrealistic. The sovereignty/responsibility tension raises a large number of questions about the relations between God and man, about theodicy, about the nature of human freedom in general and not only when a person confronts Christ, about the contingency of God, about time/eternity relationships, and so forth. Eschatology must be treated, for it raises the question: In what sense does an absolutely sovereign God *begin* to reign or *promise* to reign? One might have thought that divine sovereignty already presupposes a reign of God so universal and eternal that ideas of eschatological reign are either excluded or incoherent. And what effect does the sovereignty/responsibility tension have on any kind of Christology which perceives Jesus to be simultaneously at one with God and at one with man?

¹) Cf. F. NÖTSCHER, "Schicksal und Freiheit," *Biblica* 11 (1959) 446-62.

The importance of recognizing the breadth of the sovereignty/responsibility tension must not be overlooked. From a methodological point of view, such recognition is essential. For example, if the sovereignty/responsibility tension is construed solely in terms of election, and then this tension is compared in Philo and the Jewish apocalyptic intertestamental literature, large areas are found in common; but if the sovereignty/responsibility tension is construed solely in terms of its eschatological ramifications, there is virtually nothing in common. It is methodologically necessary to permit the shape of the sovereignty/responsibility tension to emerge as naturally and wholistically as possible from each corpus under scrutiny, without determining in advance the kind of category (e.g. theodicy, or election) that will be admitted to the discussion. It is equally necessary to observe how the various parts *function* in their respective systems; for it is possible that election, for instance, serves to foster national or racial pride in one system and personal humility in another. The mere presence of the idea of election is not itself very informative.

In this paper I shall attempt a brief study of this kind in Philo. My concern, however, is not with Philo alone, but with demonstrating the kind of analysis that is necessary in approaching the sovereignty/responsibility tension in any body of religious literature, not least the New Testament documents²⁾.

II

There is little agreement among Philonic scholars concerning the extent to which Jewish thought, hellenization, mysticism, and political concerns prevail in Philo³⁾. But despite arguments to the contrary, the assessment of S. SANDMEL appears justified: "Philonic Judaism is the result of hellenization which transcends mere language; it is as complete a hellenization as was possible for a group which

²⁾ I have attempted something of this in *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Some Aspects of Johannine Theology Against Jewish Background* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott/Nashville: John Knox, 1980), where there is also further discussion of methodological questions but no treatment of Philo.

³⁾ See the annotated bibliography of L. FELDMAN, *Studies in Judaica: Scholarship on Philo and Josephus (1937-63)* (New York: Yeshiva University, n.d.) 6-15; and the more recent bibliographical studies of Earle HILGERT in *Studia Philonica*.

retained its loyalty to Torah, and the separateness of the group" ⁴). Inconsistency necessarily arises in Philo's handling of Torah: the Hebrew in him holds to the scrupulous observance of the law (e.g. *Mig.* 89 f.), while the Greek in him allegorizes and insists that at least some of the history in Torah is to be treated lightly, filtered by "reason" (*Hyp.* 6.5-9).

It cannot be said that Philo's exegesis, taken as a whole, makes sense. Whenever there are alternatives, he chooses both (usually, it must be said, in different parts of his work). He contradicts himself as to whether people now possess the dominion to which the Bible refers . . . He combines a stern subordination of man's role to God's with some very free and positive speculation about the cosmic significance of man's unique constitution ⁵).

It is therefore doubly important that the examination of the sovereignty/responsibility tension in Philo be conducted in his own terms, without the importation of categories which do not concern him.

We begin with a brief examination of Philo's understanding of God, especially as God relates to human beings. God in Philo is not only the Pure Being of some Greek philosophy but also the personal and merciful God of the Jews ⁶) (e.g. *Mos.* ii 238-41; *Spec.* i 308; ii 176-82; *Op.* 81-171). The expression "the loving kindness of the great and bountiful God" reappears even in the most metaphysical passages (e.g. *Cher.* 29; *Abr.* 137; *Leg. All.* i 34) ⁷). God is unique, invisible, transcendent, sovereign over all, the ultimate Cause who cannot be used (*Post.* 15; *Mig.* 180 f.; *Leg. All.* ii 1-4; *Cher.* 99-101, 113, 127-30) ⁸). He is the Existent (τὸ ὄν); whose highest and chief powers are two: his sovereignty, reflected in κῆρυξ, for as Lord he

⁴) *Philo's Place in Judaism* (New York: Ktav, 1971) 211; cf. also his more recent *Philo of Alexandria: An Introduction* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 127-134.

