

REINCARNATION IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

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REINCARNATION IN PHILO OF
ALEXANDRIA

by
Sami Yli-Karjanmaa

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PREFACE

This book is a revised and shortened version of my doctoral thesis which I defended at the Faculty of Theology of Åbo Akademi University (ÅAU) in Turku, Finland, in July 2013. I am grateful to several people for their contributions. My supervisor, Professor Antti Laato, unfailingly encouraged me throughout the lonely years of work far away from the Akademi, provided many useful suggestions and helped shape the structure of the work. Whenever I visited the research seminars at the ÅAU to present parts of the dissertation, I usually had the privilege of enjoying the knowledgeable and witty opposition by Professor Emeritus Karl-Gustav Sandelin. And it was Adjunct Professor Erkki Koskenniemi without whom this book would be on some other subject, for he fortunately persuaded me not to change the topic after I had written my Master's thesis on Philo and reincarnation at the Faculty of Theology of the University of Helsinki. His basic argument was that a monograph on the subject was still lacking. Here it finally is. I thank Adjunct Professor Pauli Annala for his comments as one of the two external examiners of my thesis and for our many fascinating discussions. Thanks are also due to two Professors Emeriti for their kind help with certain points in the Armenian Philo: Abraham Terian and Jouko Martikainen. My skills in this language remain very limited, and all lack of expertise in this regard is entirely my own. Nevertheless, studying some of my key texts only as translations of translations was no option.

There are also institutions to thank. This study was made possible by the financial support of the ÅAU, its Foundation and Rector Jorma Mattinen. I received grants also from the Emil Aaltonen Foundation and the Waldemar von Frenckell Foundation, and a 12-month scholarship from the Finnish Graduate School of Theology. A debt of another kind but no less important I owe to the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae at the University of California at Irvine. Earlier generations of scholars of antiquity could not have even dreamed of being able to access and search almost all relevant Greek texts while sitting at their own desk.

I also want to thank my dear wife Minna and our beloved daughter Siri. They provided me with the much needed balance of *vita activa*. It is to Siri, who at the time, from the age of two, was also working on her own "dissertation," that I dedicate this book.

Last but certainly not least I want to express my gratitude to Professor David T. Runia (Melbourne, Australia). During the time I have read on

Philo, he has for me become a model of Philonic scholarship of the highest order. I was deeply honored and overjoyed to have him first as an external examiner and then my opponent at the public defense of my thesis. Our two-hour discussion, in which we agreed on some points and disagreed on others, was a real debate and an extremely pleasant and rewarding experience as such. This preface gives me the opportunity to follow a recommendation of his to state some of my *assumptions* regarding Philo and his project at the outset, and I will use the rest of this Preface for a short discussion of my approach to the Alexandrian exegete.

The process of reworking the manuscript has given me the opportunity to rethink everything once more. The text has significantly benefited from this, although in essence the work has remained the same. Just like in the original thesis, I here also build a cumulative case. It is important to note that the case is not, to begin with, one for or against Philo's acceptance of the doctrine of reincarnation. Rather, as I have in some instances half-seriously stated, in some respects it is like a "courtroom trial" which aims to settle how the matter stands: all evidence is taken into account as completely as possible regardless of the outcome it favors. As the case proceeds, I also make observations and draw more general conclusions regarding Philo as an author. It is some of these conclusions, and especially the assumptions they involve, that Professor Runia suggested I should explicitly share with my readers earlier on. Although we may not entirely agree on their character (I would emphasize that they are the result of my study of Philo's writings), I am happy to follow his advice and briefly discuss two issues.

First, it is my view that Philo does not always say everything he thinks but leaves some connecting of dots to his reader. His way of using allusions is a good example. Whether he is paraphrasing parts of the biblical text under interpretation, or using Platonic language in his allegories, or giving almost the same exegesis for different scriptural verses, there are very often unacknowledged intertextual elements present. For example, with regard to the last case, it is clear that Philo did not write each of the three closely parallel accounts of the souls of the air in *Gig.*, *Plant.* and *Somn.* (see section 3.1.2) unaware of the other ones, nor could he reasonably expect his audience not to recognize their connections. It is my conviction that reading such close parallels together will lead to a fuller picture of Philo's message, even though he himself makes no statement to this effect. Would this not also hold for passages which feature allusions to Plato's dialogues? Surely the passages that he refers to need to be closely examined and their relation to Philo's thought world assessed. In the context of this study this

issue becomes particularly acute when the allusions are to the Athenian philosopher's descriptions of reincarnation. Here again, no explicit comment by Philo is to be found, and yet the allusions serve some purpose with regard to what he is aiming to say. It is my view that this purpose may, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, be taken to be one of expressing approval—the extent and limits of which must be analyzed case by case.

The second point too is related to parallels. When Philo gives a very similar interpretation to entirely different biblical verses, I think we need to ask questions about the relationship between the *explanandum* and the *explanatio*. There is no question about the unparalleled standing of the “holy word” of Moses or about Philo's staunch loyalty to Judaism. At the same time his midrashic, allegorical method gives him a very large freedom of maneuver as far as the contents of his interpretations are concerned. And it is through the door thus opened that Greek philosophy, first and foremost the ideas of Plato, enters. Here I have found myself to be in considerable agreement with the way of reading Philo represented by David Winston.—Given these two points (and perhaps some others as well), it is my hope that this work will generate debate not only about Philo's individual eschatology but, in addition, about the way his works, especially his allegories, are read. Both issues have implications that also extend beyond Philonic studies.

I humbly thank Professor Thomas Tobin, S.J., for accepting the work to be published in the *Studia Philonica Monographs* series. I also thank Leigh Andersen and Nicole Tilford of SBL Press for smooth cooperation and Gonni Runia for professional typesetting of the manuscript.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|--------|---|
| ALGHJ | Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums |
| Arm. | Armenian; (a reading attested in) the ancient Armenian translation of Philo's works |
| BJS | Brown Judaic Studies |
| BZNW | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft |
| CBQ | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i> |
| CQ | <i>Classical Quarterly</i> |
| CRINT | Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum |
| DK | <i>Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker</i> . Edited by Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz. Sixth edition. 3 vols. Berlin: Weidmann, 1951–1952. |
| ex. | exegesis of [a biblical text] |
| fr. | fragment |
| HO | Handbuch der Orientalistik |
| HTR | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i> |
| HUCA | <i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i> |
| HWS | Smyth, Herbert Weir. <i>A Greek Grammar for Colleges</i> . New York: American Book, 1920. |
| JAOS | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i> |
| JBL | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i> |
| JPS | Jewish Publication Society, or <i>JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh: The Traditional Hebrew Text and the New JPS Translation</i> . Second edition. Philadelphia: JPS, 2003. |
| JSJ | <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i> |
| JSJSup | Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism |
| JSPSup | Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series |
| LCL | Loeb Classical Library |
| LSJ | Liddell, Henry George and Robert Scott. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon: Revised and augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie</i> . Oxford: Clarendon 1940. |
| LXX | The Septuagint |
| MAAR | Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome |

- MI Marcus, Ralph. "An Armenian-Greek Index to Philo's *Quaestiones* and *De Vita Contemplativa*." *JAOS* 53, no. 3 (1933): 251–82.
- MPG *Patrologia graeca* [= *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886.
- NBHL Awatik'ean G., Siwrmēlean X., Awgerean M. *Nor Baigirk' Haykazean Lezui*. [*New Dictionary of the Armenian Language*]. Venice: Mechitarist Press 1836–1837.
- NETS *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. Edited by Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- NHMS Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies
- NovTSup *Novum Testamentum Supplements*
- NTAbh *Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen*
- OL The Old Latin translation of *QG* 4.154–245 and the eleven *quaestiones* between 4.195 and 196 not present in the Armenian version. Critical text: Petit, Françoise. *L'ancienne version latine des Questions sur la Genèse de Philon d'Alexandrie*. 2 vols. TUGAL 113–4. Berlin: Akademie, 1973.
- PACS Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series
- PAPM *Les oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie*. Edited by Roger Arnaldez, Jean Pouilloux, Claude Mondésert. 37 vols. Paris: Cerf, 1961–1992.
- PCH *Die Werke Philos von Alexandria in deutscher Übersetzung*. Translated by Leopold Cohn, Isaac Heinemann et al. 7 vols. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1909–1964.
- PCW *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*. Edited by Leopold Cohn, Paul Wendland and Siegfried Reiter. 7 vols. Berlin: Reimer, 1896–1915.
- Phi Borgen, Peder, Kåre Fuglseth, and Roald Skarsten. *The Philo Index: A Complete Greek Word Index to the Writings of Philo of Alexandria*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- PLCL *Philo*. Translated by F. H. Colson et al. 12 vols. LCL. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929–1962.
- PRSt *Perspectives in Religious Studies*
- ps.- pseudo-
- QGE Philo's *Quaestiones in Genesim* and *Quaestiones in Exodum* collectively

| | |
|-------------|---|
| QGUM | The German translation of Philo's <i>Quaestiones in Genesim</i> ongoing at the Institutum Judaicum Delitzschianum of the University of Münster. Texts are available online at http://www.uni-muenster.de/EvTheol/ijid/forschen/philon.html . |
| <i>ResQ</i> | <i>Restoration Quarterly</i> |
| SBLDS | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series |
| SFSHJ | South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism |
| <i>SPhA</i> | <i>Studia Philonica Annual</i> |
| SPhA | Studies in Philo of Alexandria |
| TLG | Thesaurus Linguae Graecae (http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu) |
| TUGAL | Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur |
| <i>VC</i> | <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i> |
| VCSup | Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements |
| WUNT | Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament |

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 *The Issue*

The original impetus for my research on Philo's position on the idea of reincarnation, first in the form of a Master's thesis, then as my doctoral dissertation and now as its revised version, came from a single sentence and the related footnote in an article by Samuel Vollenweider.¹ As an undergraduate student of theology, I had been wholly unaware that this doctrine might have had supporters within Second Temple Judaism, and was thus surprised to find Vollenweider writing, "Darüber hinaus zeichnet sich nur gerade einmal bei Philon von Alexandrien das Seelenwanderungsmotiv am fernen Horizont ab."² The passage referred to states the following about the incorporeal souls which, according to Philo, inhabit the air:

Of these souls some, those that are closest to the earth and lovers of the body, are descending to be fast bound in mortal bodies, while others are ascending, having again been separated (from the body) according to the numbers and periods determined by nature. Of these last some, longing for the familiar and accustomed ways of mortal life, hurry back again, while others, pronouncing that life great folly, call the body a prison and a tomb but escaping from it as though from a dungeon or a grave are lifted up on light wings to the ether and range the heights for ever. (*De somniis* 1.138–139)³

¹ Samuel Vollenweider, "Reinkarnation—ein abendländisches Erbstück," in *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie: Studien zu Paulus und zur frühchristlichen Theologie*, WUNT 144 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 327–46, p. 332; repr. from *Der Evangelische Erzieher* 47.2 (1995): 141–58. My doctoral thesis is "Reincarnation in Philo of Alexandria" (Th.D. diss., Åbo Akademi University, 2013).

