

PETER FRICK

Divine Providence
in Philo of Alexandria

*Texts and Studies in
Ancient Judaism*

77

Mohr Siebeck

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Edited by
Martin Hengel and Peter Schäfer

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Peter Frick

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in Philo of Alexandria

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To
Kristoffer and Benjamin

Preface

This book is based on a doctoral dissertation written under the direction of Alan Mendelson and Peter Widdicombe at McMaster University. Except for minor revisions, I have added Chapter Six and the section on “The Notion of Providence in Hellenistic” Judaism in the Introduction.

I would like to thank Martin Hengel, first, for introducing me to the writings of Philo during my student years in Tübingen. I still remember many occasions in which Prof. Hengel made intriguing comments on various doctrines and aspects of Philo’s thought. His comments about this unique thinker fascinated me to such an extent that I decided to study Philo. The result is the present volume. I also appreciate very much the fact that Prof. Hengel suggested this volume for publication and included it in this series of studies on ancient Judaism. In a similar vein, I would also like to thank David Winston, not only for his willingness to read the entire manuscript and to offer invaluable suggestions, but also for the sharing of his deep insights into Philo’s thought through many of his publications.

It is with a deep sense of appreciation to St. Paul’s United College, University of Waterloo, that I acknowledge the sabbatical leave granted to me for the first half of this year. Because of this leave, I was able to present this study for publication within a very short time frame. Last, but in no way least, I would like to thank my family, my wife Ruth and our children Kristoffer and Benjamin. I dedicate this volume to our boys who each have experienced in their own ways the goodness of God’s inscrutable providence.

Waterloo, Easter 1999

Peter Frick

Contents

Preface	VII
Abbreviations	XII
<i>Introduction</i>	1
The Doctrine of Providence in Philo of Alexandria	1
The Notion of Providence in Greek Philosophy	5
The Notion of Providence in Hellenistic Judaism	6
The Term <i>πρόνοια</i> in Philo	15
Assumptions and Structure of Study	17
Approach to the Present Study	20
The Notion of Providence in Philonic Research	21
<i>Chapter One: Divine Transcendence and Providence</i>	25
1.1 The Concept of God	26
1.1.1 The Transcendence of God	26
1.1.1.1 Transcendence and Philosophy	26
1.1.1.2 Transcendence and Scripture	30
1.1.2 Divine Existence and Essence	32
1.1.3 The Unknowability and Ineffability of God	33
1.1.4 The Knowledge of God	38
1.1.4.1 Anthropomorphic Language and Negative Theology	39
1.1.4.2 Positive Descriptions	41
1.1.4.3 The Property of Acting	42
1.2 The Concept of Providence	43
1.2.1 Transcendence and Providence	43
1.2.2 Divine Existence and Providence	45
1.2.3 Divine Essence and Providence	49
1.2.3.1 God is Provident	51
1.3. The Concept of the Providence of God	52
<i>Chapter Two: Divine Immanence and Providence</i>	57
2.1 The Immanence of God	58
2.2 God's Goodness and Providence	61
2.2.1 God's Goodness and Grace	63
2.2.2 God's Goodness and Will	68
2.2.3 God's Goodness and Providence	70

2.3 God's Powers and Providence	73
2.3.1 The Logos and the Powers	73
2.3.2 The Gracious and Providential Power	79
2.3.3 God's Powers and Virtues	84
2.4 Synopsis	87
<i>Chapter Three: Providence in Philo's Theory of Creation</i>	89
3.1 The State of the Question	90
3.2 Providence and the Createdness of the Cosmos	94
3.2.1 The Cosmos was not created Automatically	94
3.2.2 The Cosmos was created by the Mind of God	98
3.2.3 The Temporal Beginning of the Cosmos	100
3.3 Providence and the Destruction of the Cosmos	102
3.4 Providence and the Logos	108
3.5 Conclusion: Providence and Creation	116
<i>Chapter Four: Providence and Astral Fatalism</i>	119
4.1 Astronomy and Astral Fatalism	121
4.1.1 The Discipline of Astronomy	121
4.1.2 The Casting of Nativities	123
4.2 Philo's Concept of God and the Idea of Astral Fatalism	126
4.2.1 God's Transcendence and Incorporeality	126
4.2.2 Divine Causation	128
4.2.3 The Divinity of the Stars	130
4.3 Astral Fatalism and Moral Responsibility	133
4.3.1 Human Freedom	134
4.3.2 Moral Responsibility	135
4.4 Conclusion	137
<i>Chapter Five: Theodicy and Providence</i>	139
5.1 God is not the Cause of Evil	140
5.2 The Distinction between Physical and Moral Evil	143
5.3 The Category of Physical Evil	145
5.3.1 The Cosmological Argument	145
5.3.2 The Physical Argument	146
5.3.3 The Logical Argument	149
5.3.4 The Ethical Argument	151
5.4 The Category of Moral Evil	152
5.4.1 The Soul in Philo's Ontological Hierarchy	153
5.4.2 The Creation of the Rational and Irrational Parts of the Soul	156
5.4.3 The Rational and Irrational Parts of the Soul	158
5.4.4 The Notion of Moral Responsibility and the Origin of Evil	162
5.4.4.1 The Knowledge of the Moral Good	163
5.4.4.2 The Choice between Good and Evil	163
5.4.4.3 The Origin of Moral Evil	166