⁵) D. JOBLING, "'And have dominion . . .': The Interpretation of Genesis i 28 in Philo Judaeus," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 8 (1977) 81.

⁶) For a survey of Philo's conception of God, see J. DRUMMOND, *Philo Judaeus* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1888) 2. 1-64; H. A. WOLFSON, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947) 2. 73-164; R. WILLIAMSON, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970) 212 ff.

⁷) As E. R. GOODENOUGH (*An Introduction to Philo Judaeus* [Oxford: University Press, 1962] 85-86) points out.

⁸) On God's transcendence, unknowability and unnamability, cf. H. A. WOLFSON, *Philo* 2. 94-137; J. DANÉLOU, *Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard 1958) 143-149; and the penetrating if brief remarks of C. H. DODD, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953) 61 f.

exercises rule (βασιλική) and stands behind punishment (κολαστήριος); and his beneficence, reflected in θεός, which suggests the power of showing grace (χαριστική) and of benefitting (ἐνεργετής). These two powers, summed up as goodness and power (*Som.* i 163; *Spec. Leg.* i 307; *Cher.* 27), are brought together by a third word (λόγος) which unites them (*Cher.* 27 f.).

Sometimes these attributes function for Philo in a manner typical of the Old Testament. For example, God's goodness demands humility and fear (*Gig.* 45 ff.; *Cher.* 29 f.). In *Det.* 154-9 and *Post.* 6, the divine omniscience forbids us thinking that we can escape him. More frequently, however, perspectives not found in the Old Testament prevail. *Mut.* 18-23 speaks of him as the "Lord" of the bad, the "God" of those on their way to betterment, and the "God and Lord" of the perfect: thus he is spoken of as Lord to Pharaoh, God to Moses, and Lord God to Israel. Inconsistently, Philo elsewhere says that although God is revealed as sovereign and benefactor ("Lord and God") yet this is so only to the world open to our senses; but "to that goodness which our minds perceive He is saviour and benefactor only, not master or lord. For wisdom is rather God's friend than His servant" (*Sob.* 55).

This general pattern is the necessary metaphysical structure which undergirds philonic *theology*, and introduces interesting new dimensions into the sovereignty/responsibility tension. Its immediate conclusion is that, since God is so wonderful, the only suitable place for this God to dwell is the invisible soul (*Cher.* 99-101). Therefore Philo exhorts his readers to be full of good teaching, excellence, virtue, and noble actions.

In the same vein, it is Philo who of Jewish writers takes loathing of anthropomorphisms to its farthest limit. When the Old Testament attributes to God the swearing of oaths, repenting, a "coming down," or wrath, Philo not only "rejects as impious both anthropomorphism and anthropopathism"⁹) but uses this as a launching-pad for defending his allegorizing approach (*Sac.* 91-6; *Post.* 1-7; *Quod Deus* 20-22, 51-69; *Conf.* 134; *Som.* i 232-6). The reason for such strong anti-anthropomorphic sentiment lies partly in his Stoic conception of God as Pure Being¹⁰), and partly in the consistent

⁹) J. DRUMMOND, *Philo Judaeus* 2. 15.

¹⁰) P. BOYANCÉ ("Le Dieu Très Haut chez Philon," *Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* [ed. P. LEUY and E. WOLFF; Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1974] 139-149) points out that, even

tendency to fence God off from any possibility that evil be attributed to him. This is clearly seen, for example, in Philo's oft-repeated explanation of the words, "Let us make man . . ." (Gen. i 26). He offers his "solution" as probable, and it runs as follows: Created things other than men are neither good nor bad. Only in the case of man did God say, "Let *us* make. . ."

It is to this end that, when man orders his course aright, when his thoughts and deeds are blameless, God the universal Ruler may be owned as their Source; while others from the numbers of His subordinates are held responsible for thoughts 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 (*Op.* 72-5; cf. *Conf.* 175, 179; *Fug.* 68 f.; *Mut.* 29-31).