² Vollenweider "Reinkarnation," 332. In a note he refers to *Gig.* 6 ff. and *Plant.* 14 with regard to the idea of the pre-existence of the soul and concludes by stating that "erst in der *Kabbala* wird die Seelenwanderung bedeutsamer."

³ All English translations of Philo's texts are from the PLCL with the following exceptions: For *Opif.* I use David T. Runia, *On the Creation of the Cosmos According to Moses: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*; PACS 1 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001); for *Gig.*, David Winston, *Philo of Alexandria: The Contemplative Life, The Giants, and Selections: Translation and Introduction* (London: SPCK, 1981); for *Agr.*, Albert C. Geljon and David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: On Cultivation: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*; PACS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2013); for *Virt.*, Walter Wilson, *Philo of Alexandria: On Virtues: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*; PACS 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2010); and for

Two questions arose: (1) Is reincarnation merely “discernible in the far-away horizon” in the above passage? (2) Is this the one and only place where Philo refers to the doctrine? My *prima facie* answer to the first question was “no,” and further reading of Philo not only confirmed this but also elicited the same response to the second. Granted, all the other possible mentions of reincarnation are less explicit and seem to form a continuum from probable to ambiguous. Nowhere in his surviving writings does Philo openly name or discuss the doctrine itself.

This state of affairs makes it imperative for the researcher to try and understand Philo’s views about the soul in their entirety. This means delving, first of all, into Philo’s anthropology and soteriology in order to see whether or not they are in harmony with the tenet of *metempsychosis*. As Philo is so vague about the matter and his references to the fate of the imperfect souls in the hereafter are few and undetailed, understanding his statements will require that the researcher be well acquainted with his writings and ways of argumentation in order to recognize relevant parallels that complement each other.

Another part of the task of establishing Philo’s position on reincarnation is to assess his debt to authors who espoused the doctrine. While there may be several such thinkers, one of them can without hesitation be given the prime position. Plato may have adopted the doctrine from Socrates whom he presents as its proponent, but it was also part of the Pythagorean thought world to which he stood near.⁴ The expressions Philo uses of the soul in general, and the passage quoted above to a high degree, exhibit Plato’s influence, and when a Platonist speaks of the soul, rebirth is in the air. Hence also the title of this book. For it is self-evident Philo knew the idea; he also knew it had a bearing on what he said about the soul’s need to orientate away from bodily things, and he also knew he was leaving out

Legat., Mary E. Smallwood, *Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gaium: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1961). Where I have deemed it warranted, I have modified the translations (as in several places above). Only significant changes are mentioned. In this passage I have chosen to translate διακριθεῖσαι πάλιν as “having again been separated (from the body)” rather than “selected for return” (PLCL) for reasons to be returned to (p. 136). For the Septuagint, I use *A New Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS). Proper names are in the form they appear in PLCL to avoid the use of different versions of a single name. For all other primary texts, the translations used are those indicated in the bibliography.

⁴ In the dialogues *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus* and *Republic* it is Socrates who explains the tenet; the passages in question will be dealt with below (pp. 91–95). In the *Meno* Socrates refers to “wise men and women” (81b) who hold it. In the *Timaeus* it is brought forward by the title character (a leading Pythagorean according to later tradition), in the *Laws*, by the Athenian, and in the *Statesman* it is mentioned in passing (272e) by the Stranger.

explicit discussion of the doctrine even where it would have been most natural. He neither rejects or adopts the doctrine itself in so many words, but he cannot—so I maintain—have considered it so insignificant a part of Plato’s views as to simply ignore or forget it. From these premises it follows, *a priori*, that the tenet has to be somewhere in Philo, *regardless* of what he thought of it. The task is to comb his *oeuvre* to see what his words reveal of his thoughts.

Familiarizing myself with previous research on Philo and reincarnation revealed a surprising state of affairs. The subject has not enjoyed popularity, even though transmigration was among those Platonisms that led to the important development of Philo’s losing his position as “honorary Church Father.”⁵ Other typical features of the scholarly treatment of this question include taking a position on what Philo thought without having actually studied the matter, and a virtually complete lack of interaction and debate between researchers. Hence it is no wonder that the views adopted vary widely. Compare, for instance, the following two quotations:

But natural death brings [the entire liberation from the body] only to those who, while they lived on earth, kept themselves free from attachment to the things of sense; all others must at death pass into another body; transmigration of souls is in fact the necessary consequence of Philo’s premises, though he seldom speaks of it expressly.⁶

Although both Philo and Plato emphasize the connection between the soul’s conduct and its fate, Philo posits no successive incarnations of the soul according to fate in which the wicked soul will ultimately be purified and freed from the body ... Philo’s rejection of successive incarnations for the soul and his emphasis upon God’s providence lead him to different conclusions from Plato about the soul’s fate.⁷

After this preliminary sketch of the landscape in which we are moving in our exploration to determine Philo’s views concerning the afterlife of those souls which do not meet the preconditions for salvation it is time to define more precisely the scope of our inquiry.

⁵ The quoted epithet is by David T. Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature: A Survey*; CRINT 3.3 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 31 who does not mention reincarnation in this context.

⁶ Emil Schürer and Charles Bigg, “Philo,” in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, 21:409–13, p. 411. (As will become obvious in subsection 1.4.1, this view, in all likelihood by Schürer, comes almost directly from Eduard Zeller.)

⁷ Fred W. Burnett, “Philo on Immortality: A Thematic Study of Philo’s Concept of *παλιγγενεσία*,” *CBQ* 46 (1984): 447–70, p. 466 n. 83.

1.2 *The Terms of Reference of the Study*

1.2.1 *Definitions*

In this study the following key terminology will be used in the sense defined below.⁸

Acceptance: The following two main senses for the verb *to accept* are applicable:⁹ (1) ‘take or receive with consenting mind,’ ‘receive with favour or approval’; (2) ‘receive as adequate or valid,’ ‘admit,’ ‘believe,’ ‘tolerate,’ ‘submit to.’ Of these, the last one can be omitted, and if the outcome of this study shows that Philo “tolerated” reincarnation, it will then need to be discussed separately as to whether this qualifies as acceptance. The words *believe* and *belief* will, accordingly, be used interchangeably with *accept* and *acceptance* and do not refer to an explicit creed. All other corresponding expressions (adopt, approve, endorse, espouse, etc.) are used in the sense defined above.

Doctrine, tenet: In this study the expressions “the doctrine of reincarnation” or “the tenet” thereof are used undogmatically: they do not refer to an explicit creed or dogma. They are used synonymously with such phrases as “the idea of reincarnation,” “the notion,” et cetera.

Imperfect soul: This expression is used for referring to souls that do not meet the prerequisites of salvation. Those who do will in any case not be liable for reincarnation, and so it is the fate of the “imperfect” ones in Philo’s thought that is vital for his stance on reincarnation. It is not implied that perfection is a precondition for salvation.

Individual eschatology: Views held by a person, or forming part of a belief system, that concern the events which an individual soul undergoes after being separated from the physical body at death.

Pre- and post-existence of the soul (or mind etc.): Its existence, respectively, before entering the human body and after separation from it at physical death.

Protological/universal allegory: A protological allegorical interpretation maintains the protological orientation of the text being interpreted (and thus is chiefly applicable to the exegesis of Gen 1–3), whereas a universal interpretation ignores the context of a protological text and extracts from

⁸ Certain specific concepts will be defined later, after the necessary preliminaries have been discussed: *double dichotomy* on p. 39, *monadization* on p. 40 and *the corporealization of the mind* on p. 70. These are tentative concepts that I have found practical.

⁹ Taken from the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

the biblical narrative concerning “how things happened in the beginning” a general truth on “how things are.”¹⁰

Reincarnation: In this study the terms reincarnation, rebirth, transmigration (of souls) and *metempsychosis* are used synonymously to mean a repeated process in which a fundamental, incorporeal part of the individual is thought to pass from one body to another through physical death and birth. In practice, if Philo is found to accept the doctrine, this part will be the soul (ἡ ψυχή) or its highest part for which Philo’s three most important terms are the mind (ὁ νοῦς), the intellect (ὁ λογισμός), and the understanding (ἡ διάνοια).¹¹ For convenience, the term *soul* may be loosely used to refer to the incarnating entity, whatever it is. The purpose of reincarnation is the liberation, purification and restoration of the soul to its original, heavenly state.

Reincarnational: This adjective is used in two ways: (1) Of belief systems that include the doctrine. (2) Of texts, terminology or images etc., to denote the presence of the idea of reincarnation: the tenet is either explicitly mentioned or implied, e.g., mentioned before or after a passage in such a way that the terms or images in question have a connection to the idea. This definition as such entails no position on what the use of reincarnational texts means. They can be quoted or alluded to for the purpose of either espousing or refuting them.

Salvation: Philo’s words in *Gig.* 14 serve as a succinct definition of salvation: “incorporeal and immortal life in the presence of the Uncreated

¹⁰ This distinction is related to the tension noted by Runia, *On the Creation*, 333–34 “between a presentation as *history*, i.e. an account of the life of early mankind, and a presentation in terms of *actualization* and *idealization*, i.e. seeing Adam and Eve as types of human beings” (emphases original), although he, in the context of the *Exposition of the Law*, restricts the former to “the origins of human culture and civilization.” His characterization of the latter very well suits what I see as the purpose of Philo’s universal allegory: biblical themes are “applied to the human situation as it is for the contemporary reader.” Cf. also Folker Siegert’s reference to “mankind as it is in the present” in connection with Philo’s exegesis of Gen 2:7 in *Leg.* 1.31–38 (“Philo and the New Testament,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 175–209, p. 184).

¹¹ I have chosen “mind” as the general term when speaking of the highest part of the soul. It is my aim to adhere to the translations above throughout this study—also in quotations from published translations, in which I do not mention the possible change of words unless the terminology itself is of consequence. The consistency sought admittedly comes at the cost of reduced idiomaticity in English, when, e.g., “understandings,” as entities, are spoken of. For the structure of the soul in Philo, see below, pp. 36–44.

and Immortal.”¹² This is understood to mean never-ending immaterial existence with God.¹³

1.2.2 *The Research Task and the Structure of the Work*

The central problem of this study is this: *does Philo accept the idea of reincarnation?* Ultimately, therefore, the result of this study will be condensable to a single word. It is, however, to be expected that solving this issue will lead to enhanced understanding of also other aspects of Philo’s individual eschatology, soteriology, anthropology and ethics.

