A Place for Everything and Everything in Its Place:
The Importance of Reason and Order in Philo of Alexandria[1]

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Philo, the Judean philosopher from Alexandria, synthesizes Platonic and Stoic doctrines in order to present a system that retains the absolute transcendence of God without eliminating providence. While Philo rejects Stoic pan-corporeality in favor of a Platonic cosmos wherein the sensible, material world is a shadow of the higher, intelligible existents, the Stoic *logos* remains a crucial component in the Philonic system. For the Stoics, the *logos* is the divine principle of order, immanent in the sensible realm. While denying its equivalence with the highest God, Philo expands the role of the *logos*, making it the principle of order at every level of creation.

The first aim of this paper is to illustrate the continuity of the cosmic and the political orders in Philo's world view. Developments, such as the powers of God in the Pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *De Mundo* and Eudorus of Alexandria's doctrine of the One beyond the Monad and the Dyad, are crucial to his system of thought. In Philo's view, mediators are essential, especially as the creators and guarantors of order at the human level. The second aim is to examine Philo's notion of providence and illustrate the consequences of holding mixed-up views about the proper order. When an individual fails to recognize their proper place in the political and cosmic order, chaos ensues, which can have catastrophic consequences. Understanding the importance

of order, Philo's readers are equipped to see that his account of biblical Joseph is of the type of soul that remains blind to it.

PRINCIPLES OF ORDER: GOD, COSMOS, AND KING

The later Hellenistic and early Middle Platonic developments (such as those of the Pseudo-Aristotelian author of *De Mundo*, Eudorus of Alexandria, Musonius Rufus, and Plutarch) provide crucial insight needed to understand how Philo combines Platonic and Stoic world views, retaining divine transcendence, on the one hand, and the possibility for order in the sensible realm, on the other. Philo maintains that the *logos* functions in the world in the same way as it does for the Stoics, though he denies that this *is* God, but is rather *caused by* God and is the lowest manifestation of various intermediating levels at which the *logos* is expressed. In this system, mediators become crucial for maintaining the cosmic order as far as possible within the material world.

The idea of secondary causation is addressed in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise, *De Mundo*, which is crucial for recognizing the way in which Philo understands the immanent *logos* as the ordering power of God. In the final chapters of *De Mundo*, the author offers a view on providence as that which orders the world through the operation of divine powers (δυνάμεις). The author of *De Mundo* draws analogies between kingship and laws (on earth) to explain how God maintains order in the cosmos without meddling in its affairs. If it is not fitting for a king to micromanage the affairs of his nation, this is all the more true when it comes to God's direct involvement in the world: "so that if it was beneath the dignity of Xerxes to be the actual executor of all things…and to administer the Empire by personal supervision, it would be still more unbecoming for God."[2] While it is the cause of all motion in the cosmos, the divine itself remains unmoved: "so also the divine

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2   *De Mundo* 398b 4–6. Translation adapted from *Aristotle on Sophistical Refutations, on Coming-to-Be and Passing Away, the Cosmos*, trans. and ed. E. Forster and D. Furley in Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955).

nature [φύσις] with a single movement of the nearest element distributes his power to the next part and then to the more remote part until it permeates the whole."[3] The unmoved God is the first principle, after which a chain of moving causes extend the divine powers of creation and order to the world.[4] For the author, this principle of order is the oldest, best, and most enduring law: "God is a law to us, impartial and admitting of no correction or change: he is surely a stronger and more stable law than those inscribed on tablets. Under his motionless and harmonious guidance all the orderly arrangement of heaven and earth is administered."[5] In the *De Mundo*, the function of God's powers compare to that of Plato's incorporeal forms, or ideas, as both impose order on the visible world.[6] However, the *De Mundo* presents a view with insufficient complexity than would be needed to approximate Philo's, where intermediary levels intervene between God and the corporeal world. According to the author of *De Mundo*, God occupies the purest region, the external boundary of the cosmos where the most noble of visible things reside.[7] However, for Philo, this is still not far enough away from worldly affairs.

With Eudorus of Alexandria (fl. circa 25 BCE) we find a philosophical position in which the transcendence of God is approximate to that of Philo's. Preserved for posterity in Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, Eudorus is ascribed the following view: "so there is the One as first principle, and there is the One and the indefinite Dyad as elements, both of which are in turn one [or, "both Ones being in turn principles"]. And it is clear that the One that is the principle of all things is distinct from the One opposed to the Dyad, which they also call Monad."[8] The

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3   *De Mundo* 398b 19–23.