This thought is part of a much broader pattern which insists that God is the author of good things only, but of nothing bad (*Conf.* 180-82; *Det.* 122). It is inconceivable that God could test people with famine, for he is good; and therefore Deut viii 2 *must* be taken allegorically (*Congr.* 170-74). If God must punish, he does so through intermediaries, for it would not be fitting for him to do it himself, directly (*Abr.* 142-6)¹¹. Although there are some who say that reverence to God consists in saying that all things were made by him, both the good and their opposites, yet men ought rather to own "Him Author of the good things only" (*Agr.* 128-30; cf. *Op.* 75; *Plant.* 53)¹². The same motif is present in Philo's understanding of creation. The origin of creation is the goodness and grace of God (*Leg. All.* iii 78; *Mut.* 46); i.e. God did not begrudge a share of his own nature to the original unlovely unformed material (*Op.* 21 f.). If the creation is not better than it is, the reason is not to be found in any alleged niggardliness in God's giving, but in the limited capacity of the material to receive what God gives

in the relatively few places where God is described as θεός ὑψίστος, the title conjures up notions of transcendent immutability and impassibility, dependent on Stoic influence. Cf. also Joseph C. McLELLAND, *God the Anonymous: A Study in Alexandrian Philosophical Theology* (Philadelphia: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1976) esp. 23-44.

¹¹) However, in the ordinary flow of his writing, when he is not dealing directly with divine goodness or transcendence, Philo can still speak of God punishing the impious (e.g. *Mos.* i 6; ii 147); although elsewhere, while stressing that God is transcendent and motionless, he says that God takes hold of us (only) by intermediaries (*Post.* 20).

¹²) It is often pointed out that the thought is Platonic (cf. *Tim.* 29 f., 40 f.; *Rep.* 379 B, C).

(*Op.* 23) ¹³). The fact that God's providence (*πρόνοια*) is beneficent receives repeated stress (*Mos.* i 67; *Op.* 9 f.; and the whole of *Prov.*); and this beneficence Philo regards as an incentive to piety, indeed "the most beneficial and the most indispensable" of all motives (*Op.* 9 f.). Even where divine *πρόνοια* is punishing the wicked, from the perspective of Israel the action is kind and good (*Mos.* i 132 f.) ¹⁴).

God's providence sometimes takes on a slightly predestinarian flair, which, however, is invariably tempered by the fact that it is only related to what is good. Aaron answers Moses's request positively because his soul had been predisposed to obedience by the watchful working of God (*κατ' ἐπιφροσύνην θεοῦ*, *Mos.* i 85). Moreover, "without God's directing care, the affairs of kings and subjects cannot go aright" (*Mos.* ii 5). God restrains people from evil for their good, and therefore the "freedom" of the wicked must not be envied (*Conf.* 166 f.; *Det.* 141 ff.). Why God does not restrain others is not discussed. The crucial point is that divine ultimacy is restricted to the positive aspects of life.

In some instances, Philo appears reluctant to ascribe something to providence; he ventures only his personal opinion. Hence, while *Flacc.* offers many examples of God overruling for the sake of his people (e.g. 102, 189-91), some instances are only tentatively put forward as the result of divine providence (*θεία πρόνοια*, *Flacc.* 121-5; cf. *Leg.* 3, 220 f.). Elsewhere, similarly, Philo says that the events of the Moses-in-the-bulrushes narrative were brought about, "in my opinion, by the providence of God watching over the child" (*Mos.* i 12, 17). There are only a few statements which suggest a more rigid control. QG iii 13 (on xv 16), for example, appears to make fate determine the times; while in *Conf.* 98 we learn that "even the whole world does not move of its own free unshackled will, but is the standing-ground of God who thus pilots in safety all that is." Philo then retreats from the anthropomorphism he has just used!

¹³) It is this aspect of creation which casts some doubt on the success of H. A. WOLFSON's attempt to show that Philo believes in creation *ex nihilo*: *Philo* I. 300-316.

¹⁴) This kind of example prompts H. A. WOLFSON, *Philo* I. 180, to write that providence in Philo is "individual providence, the power of God to change the order of nature for the benefit of certain favoured individuals."

III

At first glance, human natures are also said to be determined; but before considering examples, Philo's anthropology must be reviewed. Living nature is divided into two parts, the reasoning and the unreasoning; the former into two more, the mortal (men) and the immortal (unbodied souls which range through air and sky). The latter are immune from wickedness because they have never been imprisoned in "that dwelling-place of endless calamities"—the body¹⁵). And this immunity is shared by unreasoning natures, because, as they have no gift of understanding, they are also not guilty of wrongdoing willed freely as a result of deliberate reflection (*Conf.* 176-8). That leaves man, "practically the only being who having knowledge of good and evil chooses the worst" (*ibid.*). Thus, although man is charged with looking after things in the world open to the senses (*Op.* 87 f.), it is nevertheless man's reason or mind which he must cultivate. Man's knowledge is finite (*Ebr.* 192-205); but mind, represented by Abraham, travels far in its love of learning (*Mig.* 216-20).