5.5 Theodicy and Providence	166
5.5.1 Providence and the Category of Physical Evil	167
5.5.2 Providence and the Category of Moral Evil	171
<i>Chapter Six: Providence and History</i>	176
6.1 Providence and the Lives of Individuals	177
6.1.1 Generic Descriptions of Individuals	177
6.1.2 Abraham and Sarah	180
6.1.3 Isaac	183
6.1.4 Joseph	183
6.1.5 Moses	184
6.2 Providence and the Jewish People	185
6.2.1 <i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>	187
6.2.2 <i>In Flaccum</i>	188
<i>Conclusion</i>	190
Bibliography	195
Index of Biblical References	207
Index of Philonic References	209
Index of Ancient and Modern Authors	216
Index of Subjects	219

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.</i> 1-2	<i>De Somniis I-II</i>
<i>Spec.</i> 1-4	<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	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
CRINT	Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
EK	Edelstein, L. and I. G. Kidd (eds.). <i>Posidonius. The Fragments, The Commentary</i> , 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, <i>The Hellenistic Philosophers</i> , 2 vols. New York, 1987.
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LSJ	H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . 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	<i>Society of Biblical Studies Seminar Papers</i>
SP	<i>Studia Philonica</i>
SphA	<i>Studia Philonica Annual</i>
SVF	J. von Arnim (ed), <i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> , 4 vols. Stuttgart, reprint 1964.
ThW	<i>Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament</i> , 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 study 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,"¹ we shall distinguish our aims as follows. We shall 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 Philonic thought as a whole.

To gain a perspective on how Philo establishes the idea of providence as a 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 text² offers as good a starting point to gain insight into the significance of providence within Philo's basic outline of theology. Whether this passage delimits "certain unshakable beliefs,"³ or whether it is "the first creed in history,"⁴ or Philo's "concept of orthodoxy,"⁵ this text is at any rate an extremely significant compendium of Philonic thought in

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

²Philo 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 – though important – only limited insight into the full spectrum of how Philo conceives of the idea of providence.

³Harry 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).

⁴Erwin Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo*, 37.

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

its entirety. Philo even 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).⁶

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, since the concept of providence figures as a crucial element in Philo’s theological “creed” on the level of the doctrine of God and the theory of creation, we must also understand the notion of providence as a structural pillar without which Philo’s thought 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.⁷ 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 of “God’s unknowable essence” and ὑπάρχω with the meaning of “God’s knowable existence.” On the basis of this distinction, coupled with his

⁶*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.

⁷Colson’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 perhaps represents Colson’s attempt to distinguish the theological nuance implied in the two verbs.

interpretation of the biblical lemma Exodus 3:14 (ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν), 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 God 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.⁸

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

⁸*Opif.* 171-2.

notion of God's continuous care of his creation, a care which Philo seeks to render intelligible as the concept of divine providence.⁹

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 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 continuous benefit of his creation and the special blessings for his chosen people.

⁹The 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.

The Notion of Providence in Greek Philosophy

In Greek thought,¹⁰ the idea of providence is expressed by the technical term *πρόνοια*. The term can be traced in its philosophical sense to Plato who introduces the expression of divine providence (*θεοῦ πρόνοια*) into Greek philosophy.¹¹ The word *πρόνοια* is employed in the dialogue *Timaeus*¹² 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 x of the *Laws*¹³ 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 creator's good will for 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 exploits 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 supralunary realm while the world was left to chance and fate.¹⁴

The Stoics of all periods, however, built on Plato's ideas of providence and adapted it as a crucial element to their materialist philosophy.¹⁵ God is understood to be identical 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

¹⁰For 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 (1994), 4417-90. See also John Dillon, "Providence," in: *ABD*, vol. 5, 520-21.

¹¹Cf. Diogenes Laertius 3:24.

¹²30c (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν) and 44c (πρόνοαι 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.

¹³896e-905d.

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

¹⁵On the Stoic notion of providence, see Myrto Dragona-Monachou, *The Stoic Arguments for the Existence and Providence of the Gods* (Athens, 1976). The notion 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 providence was one of the most basic tenets of Stoicism," 131.

principle which they designated as *theos*, ‘God’ but which they conceived of simply as the immanent active principle of the universe.”¹⁶

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.’¹⁷

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. As we shall see, for Philo, the pantheistic designation, the providence “of the gods,” is reconceived in a monotheistic framework as the providence “of God,” the God of the Scriptures.

The Notion of Providence in Hellenistic Judaism

There are a number of late biblical and extra-biblical works, especially the writings of the genre “wisdom literature,” in which the authors attempt to consolidate biblical with Hellenistic thought. In some writings the positions advocated are clearly apparent. The *Letter of Aristeas*, for example, espouses “the most positive estimate of the Greeks and Greek culture and of the possibility for peaceful and productive coexistence between Jews and Greeks,”¹⁸ while on the other end of the spectrum we find, for example, the

¹⁶John Dillon, “Providence,” 520.