4   The author follows Aristotle, who posits one transcendent cause of all cosmic motion. See, *Metaphysics* 10 1075a 11–20.

5   *De Mundo* 401b 26–33.

6   See John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 161.

7   *De Mundo* 400a 1–20.

8   Simplicius, *In Aristotelis Physicorum Libros Octo Commentaria*, ed. H.

traditional Pythagorean view on first principles maintains that the Monad and the Dyad are the highest. Eudorus, however, asserts that there is a principle beyond those which are engaged in creation. Accordingly, the One takes on a new theological significance as the highest God, which is above the Monad, a second god, and the entity that people typically recognize as God. The Second God / Monad is the purely active principle associated with limit. It is the archetype of form, and its existence depends on the Supreme God.[9] The Monad, the active principle of order, acts upon the unlimited Dyad, and the order produced corresponds to the Platonic forms, which in turn are the principles of creation and order in the cosmos.

Philo takes up a system of first principles in his account of the creation of the cosmos which resembles that of Eudorus. First is the highest God, at rest and completely beyond predication. From the most-high, one God comes forth, the *logos,* which corresponds to the Monad, the creative principle that acts to order and limit chaos and disorder. Due to God's complete self-sufficiency, superiority, and utmost simplicity, the human comes closest to an understanding of the divine through the One and the Monad: "the one God is the sole standard for the Monad, for like time, all number is younger than the cosmos, and God is prior to the cosmos and its maker."[10] The ordering activity of the first cause

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Diels, in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* IX (Berlin: Reimer, 1882), 181.27–30: ὥστε ὡς μὲν ἀρχὴ τὸ ἕν, ὡς δὲ στοιχεῖα τὸ ἓν καὶ ἡ ἀόριστος δυάς, ἀρχαὶ ἄμφω ἓν ὄντα πάλιν. καὶ δῆλον ὅτι ἄλλο μέν ἐστιν ἓν ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν πάντων, ἄλλο δὲ ἓν τὸ τῇ δυάδι ἀντικείμενον, ὃ καὶ μονάδα καλοῦσιν.

9   Numenius of Apamea, a Middle Platonist of the second century CE, makes the same distinction between the first God, which is stable, and a second creator God, which is susceptible to motion. See, Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 11.18.

10   *Legum Allegoriae* (*LA*) 2.3: μᾶλλον δὲ ἡ μονὰς κατὰ τὸν ἕνα θεόν· πᾶς γὰρ ἀριθμὸς νεώτερος κόσμου, ὡς καὶ χρόνος, ὁ δὲ θεὸς πρεσβύτερος κόσμου καὶ δημιουργός. English translations of Greek text are generally my own. However, in cases where the English translation of Philo is acceptable, I have often retained (or emended) the translation in *The Works of Philo* vol. 1–10, ed. and trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929). The Greek text is from *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt,* vol. 1–6, ed. L. Cohn and P. Wendland (Berlin:

(*logos* as Monad) produces the world of forms, referred to as *logoi*, or collectively, as another *logos*: "the noetic order is the word of God already engaged in creation."[11] The *logos* as world of the forms is different from the *logos* as Monad, and the former are identified as the thoughts of the latter. The *logos* qua forms serves as the pattern from which the material world is created. The operative notion in Philo's conception of the law is that nature is the cosmic order. It is created by God and serves as a paradigm for human behavior. Refusal to live in accordance with the law of nature (νόμος φύσεως) results in imbalance, and the *logos*, acting as an agent of justice through nature, or through the king, restores order. In order to fully appreciate the cosmic significance of the ruler, it is necessary to outline the theory of king as living law (νόμος ἔμψυχος).

In the Hellenistic period, kings would assume the role of benefactor (εὐεργέτης) and were deified. Political literature of the time often contains comparisons between the king and God.[12] While Hellenistic authors generally held that the earthly city was of lesser worth than the cosmic, in Roman authors, the earthly state is valued as itself cosmic and the king's role is expanded accordingly. Musonius Rufus, a Roman Stoic of the first century CE, provides a full articulation of the theory of king as living law. Musonius emphasizes that not only strict philosophical discipline but also the demonstration of virtue in speech and action is required to be considered a living law: "in general it is of the greatest importance for the good king to be faultless in word and action, if, indeed, he is to be a 'living law' as he seemed to the ancients…a true imitator of Zeus and, like him, father of his people."[13] Through the exercise of virtuous conduct

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Walter de Gruyter, 1896–1930).