As previously mentioned, the number of passages where Philo explicitly discusses the post-mortem fate of imperfect souls is low, and the matter cannot be judged by them alone. A broader approach that takes into account all available indirect evidence is mandatory. Chapter 2 is devoted to this evidence: It is necessary to examine Philo’s views of the origin, composition, incarnation, afterlife and salvation of the human being to see whether they are reconcilable with what reincarnation presupposes. Ch. 2 also includes the assessment of the occurrence in Philo of the essential characteristics of reincarnational belief systems, the pre- and post-existence of the soul and the existence of potential driving forces of reincarnation.¹⁴ A belief system where the soul does not exist both before birth and after death or where it does not need to develop in some predetermined way in order to be saved, is unlikely to accommodate the idea of reincarnation.¹⁵

Another set of indirect evidence is related to the fact that while Philo nowhere explicitly denounces the doctrine, his works do contain passages

¹² ἡ ἀσώματος καὶ ἀφθαρτος παρὰ τῷ ἀγενήτῳ καὶ ἀφθάρτῳ ζῶν.

¹³ A brief remark on the resurrection of the body is perhaps in order at this point. In this study no attention is paid to this doctrine, as it is entirely alien to Philo and incompatible with his anthropology and soteriology. There is a consensus about this in modern Philonic scholarship. See, e.g., Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam I-II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1948), 1.404; Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 72; Siegert, “Philo and the New Testament,” pp. 190–91; Cristina Termini, “Philo’s Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 95–123, p. 108.

¹⁴ These characteristics have been adopted from Carl-A. Keller, “La réincarnation: vue d’ensemble des problèmes,” in *La réincarnation: Théories, raisonnements et appréciations*, ed. Carl-A. Keller (Bern: Lang, 1986), 1–35, pp. 11–35.

¹⁵ It must be emphasized that these features are to be understood as *necessary but not sufficient* conditions for the acceptance of reincarnation: A belief in the pre- and post-existence of the soul does not mean endorsing rebirth, and positing requirements for the soul’s development in order for it to achieve salvation does not entail that these requirements function as driving forces for reincarnation.

where an anti-reincarnational interpretation seems possible. These texts must be analyzed in order to establish whether they amount to precluding Philo's approval of the tenet. Examples include references to children being brought from non-existence to existence and the soul's return to God at death.

Thirdly, Philo's active use of terminology and images that occur in reincarnational contexts in Greek philosophy (mainly in Plato but also in both earlier and later traditions) also has to be studied. It is usually assumed that Philo's audiences knew Plato well enough to recognize the allusions to the latter's dialogues. Thus the question is raised: what did Philo *aim at* by alluding to reincarnational texts? This question itself may not be answerable before the central problem of this study is solved, but this solving is aided by analysis of the use to which Philo puts Plato's rebirth language.

Chapter 3 deals with the available direct evidence, in which category I place *Somn.* 1.137–139, *Cher.* 114, *QE* 2.40 and fragment 7.3 Harris. The question to be answered with each is: is Philo speaking of reincarnation, or can or should his words be interpreted in some other way? The passages are examined in their different contexts: the Philonic treatise in question, the biblical lemma together with the possible proof texts or parallels from the Septuagint and, as is the case with each, the references or allusions to Plato. In addition, in all cases there are also important parallels in Philo's own writings, which, when read together with the main passage, help us understand it.

Chapter 4 builds on the results of chapters 2 and 3 and aims at a synthesis that captures Philo's essential view of the journey of the soul. The understanding reached in the earlier chapters is applied as an interpretative key to a significantly larger number of Philonic texts. In addition, the reasons for Philo's reticence about reincarnation are addressed. The chapter closes with some reflections on the results attained and areas of further work.

This chapter now continues with a discussion of the methods used in this study and an overview of the history of research on Philo's position on reincarnation.

1.3 *Methods*

The general approach followed in Chs. 2 and 3 is that of two-sided argumentation. In other words, all relevant evidence is taken into account regardless of which answer to the main problem it tends to support; no

solution is sought to be shown to be the correct one. The situation changes in the last chapter, because it applies the results of the earlier chapters to Philo's thought generally with the aim of demonstrating their feasibility. However, there as well I try to remain as open as possible to any contradictions and anomalies. The more specific methods applied in this study include the following.

A *database of thematically encoded passages* is utilized. In the context of close reading of the Philonic corpus I created a database of relevant text passages and assigned each passage one or several numerical codes (out of some 200) which denote pertinent ideas, themes, expressions and images that I consider to appear in the text. At the end of the research the database contains approximately 2200 Philonic passages with ca. 5700 codes. Interrogating the database provides a fast way of finding the occurrences of a particular notion or combination of notions in Philo's surviving *oeuvre*.

In addition, the search functions and other resources of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* have been absolutely indispensable in finding almost any ancient text written in Greek as well as in searching for the occurrences of words and expressions and exploring the meanings of various key terms in Philo and others. The TLG presently enables one to look for a maximum of three words or expressions occurring within a specified distance from each other. I have developed a software tool for accumulating any number of TLG search results on Philo and post-processing them into a *graphical concordance*, so that the occurrence in his extant Greek works of selected words and expressions, combined with any number of the thematic codes, can be seen in a few glances and clusters identified for further analysis.

The texts themselves are examined through *tradition-historical, semantic and philological analyses* as required. By tradition-historical examination I mean mapping out the history of ideas or concepts in Greek and/or Jewish literature (i.e., in written texts) as far as possible. The purpose is to enhance the understanding of the background of the text being considered, and the identification of the possible sources Philo has used or the influences he has been subject to, as well as the eventual modifications made by him.

A very important way of working with Philo's works is the *reading together* of parallel passages: It seems clear that when an author speaks of the same or very similar things in different places using the same or very similar terms, concepts and/or images, a researcher is entitled to assume that the passages complement each other so that any one of them can be assumed to fill in what is not explicated in the others. This approach also enables one to make observations of specific senses Philo attaches to specific words.

The method cannot be used blindly, however. It is not an exercise of harmonizing passages whose mutual consistency is in question; genuine contradictions do exist. The degree to which passages in different works may be treated as one whole will also depend on the overall mutual harmony of the treatises regarding the subject matter being discussed. In Philo, particular caution is called for when different genres of writings are concerned.¹⁶

1.4 *Earlier Research*

1.4.1 *From de' Rossi to Wolfson*

It is perplexing to find that there has, in practice, been no scholarly debate over the issue of Philo's position on reincarnation. As will be seen, many a scholar has expressed his or her view about the matter, but cases where reference is made to someone *else's* opinion, not to mention *arguing* for or against them, are exceptions. The lack of debate is all the more difficult to understand as many of the statements made fall into mutually exclusive categories as exemplified by the quotes above.¹⁷

The earliest explicit reference to Philo's having taken a position on the idea of reincarnation that I am aware of is included in the long assessment of Philo which the well-known Italian Jewish scholar Azariah de' Rossi gives in his *The Light of the Eyes*, first published in 1573–1575.¹⁸ De' Rossi writes,

He also believed that the soul once separated from carnal existence eventually returns to it. This is shown in a lengthy passage from his book entitled *On Dreams* which I will quote in translation in a successive chapter if God so wills.¹⁹

¹⁶ On Philo's different genres, see, e.g., James Royle, "The Works of Philo," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 32–64. The most important ones are the three Pentateuchal commentary series, the *Quaestiones*, the *Allegorical Commentary* and the *Exposition of the Law*.

¹⁷ See p. 3.

¹⁸ I am thankful to Professor David T. Runia for alerting me to de' Rossi's relevance to my study.

¹⁹ Section 1, chapter 4; page 113 in Azariah ben Moses de' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes: Azariah de' Rossi: Translated from the Hebrew with an introduction and annotations by Joanna Weinberg*; Yale Judaica series 31 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). De' Rossi's statement is mentioned without comment in Ralph Marcus, "A 16th Century Hebrew Critique of Philo (Azariah dei Rossi's *Meor Eynayim*, Pt. I, cc. 3–6)," *HUCA* 21 (1948): 29–71, p. 38.

The quotation (*Somn.* 1.138–146) follows two chapters later.²⁰ It is interesting to note that de' Rossi does not seem to have anything against Philo's belief in reincarnation. He does not criticize Philo's views of the soul, but instead calls them "apposite."²¹ After the quotation from *Somn.* de' Rossi does present a critique, but not regarding reincarnation. What he cannot accept is Philo's "belief that the souls and angels belong to one order of existence;" this is "alien to rabbinic opinion."²² Overall, de' Rossi sees Philo as one of the Essenes, whose views he takes from Josephus and from Philo's *Prob.* and also *Contempl.*²³

On the Christian side the first reference to Philo's stance on transmigration comes in the 1640s, in the *Dogmata theologica* by the French Jesuit theologian Denis Pétau (Dionysius Petavius).²⁴ Part III of the massive work begins with angelology, and Philo's views are discussed. After quoting *Conf.* 176–177 Pétau turns to the *De somniis*, notes Philo's use of Plato's philosophy and says that he "expounds a belief which is minimally suited to a pupil of the Holy Scriptures and Moses and the prophets, that the species of the soul is fourfold."²⁵ This is a reference to *Somn.* 1.138–139 which Pétau paraphrases by listing different kinds of soul as follows: (1) those who, "seized by the enticements of the earth and bodies,"²⁶ descend into bodies to be held by fetters, (2) those that are released in times determined by nature "and no longer return to bodies,"²⁷ (3) "others who again return to them,"²⁸ and (4) the angels, on whom Pétau quotes *Somn.* 1.140–141. In making explicit the notion of re-embodiment and in labelling the

²⁰ De' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, 156.

²¹ De' Rossi writes in the earlier passage (p. 113): "If you examine the entry for 'soul' in the index to his works you can acquaint yourself with his apposite remarks on any aspect of the subject which interests you."

²² This is also Marcus's ("A Hebrew Critique", 56) understanding of de' Rossi's point here. The quotations from *The Light of the Eyes* are from p. 157. On the following page de' Rossi states, "his statements about *souls and angels* as described above do not demonstrate convictions which are consistent with those of our sages." (Emphasis added.)

²³ De' Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes*, pp. 154–58. De' Rossi conflates the various accounts. He includes among the Essene beliefs also reincarnation (p. 106).