Yet within this framework Philo can speak of bad individuals "whose nature does not allow them ever to act intentionally in an honest way" (*Spec. Leg.* i 246). By contrast, Isaac the self-taught is understood to have been "endued with a nature which learned from no other teacher than itself" (*Praem.* 59). And in a quite remarkable passage Philo writes, "And if thou wilt consider, my friend, thou wilt find that God has made in the soul some natures faulty and blameworthy of themselves, and others in all respects excellent and praiseworthy . . ." (*Leg. All.* iii 76). These passages are atypical of Philo, however, and may arise from his habit of marshalling as many arguments as possible to prove any particular point, regardless of the fact that those same arguments may jar with something he has said elsewhere. In the latter example, he is, contextually speaking, concerned with defending God as creator of the serpent despite the suitability of the serpent as a symbol for pleasure; while Isaac's perfect nature ultimately arises out of the allegorical use

¹⁵) The distinction between the material (bad) and the immaterial (good) is typical of Philo—so much so that he squirms uncomfortably when he expounds a text like Gen. i 31 (*Quis. Her.* 157-60). But it is not quite certain that he regards matter as *ipso facto* evil—unlike full-blown Gnosticism and neo-Platonism, but rather like Platonism itself.

of Isaac as the offspring of Logos and Sophia ¹⁶), even though the historical still lurks behind the allegorical.

But when Philo actually sets himself to write on the freedom of man, that freedom is consistently maintained. "The voluntary act, inasmuch as it was committed with forethought and with set purpose, must incur woes for ever beyond healing" (*Post.* 10 f.). This belief stems from Philo's anthropology. We observed (*supra*) that men, unlike irrational creatures, have the powers of choice; and unlike immaterial but rational creatures, they are corrupted by the body. Now the mind (ὁ νοῦς) is the eye of the soul; and

it is mind alone which the Father who begat it judged worthy of freedom, and loosening the fetters of necessity, suffered it to range as it listed, and of that free-will which is His most peculiar possession and most worthy of His majesty gave it such portion as it was capable of receiving.

Mind is not found in other living creatures, and so they enjoy no freedom.

But man, possessed of a spontaneous and self-determined will, whose activities for the most part rest on deliberate choice, is with reason blamed for what he does wrong with intent, praise when he acts rightly of his own will. In the others, in plants and animals, no praise is due if they bear well, nor blame if they fare ill: for their movements and changes in either direction come to them from no deliberate choice or volition of their own. But the soul of man alone has received from God the faculty of voluntary movement, and in this way especially is made like to Him, and thus being liberated, as far as might be, from that hard and ruthless mistress, necessity, may justly be charged with guilt, in that it does not honour its Liberator (*Quod Deus* 45-50).

Similar expressions are to be found, *inter alia*, in *Conf.* 177 f.; *Spec. Leg.* i 227; 235-8; and 230 where, when this distinction is applied to the High Priest who sins unintentionally (*Lev.* iv 2 f.), the conclusion is drawn that the High Priest is immune from all sins of the deliberate variety. *Fug.* 65-76 not only makes the distinction between sins intentionally and unintentionally committed; but, within the latter category, between those which are involuntary and unavoidable slips, and those that are God's acts in the sense that the man serves unconsciously as God's minister (e.g. manslaughter as God's method of punishing the victim, since it would be "unbecoming to God to punish" directly). *Spec. Leg.* iii 120-22

¹⁶ Cf. E. R. GOODENOUGH, *By Light, Light* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1969) 153-166.

argues further that in the manslaughter case it must be supposed that the person killed deserved to be executed, and that therefore the defilement occasioned by manslaughter is "of little note and quite insignificant, for which pardon may well be asked and granted" ¹⁷). What happens to divine ultimacy in those cases where a man sins involuntarily and yet is not acting as God's (unconscious) minister is nowhere discussed. Elsewhere we learn that our "involuntary" sins are quite independent of us and are therefore not reckoned to us, since God rarely vouchsafes to man to run life's course without some kind of transgression (*Quod Deus* 90). Thus, while Philo is trying to preserve the goodness of God and the free will of man, he has talked himself around to a position in which involuntarily-committed sins are really God's fault! Philo would not put it in terms quite so crass; but it is clear that in an effort to relieve the sovereignty/responsibility he has merely transformed its shape and returned it with new tensions.