¹⁷Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 2:74.

¹⁸George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah* (Philadelphia, 1987), 165.

“strongly anti-Gentile”¹⁹ work of *3 Maccabees*. Many of the late biblical treatises deal with the issues of the governance of the world, God’s sovereignty, and human free will. We may surmise that these issues must have been of significant interest in Jewish-Hellenistic circles. Philo’s pursuit of these same issues, therefore, is not really innovative.²⁰ Many of his predecessors had contended with these issues. Moreover, because Philo’s intellectual and cultural climate resembles that of other Jewish-Hellenistic writers, it is very likely that he was influenced by these issues explored in these works; perhaps he even knew some of the literary works first-hand.²¹ We shall now provide a brief sketch of the ideas of some of these writers before we turn to Philo himself.

Qoheleth

A telling example of the encounter between biblical Judaism and Hellenistic philosophy is the book of *Qoheleth*. It is not surprising that the time of composition of *Qoheleth* coincides with the deepest crisis in Greek religion. The zenith of the crisis is reached during the Hellenistic period in the third century BCE, when the prevalent mythological conceptions of the gods were succeeded, at least by the more philosophically inclined Greeks, by the abstract terms for fate.²² The author of this work explores the same questions as many of his Greek counterparts. The main tone of his inquisition is sceptical with peculiar Epicurean echoes:

In my vain life I have seen everything;
there is a righteous man
who perishes in his righteousness,

¹⁹George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 169.

²⁰Cf. the extensive section on the blending of Hellenism and Judaism before the time of Philo in James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus, or the Jewish-Alexandrian Philosophy in its Development and Completion*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam, reprint 1969), 1, 131-255. See also David Winston, “Freedom and Determinism in Greek Philosophy and Jewish Hellenistic Wisdom,” in: *Studia Philonica* 2 (1973), 40-50.

²¹In fact, it can be argued that the sceptical crisis in Israel originated rather early and was prevalent even among the general populace. Cf. J. L. Crenshaw, “The Birth of Skepticism in Ancient Israel,” in: J. L. Crenshaw and S. Sandmel, *The Divine Helmsman. Studies on God’s Control of Human Events*. Presented to L. H. Silberman (New York, 1980), 1-19.

²²Cf. Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, WUNT 10 (Tübingen, 2nd. ed., 1973), 210-37, who discusses Qoheleth’s appraisal of Judaism in the light of Hellenistic influence.

and there is a wicked man
who prolongs his life in his evil-doing.²³

The justice and care of God is juxtaposed with the apparent well-being of the wicked on the basis of everyday life experiences; indeed, often they seem to be unjustly inverted. The scepticism of the author increases progressively and climaxes in his resignation in the face of fate:

For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same;
as one dies, so dies the other.
They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts;
for all is vanity.
All go to the same place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.²⁴

By equating the fate of human beings with the fate of animals, the author declares his distrust in free will. The only thing that is sure is death, but even then “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.”²⁵ Everything is determined and one’s destiny is ordained by God. Even in his belief in God’s beneficent care the author is shaken. Nothing can influence God:

I know that whatever God does endures for ever;
nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it;
God has made it so,
in order that men should fear before him.²⁶

But all this I laid to heart, examining it all,
how the righteous and the wise and their deeds
are in the hand of God;
whether it is love or hate man does not know.
Everything before them is vanity,
since one fate comes to all,
to the righteous and the wicked,
to the good and the evil,
to the clean and the unclean,
to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice.
As is the good man, so is the sinner;
and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.²⁷

²³Qoheleth 7:15; cf. 8:14.

²⁴Qoheleth 3:19–22.

²⁵Qoheleth 9:10b.

²⁶Qoheleth 3:14.

²⁷Qoheleth 9:1–2.

Perhaps no other ancient Jewish author doubted the purpose of the works of God as bluntly as Qoheleth; all life is utter vanity when God seems not to discriminate the deeds of the good from the deeds of the evil, the deeds of the righteous from the deeds of the wicked. And worst of all, what is the purpose of being Torah obedient when God does not distinguish between the devout observer of religious practises and the infidel. If the life of the sinner is equal to the life of the righteous, and if the fate from the hand of God is the same for both, then God no longer cares for those he loves. God has become nothing more – as in Greek thought – than an abstract epithet for inexorable fate. In the end, however, in spite of his deep scepticism, the author of Qoheleth does not abandon his trust in the omnipotence of God. In this respect, then, he does not fall prey to the Greek abstraction of an impersonal fate.²⁸

Ben Sira

God's autonomy, the issue of theodicy, and human free will constitute primary themes in the work of *Ben Sira*, written in Palestine between 198 and 175 BCE.²⁹ In almost philosophical terms debates Ben Sira these issues while he maintains, paradoxically, both an austere predestinarianism and human freedom of choice.³⁰

Do not say, 'Because of the Lord I left the right way';
for he will not do what he hates.
Do not say, 'It is he who led me astray'
for he has no need of a sinful man.
The Lord hates all abominations,
and they are not loved by those who fear him.
It was he who created man in the beginning,
and he left him in the power of his own inclination.
If you will (ἐάν θελήσῃς),
you can keep the commandments,
and to act faithfully is a matter of your own choice.³¹

Hengel suggests that Ben Sira's preoccupation with human free will is a reaction against the stark deterministic world view as espoused by Qoheleth

²⁸Cf. Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 229.