11   *De Opificio Mundi* (*Opif.*) 24: τὸν νοητὸν κόσμον εἶναι ἢ θεοῦ λόγον ἤδη κοσμοποιοῦντος.

12   E.g., Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.5. Philo often uses the term benefactor in reference to the divine. See, *Opif.* 23, 169; *De Vita Mosis* (*Mos.*) 2.256.

13   In Cora Lutz, *Musonius Rufus: The Roman Socrates*, ed. A. R. Bellinger (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), 65.

and the creation of an orderly state, the king imitates Zeus and becomes a model for his subjects and an image of the divine.

According to Plutarch, monarchy is the best constitution, and the monarch is a divine agent and image: "now just as in the heavens God has established as a most beautiful image of himself the sun and the moon, so in states a ruler 'who in God's likeness Righteous decisions upholds' [Homer, *Od.* 19.109–111]."[14] For Plutarch, the Imperial Roman government is an instantiation of the highest constitution, and accordingly, he frames the Roman Empire in cosmic terms. Human affairs prior to Imperial Rome were characterized by disorder, chaos, and confusion:

> [The disordered state of human affairs] remained without remedy, until such time as Rome acquired strength and growth, and had attached to herself not only the nations and peoples within her own borders, but also royal dominions of foreign peoples beyond the seas, and thus the affairs of this vast empire gained stability and security, since the supreme government, which never knew reverse, was brought within an orderly and single cycle of peace.[15]

In this account, the formation of the Roman Empire parallels the creation of the world in Plato's *Timaeus.* According to John Dillon, "this analogy, incidentally, would give Augustus a position very similar to the Platonic Demiurge, though I am not aware that Plutarch explicitly made the comparison."[16] The notion that the monarch acts as a creative principle is central to Philo, who – rather explicitly – connects Augustus with demiurgic activity.

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14   Plutarch, *Ad principem ineruditum*, in *Plutarch Moralia*, ed. and trans. R. Babbitt, in Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 780f: οἷον δʼ ἥλιον ἐν οὐρανῷ περικαλλὲς εἴδωλον ἑαυτοῦ καὶ σελήνην ὁ θεὸς ἐνίδρυσε, τοιοῦτον ἐν πόλεσι μίμημα καὶ φέγγος ἄρχων ὅστε θεουδὴς εὐδικίας ἀνέχῃσι.

15   Plutarch, *De Fortuna Romanorum* 317c: μέχρι οὗ τῆς Ῥώμης ἰσχὺν καὶ αὔξησιν λαβούσης καὶ ἀναδησαμένης τοῦτο μὲν ἔθνη καὶ δήμους ἐν αὐτῇ, τοῦτο δʼ ἀλλοφύλους καὶ διαποντίους βασιλέων ἡγεμονίας, ἕδραν ἔσχε τὰ μέγιστα καὶ ἀσφάλειαν, εἰς κόσμον εἰρήνης καὶ ἕνα κύκλον τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἄπταιστον περιφερομένης.

16   John Dillon, "Plutarch and the End of History," in *Plutarch and His Intellectual World*, ed. Judith Mossman (London: Duckworth, 1997), 239 note 7.

What is implicit in Plutarch is explicit in Philo insofar as his account of Augustus' activities as a ruler parallels the creative activity of the Platonic demiurge. The idea of the law as natural order allows Philo to make both the *pax romana* and written laws of Moses the images of this order and human rulers, its guarantors. The law of nature is the order imposed through the creation of the universe, and the good king imitates the creative activity of God by imposing order on the state. Order (τάξις) is a characteristic of the created world, which has changed into its beautiful state from the opposite[17] through the activity of 'uniting in harmony' (ἁρμόζω), which is frequently ascribed to the creation.[18] Philo explains that Augustus calmed the torrential storms, healed pestilences, broke the chains which shackled the inhabitable world, ended wars, quelled violence, and cleared the sea of piracy: "this is he who reclaimed every state to liberty, who led disorder into order [τὴν ἀταξίαν εἰς τάξιν] and brought gentle manners and harmony [ἡμερώσας καὶ ἁρμοσάμενος] to all uncivilized [ἄμικτα] and brutish nations."[19] Comparable to Plato's demiurge and Philo's *logos,* Augustus creates political order from disorder, peace from war, and unites primitive and quarrelsome nations in harmony.