In the light of Philo's understanding of intentional and unintentional actions, it is predictable that he will underscore the importance of choosing. The fool gets rid of mind, "the charioteer and monitor," and is guided by θυμός and ἐπιθυμία while the man of opposite character eliminates these and chooses as his patron and controlling guide the divine word (λόγος θεῖος). This is what Moses did, until he was left with only the best part of the soul: the rational part. His soul then exercised "its truly free and noble impulses toward all things beautiful" (*Mig.* 67). The ideal of freedom in Philo is freedom from the passions (*Quod Omn. Prob.* 21 f.). When the rational prevails, a man always acts sensibly, and cannot be compelled to do wrong. Therefore he alone is free (*Quod Omn. Prob.* 59-61). When God gave the ten commandments, he refrained from adding threats of judgment, because he is good and "he judged it most in accordance with his being to issue his saving commandments free from any admixture of punishment, that men might choose the best, not involuntarily, but of deliberate purpose, not taking senseless fear but the good sense of reason for their counsellor" (*Decal.* 176-8). Men are exhorted "to choose good and eschew evil" (*Cher.* 30). This requires real toil (*Sac.* 35-9) and self-discipline. As immoderate indulgence in pleasures brings death, the appropriate healing is "the principle of self-mastery" ὁ σωφροσύνης λόγος,

¹⁷) For discussion, cf. H. A. WOLFSON, *Philo* I. 438-441.

symbolized by the bronze serpent. The fact that God told Moses, "Make it for thyself" (Num. xxi 8) is significant: "This is that you may know that self-mastery is not a possession of every man, but only of the man beloved of God" (*Leg. All.* ii 78-80). Such a righteous man is "a safeguard against (the disease of wickedness), for he has in his righteousness a sovereign remedy" (*Det.* 123). Much is made of the fact that the Essenes constituted a *voluntary* association (*Hyp.* ll. 2). "Philo, as might be expected from his philosophical affinities, consistently maintains man's self-determination" ¹⁸).

IV

But is this self-determination absolute? It must be noted that even the passages cited are in some ways carefully circumscribed. God gave freewill to mind in "*such portion as it was capable of receiving*;" and as a result, mind is liberated "*as far as might be*" from "that hard and ruthless mistress, necessity" (*Quod Deus* 45-50; emphasis mine). Moreover, there is one passage, a homily on Deut. xxx 15, 19, which seems to exclude any notion of freedom as entailing absolute power to contrary. In it, Philo says that you may look at man's good choices as if they were freely made, or alternatively as if God were the cause behind them; and the latter is the first and better principle ¹⁹).

Drummond certainly over-reacts when he claims that this passage "reduces the belief in free-will to a useful delusion of the less educated" ²⁰). David S. WINSTON has a sophisticated discussion in which he argues that Philo's free-will is not absolute: like the Stoics, WINSTON argues, Philo never moves beyond a relative freedom ²¹). WINSTON's cautions are surely basically right; but he

¹⁸) G. F. MOORE, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1927-30) I. 458.

¹⁹) The passage is not included in the Loeb edition, but is apparently part of the lost *Leg. All.* iv. It was published by J. R. HARRIS, *Fragments of Philo Judaeus* (Cambridge: University Press, 1886) 8. An English translation is provided by J. DRUMMOND, *Philo* 2. 347n., and by H. A. WOLFSON, *Philo* I. 442.

²⁰) *Loc cit.*

²¹) Cf. David S. WINSTON, "Freedom and Determinism in Philo of Alexandria," *Studia Philonica* 3 (1974-75) 47-70. He also points out that Philo's ethical thought is linked to the idea of an all-penetrating divine logos reaching into each person's mind. This effectively converts the individual's mind into a fragmentary extension of the divine mind. Philo's free-will doctrine is relative only.

falls to reckon adequately with the fact that, as WOLFSON correctly points out ²²), God is portrayed as standing behind men's *good* choices only. When man makes a wrong choice, i.e. when he sins, he is very much on his own, and there is no flavour of divine ultimacy in such instances—even in a relationship of first cause to second cause, or the like.