²⁹Cf. George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 64. For a detailed discussion of Ben Sira's reception of Hellenism see Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 241-75.

³⁰Both of these lines are presented in detail by Gerhard Maier, *Mensch und freier Wille*, WUNT 12 (Tübingen, 1971), 84-115.

³¹Ben Sira 15:11-15.

and Hellenistic philosophy, a view that severely restricts human freedom of choice and, hence, undermines the basis of Torah obedience, the voluntary keeping of the commandments.³² By the same token, God is being exculpated as the author of evil which he hates, and consequently, he is not to be accused of leading his creatures astray. Because of free will and despite the power of one's evil inclination³³ a person is not only able to keep the commandments, but is also accountable to God for one's moral behaviour.

Still, Ben Sira does not advocate an absolute free will position. Human free will can only be relative because it must be seen as the instrument through which the keeping of the commandments is possible and intelligible. The limit of free will is determined by God himself who cares in his wisdom over his creation:

The works of the Lord have existed from the beginning by his creation,
and when he made them, he determined (διαστέλλω) their divisions.
He arranged (κοσμέω) his works in an eternal order,
and their dominion for all generations.³⁴

All men are from the ground, and Adam was created of the dust.
In the fullness of his knowledge the Lord distinguished them
and appointed (ἀλλοιόω) their different ways;
some of them he blessed and exalted
and some of them he made holy and brought near to himself;
but some of them he cursed and brought low,
and he turned them out of their place.³⁵

Do not fear the sentence of death (κρίμα θανάτου);
remember your former days and the end of life;
this is the decree from the Lord for all flesh.³⁶

³²Cf. Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 255.

³³Commenting on Ben Sira 15:14, T. Middendorp, *Die Stellung Jesu Ben Siras zwischen Judentum und Hellenismus* (Leiden, 1973), 19, points out that the Greek parallel to יצר is δαίμων or δαιμόνιον. He concedes, however, that these parallels are not sufficient to establish Greek influence. G. Maier, *Mensch und freier Wille*, 91-92, suggests more convincingly that the יצר in Ben Sira must be neutral, and not interpreted in the light of the later Rabbinic understanding of the evil יצר. "Es kommt gerade darauf an, daß wir Qumran oder die rabbinische Theologie nicht in Ben Sira hinein erstrecken... Soll die Darlegung Ben Siras Sinn haben, dann muß der Trieb frei sich für Sünde oder Gehorsam entscheiden können."

³⁴Ben Sira 16:26-27a.

³⁵Ben Sira 33:10-12.

³⁶Ben Sira 41:3-4a.

Index of Biblical References

<i>Genesis</i>		92:5 (91:6)	15
1:26	157	99:5	63
3:12-13	161	118:68LXX	63
6:1	149		
6:8	66	<i>Job</i>	
6:16	111	24:15	11
8:6	98		
9:27	173	<i>Proverbs</i>	
16:1	112, 182	3:4	11
17:4	49	19:21	15
18:2	114		
		<i>Qoheleth</i>	
<i>Exodus</i>		3:14	8
3:1-14	25	3:19-22	8
3:14	3, 19, 25, 27, 30, 33,	7:15	8
	56	8:14	8
5:2	46	9:1-8	8
8:20	184	9:10b	8
17:1-7	185		
22:22	179	<i>Isaiah</i>	
33:12ff	33	5:19b	15
33:13ff	33	14:26-27	15
33:23	35	46:9b-10	15
		55:8-9	15
<i>Numbers</i>			
6:2	183	<i>Jeremiah</i>	
20:1-13	185	LXX in brackets	
23:9	11	23:20	15
23:19	39	29:11 (36:11)	15
		30:24 (37:28)	15
<i>Deuteronomy</i>		51:11 (28:11)	15
4:19	133		
4:39	68	<i>Daniel (Theod)</i>	
5:5	75	6:19	11
32:39	34	11:37	11
<i>Psalms</i>		<i>1 Esdras</i>	
LXX in brackets		2:28	11
33:8	63		
33:11 (32:11)	15	<i>2 Maccabees</i>	
40:5 (39:6)	15	4:6	11, 12

14:9	11, 12	<i>Ben Sira</i>	
		15:11-15	9
<i>3 Maccabees</i>		15:14	10
3:24	11	16:26-27a	10
4:21	11, 12	33:10-12	10
5:30	11, 12	41:3-4a	10
<i>4 Maccabees</i>			
7:18	11		
9:24	11, 12		
13:19	11, 12		
17:22	11, 12		
<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>			
6:7	11		
13:5	48		
13:16	11		
14:3	11, 13, 49		
17:2	11, 13, 108		