Furthermore, Augustus displaced the rule of the many, and, as such, he reflects the rule of the one God:

> He was also the first and the greatest and the common benefactor [εὐεργέτης] in that he displaces the rule of the many and committed the ship of the commonwealth to be steered by a single pilot, that is himself, a marvellous master of the science of government [τὴν ἡγεμονικὴν ἐπιστήμην]. For there is justice in the saying "it is not well that many lords should rule," since multiplicity of suffrages produces multiform evils.[20]

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17   *Opif.* 21, 22, 28.

18   *Opif.* 13, 78, 82, 117.

19   *Legatio ad Gaium* (*Legat.*) 145–147: "οὗτος ὁ τὰς πόλεις ἁπάσας εἰς ἐλευθερίαν ἐξελόμενος ὁ τὴν ἀταξίαν εἰς τάξιν ἀγαγών ὁ τὰ ἄμικτα ἔθνη καὶ θηριώδη πάντα ἡμερώσας καὶ ἁρμοσάμενος. See, Plato, *Timaeus* 30a where creation is spoken of as bringing order to disorder.

20   *Legat.* 149: οὐδὲ ὅτι πρῶτος καὶ μέγιστος καὶ κοινὸς εὐεργέτης ἀντὶ πολυαρχίας ἑνὶ κυβερνήτῃ παραδοὺς τὸ κοινὸν σκάφος οἰακονομεῖν ἑαυτῷ θαυμασίῳ τὴν ἡγεμονικὴν ἐπιστήμην τὸ γὰρ "οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη" λέλεκται δεόντως, ἐπειδὴ πολυτρόπων αἴτιαι κακῶν αἱ πολυψηφίαι.

The rule of many is the political analog of polytheism and an inversion of the cosmic order. Philo's Augustus creates and maintains order in the state, in full agreement with the law of nature. As such, the human community reflects the cosmos, the king is an image of God, and the people are the direct recipients of God's powers. Accordingly, it is crucial that the ruler is correctly oriented to create and maintain order. Looking at Philo's treatment of political disorder, both biblical and contemporary, it is clear that chaos ensues as a result of confusing and conflating the proper order of things.

<div align="center">PROVIDENCE</div>

Philo has illustrated the ways in which the cosmic order is reflected through the ruler, who acts in accordance with the divine creative activity. Only activities which promote lawfulness and order can properly be understood as images of the divine. In the following section, we shall examine Philo's concept of providence (πρόνοια), which is associated with the ways in which the divine activity cares for creation. As a general rule, Philo maintains that an accurate identification of providence depends on the recognition of its incorporeality. To attain the most accurate understanding of divine providence, the human must use the eyes of the soul rather than of the body.[21] The correct view of providence also involves acknowledging that God causes only good things and is not the source of evil.[22] Perceived evils come to be as a result of secondary causes and through no intention of God, who created the universe in the best possible way.[23]

Philo is clear about what can be ascribed to providence and what cannot. The sun, moon, and heavenly bodies have come into being through providence.[24] While the planets are causes, Philo is clear

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21   *De Providentia* (*Prov.*) 9.

22   See *De Agricultura* 128–129; *De Confusione Linguarum* 180; *De Abrahamo* 268; *De Specialibus Legibus* 4.187.

23   See *LA* 3.177–178; *Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari Soleat* 122; *De Posteritate Caini* 175; *De Fuga et Inventione* 70.

24   *Prov.* 2.52–53. Philo credits Abraham with recognizing that the

that they are not the primary causes. Weather phenomena such as eclipses, rainbows, and thunderstorms are effects that follow from the secondary causes (e.g., the planets) and therefore cannot be ascribed to either nature or providence.[25] In order to clarify his point, Philo explains that a builder fashions a portico in order to maximize seasonal comfort. Through absolutely no intention of the builder, the portico happens to cast shadows (σκιαὶ) on the ground. Whether the shadows are useful (such as when they measure time) or harmful (if they were blocking light from a garden), their effects cannot be directly ascribed to the intentions of the builder.[26]