To understand this subtlety in Philo's thought a little better, another point must be observed. We have noted that God's ultimacy stands behind good things. But more than that: men are responsible for *recognizing* this fact—that everything good comes from God (*Leg. All.* iii 78; *Post.* 42). This includes wealth (*Agr.* 172 f.), and most (*sic*) good things in the soul (*Leg. All.* i 48 f.). The initial difference between Cain and Abel was that only the latter recognized that everything is from God. "The impious man thinks . . . that the mind has sovereign power over what it plans . . ." (*Conf.* 123-7; cf. *Sac.* 1-3; *Det.* 32). By contrast, "(the) purified mind rejoices in nothing more than in confessing that it has the lord of all for its master. For to be the slave of God is the highest boast of man . . ." (*Cher.* 107 f.). In other words, positive divine ultimacy is not some abstract dictum in Philo. Rather, it demands personal recognition. We must realize that God alone acts, while we ourselves are to be passive—not with the passivity of helplessness, but in a way which braces itself to accept God's ways and cooperate with him the sole Actor (*Cher.* 77-83; cf. *Sac.* 72 f.). But if men must recognize God's positive ultimacy, then surely it is not surprising if a man's choice for good is likewise related to God's ultimacy. Free-will therefore functions in Philo as the ground of human responsibility and as one major means of setting man off from God, *absolutely*, whenever man sins; but divine ultimacy limits human free-will, and relativizes it a trifle, at least in those instances where a good choice is being made.

V

In other strands of Jewish literature, the eschatological dimension wields significant influence on the pattern of divine sovereignty. This is not the case in Philo ²³). Although he can speak of a

²²) *Philo* I. 443-444.

²³) Cf. E. BREHIER, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1925) 10.

place in heaven (*Praem.* 152), the real goal is for a vision of God (*Post.* 13 f.); and, if one cannot see the Existent, at least to see his image, the most holy Word (*Conf.* 97). The soul has the possibility of living forever "by the acquisition and practice of virtue" (*Conf.* 161). In any case virtue is its own reward (*Spec. Leg.* ii 257-62). Thus God is not now coming at the end of the age to set everything to right. But there is a new tension. Despite a constant stress on divine transcendence, there is now "a conception of salvation, based on the consubstantiality between the divine being and the human soul, and taking the form of an ascent of the divine in man to its source in God" ²⁴). This mystical tradition may be variously assessed, but it cannot properly be gainsaid ²⁵). On the one hand, the ascent is based on personal moral achievement; on the other, God's ultimacy stands behind all things good, including this achievement. With the introduction of real mysticism it may not always be possible to distinguish between the personal triumph and the divine activity. Some aspects of the sovereignty/responsibility tension are being swallowed up by the vagaries of a Greek mysticism.

Philo betrays no trace of election in any Old Testament sense. In *Virt.* 184-6, he cites Deut. xxvi 17 f. (LXX) to the effect that the people chose God and God chose the people: τὸν θεὸν εἴλου σήμερον εἶναί σοι θεόν, καὶ κύριος εἴλατό σε σήμερον γενέσθαι λαὸν αὐτοῦ. But he continues: "Glorious is this reciprocation of choice, when man hastens to serve the Existent, and God delays not to take the suppliant to himself and anticipates the will (θεοῦ . . . προαπαντᾶν τῷ βουλήματι) of him who honestly and sincerely comes to do him service" ²⁶). The initiative is entirely with the "suppliant."

Elsewhere, ambiguity arises out of the fact that Philo is using his texts in both a literal and an allegorical manner. Thus in *Post.* 91 f., we learn that when God divided up the peoples, he fixed the boundaries of virtue to correspond with the number of his angels; for there are as many "nations" of virtue as there are words of God. Philo is referring to the "nations of the soul," τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς ἔθνη; and he goes on:

²⁴) R. G. HAMERTON-KELLY, *Pre-existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973) 121.

²⁵) Cf. E. R. GOODENOUGH, *By Light, Light, passim*; and H. A. A. KENNEDY, *Philo's Contribution to Religion* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919) 211-237, for discussion and references.

²⁶) There is uncertainty in the text beyond this point.

But what are the portions of His angels, and what is the allotted share of the All-sovereign Ruler? The particular virtues belong to the servants, to the Ruler the chosen [= choice?] race of Israel. For he that sees God, drawn to Him by surpassing beauty, has been allotted as His portion to Him Whom he sees.

Elsewhere Philo says that the Jews are “the people most beloved by God, the one which seems to me to have received the gift of priesthood and prophecy for every race of man” (*Abr.* 98; cf. *Spec. Leg.* ii 163-7). Their higher status is a call to minister to the other nations. This call is due to their moral superiority, to their love of God’s beauty. Certainly there is no *racial* barrier to salvation: not race but obedience brings it, and the proselyte “has won a prize best suited to his merits, a place in heaven firmly fixed” (*Praem.* 152; cf. *Mos.* ii 36)²⁷. In other passages the allegorical has taken over completely. Hence in *Mig.* 60 f., Philo applies Deut vii 7 f. not to the election of Israel but to God’s preference for those things in the soul of a man (“the crowd contained in a single soul”) which are led by “right reason” (ὁ ὀρθὸς λόγος).