161	142	11	27
168-83	158	18	40
175	69	29	83, 84, 86, 186
176	159, 163	43-44	162
178	163	47	164
180	62, 141, 143	47-48	160, 164, 165, 171
		53-56	39
<i>Congr. (De Congressu Eruditionis Gratia)</i>		56	40, 44
11	121, 122	77	86, 115
26	159	79	86, 115
49	121, 126, 133	84	160
50	121, 122, 131	104-08	66
105	43	108	62, 64, 66, 67, 87
171	70	111	72
<i>Cont. (De Vita Contemplativa)</i>		<i>Ebr. (De Ebrietate)</i>	
2	28	19	46
		92	121
<i>Decal. (De Decalogo)</i>		77-80	86
30-31	77	106	79, 115
51	64	106-07	73
58	91, 93, 100, 102, 104, 105, 108, 109, 115, 152	147	162
59	31	186-7	149
64	64	198	95
105	64	199	17, 94, 95, 97, 100
<i>Deo (De Deo)</i>		<i>Flacc. (In Flaccum)</i>	
ed. Siegert		102	188
4	30, 36, 40	104	188
5	30, 109, 113	121	188
6	114	126	188
12	30, 69, 109, 114	146	188
		170	189
		191	189
<i>Det. (Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat)</i>		<i>Fuga (De Fuga et Inventione)</i>	
39-40	113	8	46
61	180, 183	12	46
65	174	56	172
66	114, 174	63	142, 149
83	171	68-72	157
84	160	75-76	165
89	40, 46, 159	95	79, 80, 83, 84, 187
91	159	97	38, 74
160	30, 31, 36	101	31
162	42	103-04	79, 82
168	160	109	114
		110	114
		132-5	172
		140	31
<i>Deus (Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis)</i>		141	31, 40

336	17, 188	2:261	16, 91, 185
373	188	2:278	16, 184
<i>Mig. (De Migratione Abrahami)</i>		<i>Mut. (De Mutatione Nominum)</i>	
6	75, 110	7	34
115	40	8	33, 114
123	16, 183	9	36
171	16, 184	11	30
176-195	120	11-13	36
178	121, 123, 125	12	37
179	98, 121, 126, 128	13	37
179-80	120, 122	16	128
179-81	127	23	114
180	123	25	184
181	93, 104, 105, 108, 126, 128, 181	27	37
182	68	27-28	76, 78
183	68, 72	28	115
186	181	29	38, 77
192-93	98	30-31	157
194	123-127	45	59
194-81	127	46	62, 68
		54	39
		67	122
		261	162
<i>Mos. 1-2 (De Vita Mosis I-II)</i>		<i>Opif. (De Opificio Mundi)</i>	
1:12	122	7	43, 64, 91, 100
1:63-84	53	7-10	100
1:65-67	53	8	44, 66, 98, 101
1:66-67	53	9	43, 118
1:67	56, 184	9-10	50, 91, 101
1:72	56	10	64, 102
1:75	30, 31, 36, 53	16	69
1:85	16, 173	21	63, 64, 66, 69
1:132	16, 185	23	86
1:158	41, 64	24-25	61
1:162	184	27	131
1:203-04	185	29	131
1:211	16, 185	44	68
2:3	184	72-75	157
2:5	16	75	141
2:6	184	76	154
2:32	16, 184	77	64, 68
2:48	64	112	124
2:58	16, 185	117	155, 159
2:126	124	138	68
2:132	88	146	160, 171
2:154	16, 185	166	162
2:171	40	170-72	1
2:189	86, 87	171	2, 50
2:238	64	171-2	3, 4, 18, 19, 190, 192
2:256	64		

172	2, 48, 50, 90, 108	1:6-8	93
		1:6-23	93
<i>Plant. (De Plantatione)</i>		1:7	61, 101
2	168	1:12	44, 46
9	115	1:23	48, 109
9-10	78, 114	1:26	45, 46
12	131	1:30-33	45
14	54, 68	1:31	48, 50
70	9, 39	1:31-33	49
86	72	1:33	48, 127
87	70	1:40	127
88	70	1:45	127, 145
106	70	1:47	151
108	40	1:55	147
		1:77	134, 137, 172
<i>Post. (De Posteritate Caini)</i>		1:77-88	19, 120, 134
14	44, 52, 76, 115	1:78	136
15	34	1:79	134, 136
16	33	1:80	136
28	46	1:81	136
133	168	1:82	135
166-69	33, 35	1:83	134, 135
167	35	1:84	136
167-69	48	1:85	137
168	35	1:86	137
169	33, 35	1:88	125, 129, 135, 138
		1:88-89	152
<i>Praem. (De Praemiis et Poenis)</i>		2:52 LCL	130
24	64	2:74	49
32	64	2:82	72, 141, 143, 147, 167
32-34	146	2:86-87	145
39	46	2:99	146
40	28, 34, 65, 66	2:100 (2:49-50 LCL)	147-48
42	50, 95, 99	2:102 (2:53 LCL)	146, 147
43	95	2:104 (2:59 LCL)	147
44	46		
63	162, 166		
98	177	<i>QE 1-2 (Quaestiones et Solutiones in Exodum I-II)</i>	
104	17	2:3	179
105	178	2:13	54
116	178	2:37	85
119	178	2:58	183
<i>Probus (Quod Probus Liber Sit)</i>		2:61	73, 86, 87
84	141	2:62	79
		2:64	79
<i>Prov. 1-2 (De Providentia I-II)</i>		2:66	82
ed. Aucher and LCL as indicated		2:68	27, 28, 74, 82
1:3	88	2:109	124
1:6	42, 100	2:110	113
1:6-7	92	2:111	113