Generally, Philo is vehemently opposed to assigning natural or divine causation to anything that occurs in the material realm. However, there are certain instances where unexpected events in the corporeal realm can be attributed to providence. Philo describes the unusual circumstances that followed three men who robbed the temple at Delphi.[27] Immediately after committing their crimes, one of the robbers fell to his death from a cliff, the second drowned when his horse ran into the sea, and the third perished due either to fever or fire. Not only were they swift, but the deaths of the three robbers were also in full accordance with the law concerning the punishment for temple robbery. Accordingly:

> To assert that these events are due to fortune [τύχην] is pure contentiousness. No doubt if people had been punished at different times or by other penalties it would be sensible enough to ascribe them to the caprice of fortune. But when all were punished at one time [ἕνα καιρὸν] and by penalties not by another kind but those contained in the laws, it is reasonable to assert that they were the victims of divine justice [Θεοῦ δικάσαντος].[28]

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chain of causation does not begin with the planets, thereby abandoning the 'Chaldean' view which makes chance and necessity divine and posits nothing outside of the perceptible realm, e.g., *De Virtutibus* 216 and *Prov.* 1.88.

25   *Prov.* 1.47.

26   *Prov.* 2.48.

27   *Prov.* 1.33–34.

28   *Prov.* 1.34: ταῦτα γὰρ φιλονεικότατον λέγειν ἀποβῆναι κατὰ τύχην. εἰ μὲν γάρ τινες ἢ ἐν διαφέρουσι καιροῖς ἢ ἑτέραις ἐκολάσθησαν τιμωρίαις, εἰκὸς ἦν τὸ ἄστατον τῆς τύχης προφασίζεσθαι· πάντων δ᾽ ἀθρόως καὶ ὑφ᾽ ἕνα καιρὸν καὶ μὴ ἑτέραις τιμωρίαις ἀλλὰ ταῖς περιεχομέναις ἐν τοῖς

The timing and the lawfulness of the punishments make it reasonable to attribute them to providence. When the wicked seem to go unpunished, providence must not be denied, as divine and human judgement are not commensurable and it is not up to man to decide what is best for God to do.[29]

Sometimes, providence intervenes in the form of miracles, such as those that demonstrate Moses' power. In *De Vita Mosis*, this occurs on numerous occasions when Moses faces an impediment to his just rule.[30] For example, Moses receives three signs to demonstrate his power, prior to the ten plagues.[31] While wandering in the desert, Moses relieves thirst,[32] feeds the people with manna,[33] and provides water from a rock.[34] These events, which serve to relieve suffering and demonstrate that Moses has divine sanction, are unexpected (παράλογος)[35] and depend on communication between God and Moses via prayers and inspiration (καταπνευσθείς).[36] In every instance, divine intervention in *De Vita Mosis* reflects the criteria of timing and legal appropriateness.[37] For Philo, when providence intervenes in daily affairs, it must be lawful, timely, and productive of correct views and order.

INCORRECT VIEWS ON PROVIDENCE

Philo's apostate nephew Tiberius Alexander ('Alexander' from here) appears in *De Providentia*, in dialogue with his uncle as a foil for his position. Alexander doubts the existence of divine providence, and Philo responds to objections raised by his nephew. For instance, Alexander points out that often

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νόμοις κολασθέντων, εὔλογον φάσκειν ὅτι Θεοῦ δικάσαντος ἑάλωσαν.

29   *Prov.* 1.35–36.
30   E.g., *Mos.* 1.176–179, 1.185–186, 1.200–204, 1.209, 1.211, etc.
31   *Mos.* 1.91–95.
32   *Mos.* 1.184–186.
33   *Mos.* 1.199–209.
34   *Mos.* 1.210–211.
35   *Mos.* 1.196.
36   *Mos.* 1.201.
37   See especially, *Mos.* 2.284–285.

wicked men prosper while the wise and virtuous suffer, which indicates that providence does not exist. To this, Philo responds:

> If indeed you would strain the soul's eyes [τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα] to contemplate the providence of God [Θεοῦ πρόνοιαν] as far as human reason can do so, you will gain a clearer vision of the true good and laugh to scorn what here are reckoned as goods which hitherto had your admiration. For in the absence of the better things worse are always held in honour and succeed to the position which belongs to the better.[38]

In Philo's view, his nephew makes two fundamental mistakes, which lead to the denial of providence. First, in his ignorance, Alexander believes that reality consists of the perceptible realm and considers worldly things (bodily health, wealth, etc.) to be of the utmost value. Second, without a conception of secondary causes, Alexander equates providence with chance (τύχη), which describes the randomness and disorder among worldly things. Asserting that God is the cause of events in the human realm not only entails a degraded conception of God but it can also minimize human responsibility: "why do we accuse nature when we should reproach the cruelty of the assailants?"[39] Failing to recognize the proper order of things leads to chaos and disorder, as Philo illustrates in his *Legatio ad Gaium*.