Similarly, individual men are never said to be chosen out of sheer grace. Why then is Noah said to find grace in the sight of God (*Gen* vi 8) before he has done any good deed, so far as we know? The answer is that Noah was of an excellent nature from his birth (*Leg. All.* iii 77 f.), i.e. he had attracted the “grace” (*sic*) of God to him by his consistently righteous life, even though no specific deeds are recorded. Abraham is used more allegorically. When he has risen to a higher state, and the time has come for his name to be changed, he becomes a man of God.

Now if the God of the Universe, the only God, is also his God in a special sense and by special grace (*sic*), he surely must needs be himself a man of God. For he is called Abraham, by interpretation, “the elect father of sound”, that is, “the good man’s reasoning”. Good, because it is elect and purified; reasoning, because reason is the father of the voice, through which comes the sound of speech common to us all (*Gig.* 63 f.).

Here, “elect” has almost certainly lost any overtones of grace. If Abraham is chosen it is because he is choice.

²⁷) There are passages in Armenian QG and QE on election, but these are not discussed here either because they add nothing new or because they are problematical. For example, in QE ii 46 (on *Exod* xxiv 16b), R. MARCUS’S English translation could be understood to mean either that the nation was elected to be virtuous, or that it was elected because it was virtuous. Unfortunately, I do not read Armenian. The relevant Greek fragment has an independent reading, with a predestinarian flavour.

H. A. A. KENNEDY lays large emphasis on divine grace in Philo²⁸). He points out that God is always represented as the one who loses no opportunity of giving (*Mut.* 129). He is the source of all experiences of grace (*Mut.* 58 f.). All exists because of God, and even man's highest faculties are divine gifts (*Virt.* 188). God the lover of giving (φιλόδωρος) freely bestows his blessings on all, even the imperfect, summoning all to virtue (*Leg. All.* i 34). But Kennedy is utterly mistaken when he tries to demonstrate the existence in Philo of a doctrine of grace akin to that in Paul. The passages he cites are not convincing. *Leg. All.* iii 27 speaks of God revealing himself to a soul, but only to the soul he judges worthy of his mysteries. *Spec. Leg.* i 281 f. and *Mig.* 30 ff. affirm divine ultimacy, but do not reflect any of the discriminating, electing, transforming grace dominate in Paul²⁹). There is a graciousness to positive divine ultimacy that affects election not a whit.

These distinctions become clearer in another passage which again asks the question, "What does 'Noah found grace with the Lord God' mean?" (*Quod Deus* 104-108; as opposed to *Leg. All.* iii 77 f., *supra*). "Is the meaning that he obtained grace or that he was thought worthy of grace? The former is not a reasonable supposition" (104)—because *all* creatures receive grace from God. The second meaning "is founded on a not unreasonable idea" (105), but the problem is this: How great must that person be whose worth is such that he is worthy of grace (*sic*) with God! "Hardly, I think, could the whole world attain to this, and yet the world is the first and the greatest and the most perfect of God's works" (106). Philo therefore opts for a different explanation. That Noah *finds* grace means that the "man of worth" *finds* it to be the highest truth, that "all things are the grace or gift of God" (107)—i.e. God has given things solely out of grace, for he has no needs.

Here, then, is one-sided (i.e. positive) ultimacy, but nothing of electing grace. Elsewhere, similarly, we discover that those souls which are prudent, temperate, courageous or just, have become such "partly by happy natural gifts, partly by the directing influence of custom, partly by their own persistent unsparing efforts" (*Sob.* 38). This is Philo's favourite idea of the three elements in

²⁸) *Philo's Contribution*, 145-157.

²⁹) J. DANIELOU, *Philon d'Alexandrie* 175-181, misunderstands Philo in the same way as Kennedy.

education, φύσις, διδασκαλία, and ἄσκησις often symbolized by Isaac, Abraham, and Jacob respectively ³⁰); but there is no question of electing grace. God's spirit comes at one time or another to all men (*Gig.* 19-21). It must be concluded that election in Philo is never portrayed as God's gracious, discriminating activity.