2:116	113	<i>Somn. 1-2 (De Somniis I-II)</i>	
2:120	114	1:53	121
		1:54	121
<i>QG 1-4 (Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesim I-IV)</i>		1:67	40
1:4	75	1:70	115
1:6	45, 64	1:141	54
1:47	161	1:142	54
1:48	161	1:161	121
1:57	79	1:230	30, 31, 33, 36, 38
1:58	109	2:2	127
1:89	142	2:6	124
1:92	55	2:7	125
		2:25	16, 183
2:7	93, 109, 111, 114	2:44	98
2:24	99	2:112-13	124
2:34	64, 98-100	2:151	159
2:59	154	2:243	85
2:62	75	2:252	165
2:68	65, 73, 79, 80	2:283	4
2:75	79		
		<i>Spec. 1-4 (De Specialibus Legibus I-IV)</i>	
3:3	176	1:13	132
3:18	109, 112, 181, 182	1:13-14	133
3:42	49	1:13-20	132
3:43	122, 129, 181	1:14	132
3:56	85, 112, 182	1:15	133
		1:16	133
4:25	181	1:19	132
4:29	84, 185	1:20	133
4:42	86, 185	1:28	111
4:54	35	1:32	32
4:65	185	1:32-34	46
4:87	45, 46, 50, 73	1:34	64
4:88	183	1:35	49
4:188	172	1:40	33
		1:41	33, 48
<i>Sacr. (De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini)</i>		1:41-50	33
59	40	1:43-44	34
92	31	1:45	35
95-96	39	1:46	34
111	161, 166	1:47	36
		1:48	75, 86
<i>Sob. (De Sobrietate)</i>		1:66	54, 55
14	17	1:81	110
18	16, 159, 172, 182	1:87	124
60	168	1:201	159
62	168	1:209	51, 52, 67, 73, 82
62-64	173	1:308	83, 86, 179, 187
68	145, 168	1:308-10	83, 178
		1:309	84, 179

1:310	17, 179	4:92	154
1:315-18	178	4:180	64
1:318	17, 50, 178	4:187	69, 112, 142
1:329	75		
1:333	159		
		<i>Virt. (De Virtutibus)</i>	
2:5	46	34	64
2:6	64	40	31
2:165	26, 59	64	26, 31, 59, 64
2:230	122	77	64
2:256	64	212	121, 129
		213	129
3:13	137	215	45
3:15	154	215-16	99, 182
3:34	179	216	44, 99, 129, 130
3:34-36	179		
3:36	179, 180		
3:99	159		
3:178	64		
3:189	50, 64, 96, 98, 99		
3:199	64		

Index of Ancient and Modern Authors

Page numbers in italics indicate that the source is cited only in the *notes* of that page.

- Albinus *139*
Amand, David *119, 134, 136*
Amir, Yehoshua *30, 39*
Apuleius *57, 104*
Aristotle *5, 32, 42, 43, 46, 64, 77, 91, 96, 103, 122, 134, 154, 158, 174*
Arnaldez, R. *21*
Atticus *29, 102, 104, 105, 117*
Attridge, Harold W. *14*
- Baltes, Matthias *122*
Barra, Giovanni *57*
Barth, Paul *143, 144, 145, 148, 149, 169*
Bentwich, Norman *59*
Berchman, Robert M. *27, 28*
Betz, Otto *14*
Bianchi, U. *157*
Billings, Thomas *40, 41, 49, 65, 68, 86, 155, 156, 158, 159*
Birnbaum, Ellen *179*
Blume, H.-D. *40*
Boethus of Sidon *106, 108*
Borgen, Peder *17, 27, 59, 185*
Box, Herbert *186*
Boyancé, Pierre *86, 157*
Bréhier, Émile *22, 71*
- Calcidius *70, 104*
Caquot, A. *141*
Carneades *134*
Carson, Donald *23*
Christiansen, Irmgard *153*
Chrysippus *69, 107, 108, 127, 144, 146, 149, 150*
Cicero *6, 32, 47, 48, 71, 100, 126, 127, 131, 134*
Cleanthes *126, 127*
Colson, F.H. *2, 4, 44, 85, 95, 123, 147, 162, 179, 186*
- Cohn, Leopold *18, 74*
Copleston, Frederick *96*
Cornford, Francis, *70, 103*
Crenshaw, J.L. *7, 167*
- Democritus *96*
Dihle, Albrecht *70*
Dillon, John *5, 6, 27, 29, 54, 57, 69, 102, 104, 117, 142, 154, 156, 158, 161, 174*
Diogenes Laertius *5, 26, 29, 69, 72, 77, 96, 126, 128, 153, 155, 160, 174*
Diogenes the Babylonian *106*
Dörrie, Heinrich *5, 40, 110, 123, 128, 139, 141*
Dragona-Monachou, Myrto *5, 23, 29, 47, 71, 119*
Drummond, James *7, 22, 31, 54, 55, 77, 85, 86, 90, 98, 154, 156, 174*
- Epictetus *72, 144*
Eusebius *186*
- Farandos, Georgios D. *109, 153*
Favorinus *71*
Feldman, Louis H. *14*
Foster, Samuel *186*
Fraser, Peter M. *119, 123*
Freeman, Kathleen *96*
Früchtel, Ursula *80, 82*
- Gellius *146, 149*
Gilbert, M. *12*
Goodenough, Erwin R. *1, 15, 22, 79, 80, 82, 87, 89, 114, 132*
Goodman, Lenn E. *27*
Graeser, Andreas *154*
Groß, J. *160*
Guazzoni Foà, V. *23*