²⁴ Most of the literature older than approximately a century that I cite can be found on the Internet as scans of the original documents, which has made this overview possible. The works can be found using search engines fairly easily.

²⁵ My tr. for "Scripturarum Sacrarum, ac Mosis, & Prophetarum alumno minime congruentem opinionem explicat de quadruplici animarum specie" in Denis Pétau, *Opus de Theologicis Dogmatibus, in Hac Novissima Editione Auctius* (Venice: Andreae Poleti, 1745), 3:2. Parts 1–3 of the *Dogmata theologica* were originally published in 1643.

²⁶ My tr. for "terrae, corporumque captas illecebris."

²⁷ My tr. for "nec ad corpora amplius reverti."

²⁸ My tr. for "alias iterum in illa relabi."

whole as a Platonically oriented scheme which is not faithful to the Scriptures, Pétau is here presenting the first printed criticism against Philo's accepting the tenet of reincarnation. Yet it is fairly mild, and Pétau does not include Philo among the "heretics" whom he moves on to discuss.

Half a century later came an "important turning point" in the development that led to Philo's "los[ing] his status as honorary Church Father:" the twelve-page dissertation by Johann Albertus Fabricius.²⁹ As the title *Exercitatio de Platonismo Philonis Judaei* reveals, the emphasis is on showing Philo's debt to Plato. Reincarnation figures in sections X and XI. At the end of section IX, Fabricius quotes Photius's (d. ca. 893) statement on Philo: "He goes wrong in many things, adopting ideas and some other things of (*or*, foreign to) Judaic philosophy and having them written down."³⁰ In section X Fabricius then cites Pétau's account just discussed. He begins section XI by extolling the work of Giovanni Battista Crispo on Plato's psychology. A century earlier Crispo had published an almost six hundred-page corrective to Plato where he had enumerated twenty-four propositions concerning the soul—including reincarnation in part III, book I—and debunked them with the help of the Bible, Church Fathers, Councils etc.³¹ Fabricius writes:

²⁹ The quoted characterizations are from Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 31.

³⁰ Johann Albertus Fabricius, 'Exercitatio de Platonismo Philonis Judaei' (diss., Leipzig, 1693) (no page numbers), my translation. The text in Fabricius differs slightly from what Henry's edition gives for Photius. The latter runs (cod. 105), Ἀμαρτάνει δὲ ἐν πολλοῖς, ἰδέας τε ὑποτιθέμενος, καὶ ἄλλα ἅπτα τῆς Ἰουδαϊκῆς φιλοσοφίας ἀλλότρια συγγραφόμενος. Apart from changing the words referring to Philo into accusative, the word ἀλλότρια ("foreign [things]") is missing from Fabricius's quote. The similarity between Photius's and Pétau's judgements (which Fabricius proceeds to quote) and the general tendency of Fabricius's work makes me surmise this is just a mistake and that the latter's text should be amended.—It is interesting to note that Photius does not charge Philo with believing in transmigration *in distinction* to, e.g., Clement of Alexandria (cod. 109) and Origen (cod. 8).

³¹ Giovanni Battista Crispo, *De Ethnicis Philosophis Caute Legendis Disputationum ex Propriis Cuiusque Principiis* (Rome: Aloysij Zannetti, 1594). Jill Kraye, "Ficino in the Firing Line: A Renaissance Neoplatonist and His Critics," in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. Michael J. B. Allen, Valery Rees and Martin Davies (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 377–97 sees Crispo's work in the context of a more general turning of the tide in Rome against Plato, whose philosophy was regarded by Crispo as the source of most heresies, "including Protestantism" (p. 394). Against this background it is worth noting that Pétau was a Jesuit, Fabricius, apparently, a Lutheran (he published a Lutheran bibliography, *Centifolium Lutheranum*, in 1728). In any case the rise of anti-Platonism thus seems to lurk behind Philo's depreciation as well at least on the Catholic side. However, examining this link and the reception of Philo by the different parties of the reformation disputes goes beyond the scope of this study.

Of these 24 Platonic propositions on the soul I dare affirm that among them might be one or two which Philo did not similarly defend in his writings. Of the transition of souls to other bodies we have already heard.³²

Philo is not among those accused by Crispo of believing in reincarnation. His name is invoked very seldom, and when it is, it is in defence of *orthodoxy*, whereas Origen is named under almost all propositions among the heretics.

The impact of Fabricius's work can be seen in the preface of Thomas Mangey's great edition of Philo's works (1742). After writing that Philo took from Plato the ideal of assimilation to God and the notion of the creation of the world in accordance with the invisible ideas, Mangey continues:

In fact, when he adds the pre-existence of souls and reincarnation, the tripartition of the human soul and the four cardinal virtues, and further asserts that the stars are living beings together with the world itself, he does not show himself to be so much an interpreter of Moses but a pupil of gentile philosophy, principally a devotee of Plato's. If someone really desires to learn more about Philo's Platonism, I will not pursue a closed case, but let him examine the short and eminent pamphlet that presents the judgement of Ioh. Alb. Fabricius, with Iohannes Ionsius as the opponent.³³

But not all saw the relationship of the two thinkers in the same way. E.g., Peter (Pierre) Allix (d. 1717) maintained, rather inconsistently, that while Philo was "very conversant" with Plato and other Greek authors, he was, nevertheless "little acquainted with Plato's works," and that in any case "if Plato had any distinct notions in religion, he most certainly had them from the Jews."³⁴ Allix's comments reveal the superficiality of his knowledge of

³² My tr. for "Ex quibus 24. Platonicis de anima propositionibus ausim affirmare vix unam vel duas esse, quas non in scriptis suis Philo similiter asseruerit. De transitu animarum in alia corpora jam audivimus." Fabricius then moves on to the pre-existence of the soul and other matters. In his renowned *Bibliotheca Graeca* 12 vols.; (Hamburg: Christianum Liebecke, 1705–1728)—the chapter on Philo of which (4.104–22) Runia, *Philo in Early Christian Literature*, 31 calls "the first scholarly account of [Philo's] life and writings"—reincarnation is not discussed.

³³ Thomas Mangey, *Philonis Iudaei opera quae Reperiri potuerunt Omnia* (London: Typis Gulielmi Bowyer, 1742), viii; my tr. for "Denique cum praecipientiam animarum et metempsychosim adstruat, animam humanam esse *τριμερῆ*, quatuor etiam virtutes cardinales, stellas porro animatas cum mundo ipso esse contendit, non se tam Mosis interpretem, quam Gentilis philosophiae alumnum, et plane Platoni praecipue addictum ostendit. Si quis vero plura de Philonis Platonismo cupiat ediscere, ne ipse actum agam, perlegat brevem et egregium libellum Ioh. Alb. Fabricii sententiae Iohannis Ionsii oppositum."

³⁴ Peter Allix, *The Judgement of the Ancient Jewish Church against the Unitarians in the Controversy upon the Holy Trinity and the Divinity of Our Blessed Saviour*, 2nd ed., corr. by the author (Oxford: Clarendon, 1821), esp. 283–93; the quotations are from pp. 284, 287. The work originally appeared in 1689.

both authors. The debate seems to have centered on other aspects of Philo's Platonism than reincarnation and on what he was seen to say about the Trinity.³⁵ Reincarnation received little attention, even when the *Somn.* passage was commented on and notions related to reincarnation discussed.³⁶ When the tenet was mentioned, scholars saw no need to refer to

³⁵ See, e.g. Jean Le Clerc, *Joanni Clerici epistolae criticae et ecclesiae* (Amsterdam: Typographiae huguetanorum, 1700), 256–99; J. L. von Mosheim's 14-page footnote in Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: To Which Are Added the Notes and Dissertations of Dr. J. L. Mosheim*; translated by John Harrison (London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), 320–33 (Cudworth's work was originally published in 1678, and Mosheim's notes first appeared in his 1773 Latin translation); Joseph Priestley, "Of the Platonism of Philo," *The Theological Repository* 4 (1784): 408–20, and Moritz Wolff, *Die philonische Philosophie in ihrem Hauptmomenten dargestellt* (Gothenburg: Bonnier, 1858). Additionally, there is no reference to reincarnation in James Drummond, *Philo Judaeus, or the Jewish-Alexandrian Philosophy* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1888), although Drummond does discuss the idea of pre-existence (see below, section 2.1). Harry A. A. Kennedy, *Philo's Contribution to Religion* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919), 80–81, referring "esp." to *Gig.* 6–15, regards "one of [Philo's] most discordant hypotheses, that of the pre-existence of souls in the air" as a "side issue" and does not mention transmigration. I can also find no reference to reincarnation in Joseph Gross, "Philons von Alexandria Anschauungen über die Natur des Menschen" (diss., Tübingen, 1930), a study on Philonic anthropology, and the situation is the same with Joseph Pascher, *H ΒΑΣΙΛΙΚΗ ΟΔΟΣ: Der Königsweeg zu Wiedergeburt und Vergottung bei Philon von Alexandria*; Studien zur Geschichte und Kultur des Altertums, Bd. 17.3–4 (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1931).