VI

This brings us to something analogous to the "merit theology" found in other Jewish groups of that era ³¹); but it will be seen that to apply the term to Philo could be misleading. Leaving aside the terminological question for the moment, it is clear that, divine ultimacy notwithstanding, "the voluntary actions of good men are all praiseworthy" (*Post.* 75). In *Mig.* 106-108, Philo follows a manuscript of the LXX which in Gen xii 2 has καὶ ἔση εὐλογητός. He distinguishes this last word from εὐλογήμενος: the former suggests to him that the person is worthy of praise, while the latter means only that the person has actually been praised, worthy or not. In other words, Abraham is indeed worthy of praise, irrespective of whether the opinions of men concur and grant him that praise. The λόγοι impregnate tender souls, souls "of deep virgin soil" (*Som.* i 197-200). God himself does not disdain to feel and show gladness (εὐφροσύνη)

... when the human race turns away from its sins and inclines and reverts to righteousness, following by a free-will choice the laws and statutes of nature ... For it gladdens Him to give when the recipients are worthy of His bounty, since you surely must admit that if those who live a life of guilt can be rightly said to provoke and anger God, those whose life is laudable may be equally well said to gladden Him (*Som.* ii 172-80).

If Moses became priest, legislator, and king,

... his office was bestowed upon him by God, the lover of virtue and nobility, as the reward due to him ... He Who presides over and takes charge of all things thought good to requite him with the kingship of a nation ... a nation destined to be consecrated above all others to offer prayers for ever on behalf of the human race ... (*Mos.* i 148 f.; cf. *QG* iii 40 [on xvii 1 f.]).

³⁰) F. H. COLSON, in the Loeb edition, 2. 488, notes the parallel to Aristotle's so-called "educational trinity."

³¹) In the wake of the recent work of E. P. SANDERS (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977]), it has become unpopular to speak of merit theology in connection with intertestamental Judaism. I remain unpersuaded that the designation is inappropriate: for details cf. the work mentioned in n. 2, *supra*.

Noah was judged fit to be spared and to be the beginner of a second generation of mankind (*Mos.* ii 60). Moses "offers to the repentant in honour of their victory the high rewards of membership in the best of commonwealths" (*Virt.* 175). It is to good men that God suggests (ὕπηχεῖν)³² good decisions by which they will both give and receive benefits (*Leg.* 245). Even a yearning after God makes the soul worthy³³.

It should now be obvious why "merit theology" is an inadequate description of the phenomena just described. In Philo, the aim is not so much acquittal and discrete rewards as self-improvement. Sin is not so cut and dried: for example, the sins of the greatly virtuous "are such as to be regarded as acts of righteousness if done by others" (*Spec. Leg.* i 245 f.). Deeds are important only insofar as they reflect the virtues already abounding within the individual³⁴. Moreover, although the patriarchs and Moses have, by the aid of the Powers, attained the end of the mystic road and been given a vision of ultimate Reality, their influence on their descendants is now in terms of human nature transcended to become Logos and Sophia, their history being swallowed up by allegorization³⁵. Philo, then, knows no merit theology in the strict sense; but his Greek alternative cannot be said to stand closer to the biblical writers on that account.

VII

This essay has sketched in briefly some of the salient features surrounding the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility as that tension is understood by Philo. Obviously, a great deal more could be said; but perhaps the exploration has gone far enough if it has illustrated the way in which this impossibly malleable topic may be traced in one particular corpus. The questions which interest us (e.g. eschatology) may not excite Philo; and the categories familiar to us from Paul (e.g. election, grace) may

³² Cf. E. M. SMALLWOOD, *Philonis Alexandrini: Legatio ad Gaium* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961) 280.

³³ Cf. H. A. A. KENNEDY, *Philo's Contribution* 96 ff.

³⁴ Cf. S. SANDMEL, "Virtue and Reward in Philo," *Essays in Old Testament Ethics* (Fs. J. Philip Hyatt; ed. James L. CRENSHAW and John T. WILLIS; New York: Ktav, 1974) 217-223; *idem*, *Philo of Alexandria* 111-117.

³⁵ Cf. S. SANDMEL, *Philo's Place*, xx: "For Philo, the Bible is not so much the history of the human race or of the Hebrews as it is the potential or actual religious experience of every man."

have entirely different connotations or even denotations in a philonic context. Even a perspective (e.g. God's love for Israel) which bears many formal similarities to other Jewish literature, canonical and non-canonical, may *function* uniquely in a particular corpus. Such observations serve as a salutatory methodological warning that considerable care must be taken in delineating the sovereignty/responsibility tension in any body of literature, biblical or extra-biblical.