- Hadas-Lebel, Mereille 21, 140, 143, 147, 148
 Harl, Marguerite 113
 Hata, G. 14
 Hay, David 177
 Hegermann, Harald 114
 Heinze, Max 160
 Hengel, Martin 7, 9, 10, 51
 Horovitz, Jakob 92, 141
 Horowitz, J. 74
- Josephus 13-15, 71
- Kenny Peter J. 27
 Kerferd, G.B. 143
 Kidd, I.G. 155
- LaPorte, Jean 73
 Leucippus 96-97
 Lilla, Salvatore R.C. 27
 Lindner, Helgo 14
 Long, Anthony A. 96, 97, 105, 123, 143, 144, 150, 155
 Lust, J. 11
- Maier, Gerhard 9, 10
 Mann, F. 40
 Mansfeld, Jaap 28, 44, 105, 108
 Marcus, Ralph 17, 85, 112, 179, 183
 Massebieau, L. 18
 Mayer, Günter 15
 Méasson, Anita 100
 Mendelson, Alan 1, 97, 119, 122, 125, 132, 137
 Meyer, Albrecht 21, 89
 Michel, Otto 14
 Middendorp, T. 10, 11
 Moehring, Horst R. 27
 Mondésert, C. 21
 Montes-Peral, L.A. 15, 26, 40, 62, 65, 140
 Moore, George F. 15
 Mortley, Raoul 36, 39, 40
- Nemesius 57
 Nicomachus 29
 Nickelsburg, G.W.E. 6, 7, 9, 12
 Nikiprowetzky, Valentin 17, 141
 Numenius 29
- Panaetius 106, 123
- Philodemus 148
 Plato 5, 6, 16, 18, 23, 26, 27, 29, 42, 43, 48, 49, 63-65, 69, 70, 92-94, 100, 102, 111, 119, 122, 128, 131, 134, 139, 141-43, 154, 155, 159, 161, 165, 172
 Plotinus 57
 Plutarch 29, 104, 150
 Pohlenz, Max 160
 Posidonius 155
 Pouilloux, J. 21
 Pseudo-Aristotle 26
 Pseudo-Plutarch 57
- Rengstorf, Karl Heinz, 13
 Reydam-Schils, Gretchen 30
 Rochberg-Halton, Francesca 119, 124
 Rühle, O. 119
 Runia, David 1, 17, 18, 20, 21, 26, 27, 29, 30, 32, 35, 37, 38, 42, 43, 49, 60, 63-67, 69, 71, 74, 76, 77, 89, 92-4, 96, 98-102, 104-6, 109, 111, 112, 115, 116, 122, 127, 130, 133, 139, 141, 148, 152, 154, 156-158, 161, 166, 172
 Sandmel, Samuel 7, 22, 23, 167, 168
 Schwemer Anna Maria 51
 Scott, Alan 119, 122, 128, 130
 Sedley, D.N. 144
 Seneca 29, 71, 72, 104, 141, 144, 145, 147
 Sextus Empiricus 123
 Siegert, Folker 16, 30, 85, 86, 113, 114, 115
 Silberman, L.H. 7, 167
 Smallwood, E. Mary 186
 Socrates 71
 Sorabji, Richard 92
 Sterling, Gregory E. 27, 89, 117
 Struntz, F. 119
- Terian, Abraham 30, 113, 114, 129, 141, 147, 160
 Theiler, Willy 102
 Tobin, Thomas H. 109
- Umemoto, Naoto 51
- van den Broek, R. 28, 37
 Vermaseren, M.J. 106

- Weiss, Hans-Friedrich 109
Wendland, Paul 21, 30, 79, 134, 144
Whitaker, G.H. 68
Whittaker, John 28, 31, 40, 159
Winston, David 7, 11, 12, 13, 22, 26, 27, 29, 32, 39, 54, 70, 74, 75, 76, 78, 84, 89, 90-92, 134, 141, 146, 150, 152, 154, 156-158, 160, 162-165, 171, 174
Wolfson, Harry A. 1, 17, 22, 32, 33, 36, 41, 42, 46, 55, 67, 76, 89, 90, 91, 98, 100, 104, 114, 116, 128, 130, 132, 156, 162, 165
Wong, Chan-Kok 121
Xenophon 71
Zeller, Dieter 65, 67, 68, 71, 72
Zeitler, M. 134
Zintzen, Clemens 57, 86