³⁶ See, e.g., D. Grossman, *Quaestiones Philoneae* (Leipzig: Friedricus Fleischer, 1829), 27, 31; August Gfrörer, *Philo und die alexandrinische Theosophie*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart: Schweitzerbart, 1831), 2.357–60; August Ferdinand Dähne, *Geschichtliche Darstellung der jüdisch-alexandrinischen Religions-Philosophie* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1834), 1.162, 260, 310–11; Heinrich Ritter, *The History of Ancient Philosophy*; translated from the German by Alexander J. W. Morrison (London: Bohn, 1838–1846), 4.438; Karl Herzog, *Spekulativ-psychologische Entwicklung der Grundlagen und Grundlinien des philonischen Systems* (Nuremberg: Rottner & Keller, 1911), 96; Franz Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), 154. Worth a special mention is Thomas Billings's work *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1919), which remarkably fails to mention reincarnation at all. For instance, on p. 41, when discussing Philo's views on daemons and souls of the air, Billings says "there are two main passages" that are relevant, *Gig.* 6–18 and *Somn.* 1.134–143. He chooses the former for analysis and says of the latter no more than that "[t]he ideas are repeated" there. The reincarnation aspect would have informed Billings's discussion, e.g., of the fact that "some souls are swept away and overwhelmed by sense" in *Gig.* 15 (p. 58). In dealing with the reincarnational images of Plato that Philo utilizes Billings does not note their original context in this respect (pp. 88–92, 101). Billings's work, however, led me to the earliest works discussed in this section and is useful also in other respects. An *index locorum* thereto has been drawn up (Albert C. Geljon and David T. Runia, "An Index Locorum to Billings, *The Platonism of Philo Judaeus*," *SPHA* 7 (1995): 169–85. A much more recent example of a scholarly discussion of themes close to reincarnation lacking an explicit discussion of Philo's position is Dieter Zeller, "The Life and Death of the Soul in Philo of Alexandria: The Use and Origin of a Metaphor," in *SPHA* 7 (1995): 19–55 (esp. pp. 44–45).

their predecessors; e.g., Eduard Zeller writes that those who have been freed from attachment to the body may after death enjoy their higher life, whereas “den übrigen stellt Philo, so selten er auch davon redet, die Seelenwanderung in Aussicht, welche seine Voraussetzungen forderten.”³⁷ The only reference is a quotation of *Somn.* 1.139. Similarly, Édouard Herriot states—again in connection with Philo’s views on angels—that those souls who had descended “dans des corps d’hommes non vertueux” will after death be “précipitées dans le corps d’autres hommes” of the same kind.³⁸

Zeller for his part is the only scholarly reference of Emil Schürer who gives more than usual attention to delineating the *Stellenwert* of reincarnation in Philo’s thought. He writes,

For those who have not freed themselves from sense, Philo has to accept, after the occurrence of the natural death, a transition to another body, that is a *transmigration of souls*.³⁹

This is preceded by the quotation of *Leg.* 1.108 and not the usual *Somn.* 1 passage, although Schürer does refer to the souls, angels and daemons of the air of *Somn.* in discussing Philo’s “chiefly” Platonic anthropology four pages earlier.⁴⁰ He further notes Philo’s views of the body as a prison or a grave and his ethics whose most important principle is “the *utmost possible renunciation of sensuousness*, the extirpation of the passions.”⁴¹ This Schürer sees as a Stoic ideal, but notes that the Platonic “imitation of the Deity” is also very important for Philo;⁴² after all,

the origin of man being transcendental, the object of his development is likewise transcendental. As it was by falling away from God that he was entangled in this life of sense, so must he struggle up from it to the direct *vision of God*. This object is attainable even in this earthly life.... Beyond it

³⁷ Eduard Zeller, *Die nacharistotelische Philosophie*, vol. 3.2 of *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*; sixth edition (Hildesheim: Olms, 1963), 446. (Zeller’s great work originally appeared during 1844–1852.) It seems evident that this formulation is behind Schürer’s (above, p. 3).

³⁸ Édouard Herriot, *Philon le Juif: Essai sur l’école juive d’Alexandrie* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1898), 248. He actually refers to *Gig.* 6–18 and gives the *Somn.* passage as a comparable text only. Cf. p. 329: “la théorie . . . sur la transmigration des âmes a dû faire sur [Philon] une vive impression.” Previous scholarship is not mentioned.

³⁹ Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, tr. Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie; 2 divs., 5 vols. (New York: Scribner’s, 1885–1891), 2.3:380 n. 185. Emphasis original. (The English translation was published in practice simultaneously with the German original.)

⁴⁰ *Idem*, 2.3:377. For *Leg.* 1.105–108 see below, esp. pp. 57–64.

⁴¹ *Idem*, 2.3:378. Emphasis original.

⁴² *Idem*, 2.3:378–79.

lies only complete deliverance from this body, that return of the soul to its original incorporeal condition, which is bestowed on those who have kept themselves free from attachment to this sensuous body.⁴³

When one compares the entire section on Philo's anthropology in the article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* by Schürer and Charles Bigg (from which the quotation on p. 3 was extracted) with the above summary, their likeness is so close that it is clear the text in the former is Schürer's and that these are the premises of Philo's of which reincarnation is "the necessary consequence."⁴⁴ Schürer's is clearly the most thorough description so far of the basis on which Philo could be seen to hold the doctrine. But can he be deemed to have settled the issue? Quite apart from the fact that the virtual consensus of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries has since dispersed into a spectrum of views that in the extremes are mutually exclusive, my answer is no. He certainly succeeds in making it seem plausible that Philo believed in transmigration, but his account is nevertheless so brief that no more should even be expected of it.

It is interesting that up to the nineteenth century it is difficult to find anyone expressing an opinion to the effect that Philo *denied* reincarnation, or that even if he wrote approvingly about it, he did not really mean it. The later scholarly view that Philo rejected rebirth could be thought to have stemmed from the rise of critical research, but as the matter stands, this is not the case.

In the twentieth century, scholars continued to make their statements usually in passing. For example, Norman Bentwich has one sentence:

The unrighteous souls, Philo sometimes suggests, in accordance with current Pythagorean ideas, are reincarnated according to a system of transmigration within the human species (*παλιγγενεσία*).⁴⁵

⁴³ Idem, 2.3:380. Emphasis original.

⁴⁴ Bigg apparently did not write anything on Philo's position on reincarnation. The tenet is in Charles Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria: Being the Bampton Lectures of the year 1886* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913) briefly mentioned as having been rejected by both Clement of Alexandria (p. 318) and Origen (p. 241) but it is not referred to in connection with Philo.

⁴⁵ Norman Bentwich, *Philo-Judaeus of Alexandria* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1910), 180. Other examples of very brief mentions of Philo's acceptance of reincarnation are Walter Stettner, *Die Seelenwanderung bei Griechen und Römern*; Tübingen Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 22 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1934), 53, 61 (based on *Somn.*); Irmgard Christiansen *Die Technik der allegorischen Auslegungswissenschaft bei Philon von Alexandria*; Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Hermeneutik 7 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1969), 59 (*Somn.*); Carl R. Holladay, *Theios Aner in Hellenistic-Judaism: A Critique of the Use of This Category in New Testament Christology*; SBL Dissertation Series 40 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1977), 139 (no reference to any Philonic text).

This time the text explicitly referred to is *Cher.* 114. There a “regeneration” after death is mentioned without spelling out its meaning.⁴⁶ The word “sometimes” implies that Bentwich saw the idea also elsewhere but he does not tell us where, nor does he refer to previous research.

Another feature characterizing the way in which scholars have treated the issue is the use of elusive language. For example, Émile Bréhier, after giving his own translation for *Somn.* 1.134–143 speaks of Philo’s classification of souls in three groups.⁴⁷ If we use Pétau’s classification as a reference,⁴⁸ we note that Bréhier takes the first and third groups together as “les âmes du corps.”⁴⁹ He says of the second one (with regard to the body) that they “l’ont quitté définitivement” and goes on to identify the time periods mentioned at *Somn.* 1.138 with those that Plato mentions in the *Phaedrus* in the context of reincarnation. He can hardly mean anything else than that Philo too means that souls transmigrate, but he does not make this explicit.⁵⁰

Isaak Heinemann is very brief on Philo and reincarnation: after having stated that Pythagoreanism did not have such an authoritative position for Philo as Platonism and Stoicism, he continues,

mit dem Glauben an die Seelenwanderung setzt [Philon] sich nie auseinander, auch wo er der Bibel zuliebe tierfreundliche Lehren entwickelt oder im Widerspruch zu ihr das unblutige Opfer rühmt.⁵¹

Heinemann is right that in those contexts Philo does not “enter into debate” with reincarnation, but otherwise his remark is quite perfunctory.

⁴⁶ This passage is the object of examination below, section 3.2.

⁴⁷ Émile Bréhier, *Les idées philosophiques et religieuses de Philon d’Alexandrie* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1908), 127–28.

⁴⁸ See above, p. 10.

⁴⁹ In effect the same is done by the French translator of *Somn.* in the PAMM series, Pierre Savinel. See below, n. 475 on p. 148.

⁵⁰ Also Colson in PLCL 5.600 (1934) and Michael J. Reddoch, “Dream Narratives and Their Philosophical Orientation in Philo of Alexandria” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 2010), 203 substitute a reference to the reincarnational time periods of the *Phaedrus* for an explicit mention of the doctrine of reincarnation when commenting on the *Somn.* passage. Another type of elusiveness is found in Jaap Mansfeld, “Heraclitus, Empedocles, and Others in a Middle Platonist Cento in Philo of Alexandria,” *VC* 39 (1985): 131–56: e.g., on pp. 135, 145–46 he mentions transmigration when discussing the traditions behind certain Philonic passages (*QG* 1.70–71 and *Leg.* 1.108, respectively) but does not make explicit what he thinks Philo’s stance on the tenet was. See below, n. 206 on p. 61.

⁵¹ Isaak Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung: Kulturvergleichende Untersuchungen zu Philons Darstellung der jüdischen Gesetze* (Breslau: M. & H. Marcus, 1932), 550.

Henrik Elmgren considers *Somn.* 1.139 an unambiguous reference to reincarnation: “This passage about rebirth cannot be misunderstood.”⁵² He says it is not an isolated case, but the other passages he refers to, *Mos.* 2.263 and *Opif.* 78 (dealing with the memory of past catastrophes and that of the music of the spheres) are quite open to other interpretations. More relevant is his mention of the recurrence of the theme of migration in Philo. He concludes that “[a]ll these statements do not of course have to be put in relation with a developed doctrine of transmigration in Philo.”⁵³ Elmgren in fact seems to be the first to express doubts about the *seriousness* of Philo’s references to reincarnation. In a somewhat patronizing manner he says, “[i]t is hardly credible that Philo in the first place drew the conclusions from a doctrine of transmigration of souls.” The implication is surely that in Elmgren’s mind such a tenet would not be in harmony with Philo’s other views. He continues that “[i]t does not have to be particularly emphasized, either, that one can easily set forth expressions of his that are in direct contradiction” with reincarnation. Alas, such expressions, which would have been most interesting to analyze in this study, are not presented for the reader by Elmgren. His meager overall conclusion is that we must be content with noting that this doctrine was not unknown to Philo.⁵⁴

Erwin R. Goodenough does not discuss reincarnation in his famous 1935 monograph.⁵⁵ However, in a later article he finds Philo opposing the tenet. He lists this opposition among three items of “Philo’s deviations from the Platonic tradition” and writes that “Philo seems completely to have rejected the Platonic doctrine of metempsychosis.”⁵⁶ What are the grounds for this view? “In each of these rejections it is his Jewish foundation which has been the censor.” No Philonic texts are referred to; other scholars are not mentioned.

⁵² Henrik Elmgren, *Philon av Alexandria med särskild hänsyn till hans eskatologiska föreställningar* [*Philo of Alexandria and his eschatological views*]; diss., Lund (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelse, 1939), 171. All the quotations from his work are my translations from Swedish.

⁵³ *Idem*, 172. The quotations that follow are from the same page.

⁵⁴ Like so many others, Elmgren leaves the impression that no scholar has addressed Philo’s position on reincarnation before him; none are cited.

⁵⁵ Erwin R. Goodenough, *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935). He does touch on two of the passages examined below in Ch. 3 as direct evidence, i.e., Philo’s interpretation in *Somn.* 1 of Jacob’s ladder dream in Gen 28 (p. 169) and the one in *QE* 2 of Moses’s ascent to the mountain in Ex 24:12 (p. 214) but does not seem to see any reason for raising the possibility that Philo is speaking of transmigration of souls.

⁵⁶ Goodenough, “Philo on Immortality,” *HTR* 39.2 (1946): 86–108, pp. 106–7.

In his massive two-volume work Harry Austryn Wolfson discusses Philo's position on reincarnation on a single page. He takes as his starting point in this question a rather dubious reading of Plato: "the Platonic view with regard to the reincarnation of the souls of the wicked" does not imply "a belief in individual providence and individual reward and punishment. According to Plato, reincarnation follows wickedness by the necessity of a predetermined law of fate."⁵⁷ The reference Wolfson gives is *Timaeus* 41e–42d, but what we find there is the determination of reincarnation based on precisely individual behavior;⁵⁸ and there is no contradiction between a law and individual responsibility. It is true that the punishment of reincarnation is in *Tim.* not *individually declared* on souls by some tribunal, but even that is present in other dialogues, albeit in mythical form.⁵⁹ When Wolfson then goes on to state that in Judaism "both resurrection and immortality are considered as acts of individual providence, coming to each individual as a reward or a punishment for his actions," one wonders where the difference he sees from Plato's views is to be found.⁶⁰ Moreover, since this difference is his only argument supporting the implication of what he says—that Philo could not have accepted reincarnation—his view must be judged to be without foundation. Wolfson too mentions no other scholars in this context.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.408.

⁵⁸ For a quotation, see below, p. 91.

⁵⁹ In the *Phaedrus* an individual judgement is mentioned (249a; similarly *Republic* 614c), but it is concerned with the souls' inter-incarnational location only and not with whether they reincarnate or not. This latter is determined by the predefined time period (10,000 or 3,000 years). In the *Phaedo*, no formal judgement is involved in, e.g. 81c in the description of impure souls being dragged back to the visible world, but later (113d) it is mentioned. In the account of the post-mortem judgment in the *Gorgias* (523b–524a), reincarnation does not figure at all—explicitly, that is, but cf. n. 203 on p. 60 below. On the use of myth by Plato, see the brief discussion below, pp. 24–25.

⁶⁰ Wolfson, *Philo*, 1.408.

⁶¹ Wolfson himself is the only reference that Burnett, "Philo on Immortality," 466 n. 83 gives for his already cited statement of "Philo's rejection of successive incarnations" (above, p. 3). It is illustrative of the marginal position of reincarnation in Philonic studies that in the three annotated bibliographies of research covering the period 1937–2006 (Roberto Radice and David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: An Annotated Bibliography 1937–1986*; VCSup8 [Leiden: Brill, 1988]; David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: An Annotated Bibliography for 1987–1996 with Addenda for 1937–1986*; VCSup 57 [Leiden: Brill, 2000]; David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria: an Annotated Bibliography 1997–2006 with addenda for 1987–1996*; VCSup 109 [Leiden: Brill, 2012]) only the first one mentions *s.v. reincarnation* a single item, Burnett's article—which does not merit the mention in terms of having made some scholarly contribution on this topic.

Anita Méasson has thoroughly examined Philo's use of Platonic myths. Her work will be referred to in numerous places below; with regard to reincarnation it can be stated that she sees Philo referring to the doctrine at *Somm.* 1.139.⁶² There are also other researchers whose statements on Philo and reincarnation are mentioned when the Philonic texts which their remarks pertain to are analyzed in Ch. 30. In the following two subsections of this chapter we will discuss the comments on Philo's position on reincarnation by two leading Philonic scholars who have written more than is usual on the subject: David Winston and David T. Runia.

1.4.2 *David Winston and the Endless Series of Reincarnations*

David Winston is one of those researchers who see Philo as accepting the idea of reincarnation. But he is quite unique in positing reincarnation as *an eternal punishment* in Philo.⁶³ His starting point is that the attainment of "joyful immortality" is, according to Philo, "conditional on the soul's assimilation to divine wisdom and its pursuit of the life of perfect virtue." Winston subsequently paraphrases various texts by Philo to the effect that "it is virtue that gives immortality and vice that brings on destruction," and that the wicked are dead already and can expect nothing but eternal death. He writes,

Since Philo further indicates that the earth is the beginning and end of the evil and vile man (*QG* 1.51), we may conclude that in his view the destruction of the wicked very likely consists in an endless series of reincarnations. This would fit precisely his definition of folly as "a deathless evil, never experiencing the end that consists in having died, but subject to all eternity to that which consists in ever dying" (*Det.* 178).

He then specifies that this would be the fate of only those who are incurably wicked. With regard to the curable souls that fall short of perfect wisdom, Winston surmises that "it is quite likely Philo thought they needed to undergo further transmigrations to purge them before they could escape the wheel of rebirth."⁶⁴ In another context he mentions one of the

⁶² Anita Méasson, *Du char ailé de Zeus à l'Arche d'Alliance: Images et mythes platoniciens chez Philon d'Alexandrie* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1986), 286.

⁶³ David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1985), 38–42. The quotations that immediately follow are from pp. 38–39.

⁶⁴ *Idem*, 42.

passages which I discuss in Ch. 3 when he states that Philo “certainly ... envisages reincarnation” in, “e.g., *Somn.* 1.139.”⁶⁵

I think the Philonic passages Winston appeals to are not (with the exception of *Somn.* 1.139) *specific* enough to prove his views, nor is his analysis sufficiently detailed for that purpose. Philo’s comments in the passage mentioned thrice by Winston, *QG* 1.51, on Adam’s having to return to the earth (Gen 3:19) are very intriguing. The idea seems to be that the transgression in Paradise rendered the originally divine part of the human being earthly, and *this* made the curse of returning to the earth apply to it too and not just the body. We will be in a better position to evaluate Winston’s views further after examining *QG* 1.51 and its parallel at *Leg.* 3.251–253 in detail below.⁶⁶

1.4.3 *The Work of David T. Runia on Philo and the Timaeus*⁶⁷

The *Timaeus* has been described as the most important of Plato’s dialogues for Philo.⁶⁸ The *magnum opus* on the subject is David T. Runia’s immensely

⁶⁵ David Winston and John Dillon, *Two Treatises of Philo of Alexandria: A Commentary on De Gigantibus and Quod Deus Sit Immutabilis*; BJS 25 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 237. I take this as Winston’s text, because Dillon has expressed contrary views: In “The Descent of the Soul in Middle Platonic and Gnostic Theory” in *The golden chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), 357–64 (section XII) he on p. 362 writes that “Philo has certain difficulties with the concept of reincarnation, which is an essential part of Platonic doctrine, but this does not prevent him from having quite developed notions about the soul’s descent to the body.” The difficulties are not described. In “Philo of Alexandria and Platonist Psychology,” in *The Afterlife of the Platonic Soul: Reflections of Platonic Psychology in the Monotheistic Religions*, ed. Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth and John M. Dillon (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 17–24, he says (p. 23): “There is no need, however, to postulate a preincarnate existence for individual souls, and so no problem about re-incarnation, which is not a doctrine of which Philo would approve.” The reasons for this supposed disapproval are not presented. In neither case does Dillon mention any previous scholars’ views.

⁶⁶ See pp. 70–79.

⁶⁷ This section is a reworked version of pp. 221–26 in my “The *Timaeus*, Philo Judaeus and Reincarnation” pp. 217–43 in Gunnar af Hällström ed., *Människan i universum: Platons Timaios och dess tolkningshistoria: Texter från Platonsällskapets symposium i Åbo 2007* [*The Human Being in the Universe: Plato’s Timaeus and Its History of Interpretation: Papers from the Symposium of the Nordic Plato Society in Turku*], Finland, 2007 [Åbo: Åbo Akademi University]). Runia’s other views will be returned to in the following chapters. His sceptical view about Philo’s accepting the idea of the pre-existence of the soul is examined when we discuss Philo’s anthropology (section 2.1), and his statements regarding *Somn.* 1.138–139 are reviewed in section 3.1.3.

⁶⁸ Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 4; Bentwich, *Philo-Judaeus*, 74. John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* rev. ed. with new afterword (London: Duckworth, 1996), 140 says Philo particularly favored the *Timaeus* and the *Phaedrus*. If the references to Plato’s works in Geljon and Runia’s “Index locorum to Billings” are

thorough 1986 work *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato*.⁶⁹ Runia concludes that “Philo had direct access to the actual text of the dialogue and was intimately acquainted with its contents.”⁷⁰ He finds twenty direct references to the *Timaeus* in the *Corpus Philonicum* in addition to which he lists several dozen Pentateuchal passages in the exegesis of which Philo “calls on ideas and texts from Plato’s dialogue.”⁷¹ Runia notes that Philo may also have used secondary material such as commentaries on the *Timaeus*, and that some parts of the dialogue were more important for him than others.⁷²

The aim of this section is to examine Runia’s statements about Philo’s relation to reincarnation. In the *Timaeus* souls are punished for their wickedness in that they are made to be reborn, not only as humans but also in animal bodies (*Timaeus* 42a–c, 91d–92c). In Runia’s view “[i]t is highly problematic whether Philo accepts the doctrine of metempsychosis in any form.”⁷³ As he points out, there is no evidence that Philo accepted the idea that human souls enter animal bodies.⁷⁴ This is not surprising, for Philo subscribed to the view that animals lack the highest part of the soul (*voũs*; *Opif.* 73; *Deus* 45, 47; *Anim.* 85).⁷⁵

In *Timaeus* 91e Plato mentions that the heads of those souls who are born as land animals are dragged downwards because of their kinship with the earth, and Philo uses the same image when discussing the wicked in *Gig.* 31 and *QG* 4.111. Referring to these two passages, Runia writes:

counted, the *Republic* emerges as the clear winner. The relative importance of the various dialogues will depend on the subject matter at hand. The present study contains more references to the *Phaedo* than to any other dialogue.

⁶⁹ *Philosophia Antiqua* 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

⁷⁰ Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 371.

⁷¹ *Idem*, 367, 353–62.

⁷² *Idem*, 371–78.

⁷³ *Idem*, 347 (my emphasis).

⁷⁴ *Idem*, 348.