Index of Subjects

Abraham 44, 112-13
analogia entis 39
analogia relationis 39
Anthropomorphic Language 39, 40
Astral fatalism 20, 123-26
 divine causation and 128-30
 divinity of the stars and 130-33
 moral responsibility and 133-37
Astronomy 121-23
Atomists 96-97
Ben Sira 9, 11
Creation
 by the mind of God 98-100
 causes of, 44, 45, 110
 creatio ex nihilo 91
 creatio aeterna 100, 103
 creatio continua 90, 103, 117
 indestructibility of 106
 knowldge of 38
 not automatically 94-98, 172
 temporal beginning of 100-102
 unknowability of 33-38
Daniel 11
De Abrahamo 180
De Aeternitate Mundi 105
De Animalibus 20, 113
De Deo 16, 20
De Migrationi Abrahami 120, 181
De Mutatione Nominum 76
De Natura Deorum 47, 48
De Opificio Mundi 1
De Providentia 15, 16, 18, 19, 21, 22,
 23, 125, 129, 139, 140, 151, 152, 167,
 190
De Sobrietate 68
Epicurean 4, 50, 96
epistemological 29, 149-151
Evil
 moral 152-66
 physical 145-52
Freedom, human 134, 135, 164-66

God
 apprehension of 34
 cause, the highest as 44, 45
 concept of 2, 4, 26, 58
 evil and 140-43
 existence and essence of 2, 3, 32-43,
 45-52
 fatherhood of 49-51
 goodness of 61-73
 grace of 63-68
 idea of astral fatalism and 126-33
 immancece of 19, 52, 58-61
 is provident 51-52
 positive descriptions of 41, 42
 providence and 52-56
 self-designation of 30, 33, 53
 transcendence of 19, 26-30, 52, 126
 will of 68-70
Horoscopy 124, 137
In Flaccum 185, 186, 188
Katachresis 37, 38
Legatio ad Gaium 185-87, 194
Legum Allegoriae 169, 174
Letter of Aristeas 6
Logos
 as instrument of creation 109-16
 powers and 60, 73-78
 providence and 108-116
 rational soul and 171
Maccabees 12
3 Maccabees 7
Negative theology 40, 41
Moral responsibility 135-38, 162, 163,
 166
Moses 33, 53-55, 184-85
ontological 28, 29, 31, 149, 153
Philo
 as exegete 17, 18
 hermeneutic of 176-77
 ontological hierarchy of 153
 theocentric thought and 4, 140

- Philosophy
 scripture and 20, 21, 59
 divine transcendence and 26-30
 Platonism, Middle 6, 15, 23, 26-30, 40,
 57, 65, 69, 70, 92, 93, 104, 105, 109,
 117, 140, 156, 160, 192
 Powers, divine 60, 73-84
 creative 83-84
 division of 79-84
 providential 61, 116
 virtues and 84-87
 Providence, divine
 concept of God and 2, 70-73
 destruction of cosmos and 102-109
 divine essence and 49-52
 divine existence and 45-49
 evil and 20
 experience of 176
 individuals and 177-85
 in Greek thought 5, 6
 in Hellenistic Judaism 6-15
 in Philonic research 21-23
 in Philonic thought 1-4, 15-18
 moral evil and 171-75
 physical evil and 167-70
 soul and 172
 the Logos and 109-16
 theodicy and 139, 140
Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin
 169
Qoheleth 7, 11
 Sceptics 4,
 Scripture 30-32
- Soul
 division of 154-56
 ontological hierarchy in 153
 providence and 172
 rational and irrational part 156-62
 rational part of 163
 Stoic/ism 5, 6, 15, 26, 59, 69-72, 92,
 93, 105, 106-108, 109, 114, 122, 123,
 126, 127, 140, 143-49, 151, 154, 155,
 159, 160, 168, 183, 192
 conflagration 106
 palingenesis 106
 Supranoetic first principle 28
 Teleological argument 46
 Theodicy
 cosmological argument and 145-46
 doctrine of providence and 139, 140
 ethical argument and 151-52
 logical argument and 149-51
 moral evil and 152-66, 171-75
 physical argument and 146-48
 physical evil and 145-52, 167-70
 Theory of Creation 2-4, 29, 89-117, 172
 Transcendence
 God of 26-43
 omnipotence of God and 148, 167
 philosophy and 26-30
 providence and 43-45
 scripture and 30-32
 Virtue 165, 173
 rational soul and 174
 powers and 84-86
Wisdom of Solomon 12
 Zodiac 124, 125

Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism

Alphabetical Index

- Albani, M., J. Frey, A. Lange* (Ed.): Studies in the Book of Jubilees. 1997. *Volume 65*.
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