⁷⁵ According to Helmut Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age*, vol. 1 of *Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: de Gruyter, 1995), 270, this lack represents a Stoic doctrine. Plato does imply that animals have greater or lesser amounts of *voũs* depending on the changes they undergo in the process of reincarnation (*Timaeus* 92c). However, this is not necessary for rebirth as animals, because *voũs* in Plato is not an essential part of the human being: “of Reason (*voũ*) [partake] only the gods and but a small class of humans” (*Tim.* 51e). Philo’s view of *voũs* appears to be much closer to Aristotle’s; cf. *De anima* 413b25–28, 429a22–26, 430a22–23. Thomas H. Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the History of Interpretation* (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1983), 149 states that the notion of mind being the highest part of the soul appears in *Tim.* 30b. This is true, but there Plato is talking about the soul of the universe.

Plato's description of the earth-bound animals is transferred metaphorically to men who exercise no restraint over their irrational passions and appetites. Platonic metempsychosis is converted to Philonic allegory.⁷⁶

The first of these two sentences is no doubt correct in the sense that in both passages Philo utilizes Platonic imagery from the *Timaeus*. In this sense it can be said that the Timaeian image is transferred from animals to humans. But what kind of associations did Philo expect these references to reincarnational passages from Plato to arouse? Did he make them in spite, because, or irrespective of the metempsychotic overtones? If because, did he want to reject the doctrine, or allude to the possibility that the unvirtuous may be reborn as animalistic people?

Regarding Runia's second sentence in the quotation above, "Platonic metempsychosis is converted to Philonic allegory," I take it to mean that since Philo is utilizing parts of Plato's explicit descriptions of metempsychosis in a context that does not necessitate the idea rebirth, he is "converting" and thus perhaps even *rejecting* the idea of reincarnation as animals.⁷⁷ But is this Philo's point? He nowhere explicitly rejects rebirth as animals, most probably because there was no need for him to state the obvious. It would be more accurate to say, "Becoming animals is not present, becoming in some respects *like* animals is." Philo is, after all, not explaining the *Timaeus* but Genesis—and for some reason he is doing so with an allusion to Plato's description of reincarnation in the dialogue.

According to Runia, QG 2.56 is "a particularly apposite example" of "Philo's use of *Timaeus* 91d–92c."⁷⁸ Here Philo gives an allegorical explanation of the four categories of animals mentioned in Gen 9:1–2 which are the same as in Plato. However, in my view the contents of Philo's exegesis have practically nothing in common with what Plato says about the wickedness of the men being born as different kinds of animals.⁷⁹ Philo may have been inspired by the Timaeian scheme in some general way, but if we did not know that he knew the dialogue, this passage would give us no special reason to think that he did. It is thus questionable whether it can be

⁷⁶ Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 347.

⁷⁷ Indeed, on pp. 512–13 in his list of "instances of independence of mind and doctrinal divergence in relation to both Platonic text and Platonist interpretation" Runia includes "the rejection of the theory of metempsychosis and its replacement with allegorical explanation." But whether in the examples discussed Philo is *rejecting* reincarnation is questionable, and, moreover, if he does, the justification for generalizing this beyond rebirth as animals is not clear.

⁷⁸ Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 348.

⁷⁹ Cf. "Philo appears not to have used the thematic material which the dialogue offers" (*ibid.*).

classified as an example of Philo's use of the *Timaeus*; the similarity is between the Bible and Plato.

Runia further considers *Decal.* 80 as "another interesting example of Philo's use of the idea of metempsychosis."⁸⁰ Philo pities the Egyptians who worship animals and says that they have their "souls transformed (μεταβεβληκότας) into the nature of those creatures they honor, so that they ... seem beasts in human shape." Philo again uses the image of animals to depict the wicked, and Runia seems to imply that this amounts to a similar conversion and rejection of transmigration as was discussed above. But what makes this passage "use" of metempsychosis? Runia refers to the verb μεταβάλλω, which is "the *terminus technicus* for the transformations that take place in the process of metempsychosis." It is true that Plato employs the verb in this sense in the *Timaeus* (42c, 92c), but Philo, however, uses it (and its cognates) dozens of times and mostly in contexts where it cannot refer to reincarnation (e.g., *Opif.* 113, *Somn.* 2.259, *Mos.* 1.204). On the other hand, if we look only at such passages where Philo uses the verb about the soul, in many of them the idea of rebirth would *prima facie* make sense.⁸¹ However, the mere appearance of the verb is insufficient to prove a reference to the doctrine even where rebirth might be meant.

Runia's main point about Philo's position on reincarnation in the light of his use of the *Timaeus* is that the Platonic metempsychosis and the Philonic allegory achieve more or less the same "result" or "effect:"

On the day that the man eats of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he will "die the death" (Gen 2:17). The death must be interpreted symbolically as the death of the soul, for the protagonists evidently keep on living (*Leg.* 1.105). Plato achieves the same result with his doctrine of metempsychosis.⁸²

But Philo is able, as we have indicated, to achieve a similar effect through his method of allegorical exegesis. All references to beasts, birds and fish in the Biblical texts can be interpreted to represent the degrees of human wickedness and degradation which Plato punishes with transmigration into animals.... [W]hen one considers that folly and ignorance automatically result in the loss of control over the irrational parts of the soul and the

⁸⁰ *Idem*, 348–49.

⁸¹ E.g., *Post.* 73: "soul-death, which is the *change* of soul under the impetus of irrational passion;" *Migr.* 225: "the soul ... *becomes* again a virgin;" *Mut.* 124: "a *change* to proved excellence of the whole and entire soul;" or, *Virt.* 205: the fallen soul is "*changed* to a life of pain and misfortune."

⁸² Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 264.

body, it is clear that the Platonic transmigration schema and the Philonic allegory, for all their differences, come close to achieving the same result.⁸³

Certainly [Philo] has no use for the more overt mythical features [of the *Timaeus*], which are found especially in the account of the soul's descent and man's successive reincarnations. Moses, by encouraging the use of allegory, achieves the same result in a more wholesome way.⁸⁴

These three cases are not identical. I understand the first one to mean that just as reincarnation is a punishment for wickedness in Plato, the same can be said of the death of the soul in Philo. This is fine as far as it goes, but it does not tell us much of Philo's stance on reincarnation until we examine his important notion of the death of the soul, linked with the punitive union of body and soul in *Leg.* 1.106–107.⁸⁵

In the second case Runia apparently means that the wickedness of the bad leads to their changing into human brutes and that this also constitutes their punishment.⁸⁶ This case is thus close to the first one, and its validity is similarly dependent on whether this is the way Philo uses the image of becoming *like* animals.⁸⁷

In the third case Runia, as far as I can see, argues that Philo's general distaste for myth implies a dislike for reincarnation as well. This is problematic. Let us briefly discuss the reincarnational myths of the *Phaedrus*, the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. If we define myths as “[n]arrations through which ... religious affirmations and beliefs are expressed,”⁸⁸ I would say that the narrative, mythical elements in these three dialogues include, respectively, the heavenly chariot race and the notions of the soul's heaviness and its losing and regaining its wings; Er's journey to the hereafter with its various details including judgement, the underground and heavenly journeys, geographical features, the drawing of lots etc.; and, in

⁸³ Idem, 348. In no other dialogue of Plato's is reincarnation as *animals* given such prominence as in the *Timaeus*, and even there it is not the primary form of metempsychosis, but secondary (42c). According to Simo Knuutila, Notes on the *Timaeus*, in Plato, *Teokset* 5 (Helsinki: Otava, 1982), 363–81, p. 376 Plato is “undoubtedly playing with the Pythagorean doctrine of transmigration of souls,” for taking him literally would imply that even animals have vices and virtues; it is also unclear by what means the animal soul could ascend back to a birth into a human body, except somehow through “gain of reason (νόου . . . κτήσεται)” (92c).

⁸⁴ Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 415–16.

⁸⁵ This examination will be done below, pp. 57–64.

⁸⁶ Runia speaks of “remedial punishment” in the context of reincarnation in *Tim.* 91a–c (p. 324).

⁸⁷ This will be discussed below, subsection 2.4.5 on pp. 120–22.

⁸⁸ *Oxford Concise Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), s.v. “Myth.”

the *Timaeus*, the souls' native stars and perhaps also their being born in a female or animal body in case of prolonged wickedness.⁸⁹ A religious belief these elements serve to express is reincarnation. So when Runia says that

[i]f pressed, Philo would argue, I think, that ... [a]ll Plato's talk about reincarnation and metempsychosis, not to speak of souls being sown in the organs of time (42d), distracts the reader from the central and all-important conflict in man's soul⁹⁰

he is juxtaposing a mytheme (the sowing) with a belief (reincarnation), and what I miss here is a distinction between them and an analysis of the significance of that distinction.⁹¹ The idea that if Philo rejected one he *must* have rejected the other as well is not convincing. Furthermore, I do not think it is warranted to call the idea of transmigration *per se* mythical or to sever its close tie with the soul's ethical battle.⁹²

We will return to Runia's views of Philo's position on reincarnation below, especially when dealing with Philo's use of the Platonic image of changing into animal form and in the discussion of *Somn.* 1.137–139 as the most important piece of direct evidence on our subject.⁹³

1.4.4 *The Most Recent Research on Philo and Reincarnation*

In the Philonic research carried out in the twenty-first century, Philo's position on reincarnation has received hardly any scholarly attention, even

⁸⁹ That the narrative details vary belongs to the nature of myth; myths may even be "strictly incompatible with each other" (*ibid.*); there need be no effort to reconcile them, because it is not so much the narrative that matters as the beliefs it conveys.

⁹⁰ Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 389 n. 122.

⁹¹ For an enlightening discussion of the role of myth in Plato, see Harold Tarrant, "Myth as a Tool of Persuasion in Plato," in *From the Old Academy to Later Neo-Platonism: Studies in the History of Platonic Thought*; Variorum collected studies series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); repr. from *Antichthon* 24 (1990). Tarrant does not explicitly make the distinction between mythemes and beliefs, and he somewhat unconvincingly characterizes myths as "detailed investigation[s]" (p. 22) that serve to impart knowledge rather than true opinion. However, in his discussion of the myth of Theuth and Thamus (*Phaedrus* 274e–275c), he does differentiate between "the historical truth" of the myth and "the truth of its message" (p. 23). Socrates explicitly plays down the importance of the former and highlights the latter. Tarrant also points to *Meno* 81e, where Socrates, treating the (reincarnational) theory of recollection much like a myth, affirms he believes in it, and to 86b, where the philosopher refuses to commit himself to any of its details (p. 27).

⁹² The possibility of being born as a woman or an animal in the *Timaeus* illustrates the difficulty of always knowing precisely where the border between a mytheme and a belief lies. But in any case I think Plato wants to convey the belief that one's conduct affects one's next life.

⁹³ Subsections 2.4.5 (pp. 120–122) and 3.1.3 (pp. 143–47), respectively.

though closely related themes have been discussed.⁹⁴ Fully explicit positions, with the doctrine being named, are not to be found.⁹⁵ Closest comes a study by Wilfried Eisele who implies that Philo speaks of reincarnation by stating—based on, interestingly, *Somn.* 1.138—that souls incarnate more than once.⁹⁶ However, he errs in writing, “Der Abstieg

⁹⁴ The issue is absent in Paola Graffigna, “The Stability of Perfection: The Image of the Scales in Philo of Alexandria,” in *Italian Studies on Philo of Alexandria*, ed. Francesca Calabi; *Studies in Philo of Alexandria and Mediterranean Antiquity* 1 (Boston: Brill, 2003), 131–46, pp. 136, 145; Sarah Pearce, *The Land of the Body: Studies in Philo’s Representation of Egypt*; WUNT 1.208 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 121, 126, 291; Adam Kamesar, “Biblical Interpretation in Philo,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65–91, p. 85; Termini, “Philo’s Thought,” 108; Carlos Lévy, “Philo’s Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 146–71, p. 164. Thus the readers of *The Cambridge Companion* get no inkling that Philo has been suspected of endorsing the doctrine, and the same applies to two other recent collections of essays: *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, ed. Francesca Alesse; SPhA 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2008) and *Reading Philo: A Handbook to Philo of Alexandria*, ed. Torrey Seland (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014). Another kind of omission leading to the same result is that a scholarly monograph of more than five hundred pages with the title *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, which does discuss reincarnation in Judaism (Paull Simcha Raphael, *Jewish Views of the Afterlife*, second edition [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009], 314–24) and even calls it, “after the twelfth century . . . as kosher to Judaism as Mogen David wine” (p. 314), fails to include any mention of Philo whatsoever. Or, an analysis of Photius’s charges against Clement of Alexandria (and in passing of those levelled against Origen as well, *Bibl. codd.* 109 and 8, respectively) of believing in reincarnation, in its discussion of the background against which Clement’s position on the doctrine should be analyzed, simply states that “reincarnation seems not to appear as a theological option” in Philo (Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria on Trial: The Evidence of “Heresy” from Photius’ Bibliotheca*. VCSup 101 [Leiden: Brill, 2010], 125).

⁹⁵ Annegret Meyer, *Kommt und seht: Mystagogie im Johannesevangelium ausgehend von Joh 1, 35–51* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2005), 314 says some souls “sehen sich nach der Erde und dem Körper, sie verharren dort,” but the reference is only to *Somn.* 1.138 and not 1.139 and the meaning of “remaining” is not spelled out. On 1.139 Meyer says that other souls “fühlen sich eingesperrt; sie zieht es nach Ablauf des irdischen Lebens wieder hinauf in die Höhe des Geistes.” Reddoch, “Dream Narratives” has already been mentioned (see n. 50 on p. 16).

⁹⁶ Wilfried Eisele, *Ein unerschütterliches Reich: Die mittelplatonische Umformung des Parusiegedankens im Hebräerbrief*; Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 116 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 212–13:

Einen Hinweis darauf [that the not fully pure souls begin their vertical motion with a descent], den man allerdings leicht übersieht, gibt zweitens auch das *πάλι* in [*Somn.* 1.138]: Ein Aufstieg findet erst statt, nachdem sich die betreffende Seelen wieder von der Erde und den Körper getrennt haben (*αἱ δ’ ἀνέρχονται διακριθεῖσαι πάλιν*). Sie haben also offenbar davor schon einmal getrennt von diesen existiert und sind dann erst herabgestiegen, um sich mit ihnen zu verbinden.

(Emphasis added.) He also speaks of “mehreren zeitlich aufeinanderfolgenden Bewegungen” (p. 212), meaning the descents and ascents of souls.

einer unkörperlichen Seele kann in jede Art von Körper erfolgen, darin unterscheidet sich Philon nicht von Platon.” The reference is to *Timaeus* 42a–c, a section where reincarnation also as animals is part of Plato’s scheme.⁹⁷ Eisele points to the creatures of land, water and fire mentioned in *Gig.* 7–11, but this does not justify his claim. Although Philo introduces these creatures by saying, “the universe must be animated (ἐψυχῶσθαι) through and through,” the land, water and fire animals, as well as the stars, are presented as static classes: each element has its *own* creatures (§7). There is no indication that a soul may move from one class to another.

Runia’s work discussed in the previous subsection has been used by other scholars in analyses of Philo’s thought also in regard to reincarnation. A recent example is the study of John T. Conroy, Jr. on Philo’s use of the notions of the death of the soul and the transformation into animal form.⁹⁸ Conroy states,

David Runia has convincingly shown that Philo has transformed the Platonic transmigration of souls into a hierarchy of being, with humans who properly utilize their minds to contemplate the heavenly realities as being superior to animals whose necks are so formed that they view primarily the things of the earth.⁹⁹

There are several problems in Conroy’s argumentation of which I will concentrate on those related in some relevant way to reincarnation. He says that in Philo the *death of the soul* means a transformation into a beast and that this is an ontological change linked with the destruction of the mind and not a metaphor.¹⁰⁰ But it has to be emphatically denied that the death

⁹⁷ As was discussed, the human mind cannot incarnate as an animal which does not have νοῦς. See above, n. 75 and text on p. 21.

⁹⁸ John T. Conroy, “‘The Wages of Sin Is Death’: The Death of the Soul in Greek, Second Temple Jewish, and Early Christian Authors” (Ph.D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2008) and “Philo’s ‘Death of the Soul’: Is This Only a Metaphor?” *SPhA* 23 (2011): 23–40.

⁹⁹ Conroy, “Death of the Soul,” 36 and “The Wages of Sin,” 82. He gives as the reference “Runia, *Philo and the Timaeus*, 305.” This is not the 1986 work but Runia’s original dissertation (“Philo of Alexandria and the *Timaeus* of Plato” [Ph.D. diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 1983]). The page number should be 303 (~ *Philo and the Timaeus*, 348) rather than 305.

¹⁰⁰ Conroy, “Death of the Soul,” 34, 37. Here it becomes apparent that despite Conroy’s reference to Runia, their positions differ markedly. Runia sees Philo converting Platonic reincarnation into *allegory*—e.g., “loss of control over the irrational parts of the soul and the body” (see above, p. 23). No ontological change is involved. If Conroy’s analysis were accurate, the expression “utterly beastly mind (my tr. for θηρωδέστατος νοῦς)” at *Agr.* 46 would be quite anomalous. Albert C. Geljon and David T. Runia in *On Cultivation* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 143 rightly do not claim it is but instead remark that “[t]he intellect becomes savage when it loves the *body* and the *passions*” (emphasis added). This is the same as the death of the soul; cf. Philo’s main text on this death at *Leg.* 1.105–108: the

of the soul is a case of “only the irrational soul continu[ing] to exist.”¹⁰¹ The death of the soul is an ethical or existential concept that characterizes the state of a morally degraded soul. The mind is, to be sure, affected by the soul’s death. It loses its ruling position, and this enables the lower parts of the soul to freely realize their sensual tendencies whereby they are pronouncedly dead in an ethical sense. But the mind’s *existence* is unaffected.¹⁰²

As to the doctrine of reincarnation itself, Conroy does not seem to be fully aware of many of its manifestations in Plato or elsewhere in Greek literature. Consequently, he does not recognize the echoes of those manifestations in Philo. For example, he does not acknowledge that the notion of changing into animal in Philo form derives from the description of the process of reincarnation in *Timaeus* 42c.¹⁰³ Other such echoes are the term *σύνδοξ* used about the coming together of body and soul in connection with the latter’s death in *Leg.* 1.106, the “σῶμα σῆμα problem” (i.e., body as the tomb of the soul), the chariot parable in the *Phaedrus* and the use by Plato of the verb *μεταβάλλω* in describing the changes of the soul in the cycle of reincarnation.¹⁰⁴ It is also incorrect to use the term “metempsychosis” of the *non-reincarnational* change “from a human soul into a beast’s soul.”¹⁰⁵

Despite these critical observations, Conroy has a definite point in suggesting that “Philo intends ‘immortality’ to mean the actual continuation of the soul in existence after it is separated from the body” and that

soul is entombed in both the *body* and the *passions*—hardly against its will but rather because of its love for them. See below, subsection 2.1.4 dealing with the causes of incarnation, especially causes 1 (pp. 46–48) and 8 (pp. 57–70).

¹⁰¹ Conroy, “Death of the Soul,” 26; emphasis added.

¹⁰² If the occasional references to the mind’s “death” (e.g., *Plant.* 147., *Her.* 52, *QG* 1.75) were understood to mean its annihilation, we would be left wondering why Philo has practically nothing to say of souls whose highest part has been amputated. An isolated case is *Spec.* 3.99 where both the change into animal form and the loss of the intellect (but *not* the death of the soul) are connected to *insanity*. Conroy does note that the mind “makes its home elsewhere” (and thereby *continues* to exist), but he does not comment on how this relates to his idea of the rational part of the soul becoming a corpse.

¹⁰³ Yet this Timaeian text is quoted in Conroy, “The Wages of Sin,” 81 and connected to the hierarchy of being. For the close parallels in Philo, see below, subsection 2.4.5 (p. 120). In “Death of the Soul,” 37, Conroy dissociates “transformation from human to beast” in Philo from the myth of Er in the *Republic*.

¹⁰⁴ Conroy, “Death of the Soul,” 28–29, 33, 33–34, 38–39, respectively. For these, see below, n. 197 on p. 57 for *σύνδοξ*; pp. 57–64 for the death of the soul; pp. 93, 171–172 for the *Phaedrus*; and above, p. 23 for *μεταβάλλω*.

¹⁰⁵ Conroy, “Death of the Soul,” 40. Given his emphasis on the verb *μεταβάλλω*, this word may have been meant to be *metabolē*.

because immortality “is not a mere metaphor but implies something ontologically, so those whose souls are said to die, do so in more than in a merely metaphorical manner.”¹⁰⁶ However, instead of affirming that the transformation from human to beast “has nothing to do with [Platonic] metempsychosis,”¹⁰⁷ it is more appropriate to conclude that the amount of circumstantial evidence is sufficient for the possibility that Philo accepted reincarnation to be among the alternatives explored.

¹⁰⁶ Idem, 36–37. In his view this means an ontological change, in mine, an existential one.

¹⁰⁷ Idem, 37.