While Alexander denies providence through its misidentification with chance, some do the opposite, affirming providence through the same misidentification. Philo introduces *Legatio ad Gaium* warning against a similar mistake:

> How long shall we the aged continue to be children grown grey in our bodies through length of years, but infants in our soul through want of sense, holding fortune [τὴν τύχην] the most unstable of all things to be the most unchangeable, nature [τὴν φύσιν], the most constant, to be the most insecure? […] For the eyes [ὀφθαλμοῖς] discern what is manifest and close at hand, but reason [λογισμὸς]

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38   *Prov.* 2.9: εἰ μέντοι τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα τείνας βουληθείης περιαθρῆσαι Θεοῦ πρόνοιαν, ὡς ἔνεστιν ἀνθρωπίνῳ λογισμῷ, τρανοτέραν τὴν τοῦ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἀγαθοῦ λαβὼν φαντασίαν, γελάσῃ τὰ παρ᾽ ἡμῖν, ἃ τέως ἐθαύμαζες. ἀεὶ γὰρ ἀπουσίᾳ τῶν κρειττόνων τιμᾶται τὰ χείρονα, τὴν ἐκείνων κληρονομοῦντα τάξιν.

39   *Prov.* 2.22: τί τὴν φύσιν αἰτιώμεθα, δέον τὴν τῶν ἐπιθεμένων κακίζειν ὠμότητα;

reaches to the unseen and the future. Reason's vision, which is keener than the vision of the bodily eyes [ὀμμάτων σώματος], we bedim and confuse, some with strong drink and overindulgence, others with that worst of evils [τῷ μεγίστῳ τῶν κακῶν], ignorance [ἀμαθία].[40]

With Gaius' accession, the Roman people fully expected their good fortune (εὐτυχία) and happiness (εὐδαιμονία) to follow.[41] According to Philo, in this situation, "the human mind [νοῦς] is blind to the perception of what is really of interest and can only take conjecture [εἰκασία] as its guide instead of knowledge [ἐπιστήμη]."[42] Rather than admitting that they were wrong, the Roman people remained resolute, justifying Gaius' crimes as he secured his position through the violent elimination of his rivals.[43] Philo presents Gaius' accession and its disastrous consequences as a direct result of ignorance and the conflation of opposites.

De Iosepho, Philo's biographical retelling of the Joseph story (Genesis 37–50), includes numerous references to providence, divine will, and nature, which seem entirely at odds with Philo's overall thought. The author of Genesis attributes certain events in Joseph's life to divine providence (e.g., Genesis 39:2–5,

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40   *Legat.* 1–2: ἄχρι τίνος ἡμεῖς οἱ γέροντες ἔτι παῖδές ἐσμεν, τὰ μὲν σώματα χρόνου μήκει πολιοί, τὰς δὲ ψυχὰς ὑπ᾽ ἀναισθησίας κομιδῇ νήπιοι, νομίζοντες τὸ μὲν ἀσταθμητότατον, τὴν τύχην, ἀκλινέστατον, τὸ δὲ παγιώτατον, τὴν φύσιν, ἀβεβαιότατον; … ὀφθαλμοῖς μὲν γὰρ τὰ ἐν φανερῷ καὶ ἐν χερσὶ καταλαμβάνεται λογισμὸς δὲ φθάνει καὶ πρὸς τὰ ἀόρατα καὶ μέλλοντα, οὗ τὴν ὄψιν ὀξυωπεστέραν οὖσαν τῆς δι᾽ ὀμμάτων σώματος ἀμαυροῦμεν, οἱ μὲν ἀκράτῳ καὶ πλησμοναῖς ὑποσυγχέοντες, οἱ δὲ τῷ μεγίστῳ τῶν κακῶν, ἀμαθία. It should be noted that, here, Philo is referring to nature, rather than providence. In Philo, providence refers to divine knowledge and care for the creation (e.g., *De Ebrietate* 19 and *De Sobrietate* (*Sobr.*) 63). It upholds nature, the underlying order. Although providence and nature are not strictly interchangeable, in the context of the present discussion, conflating providence with chance and nature with chance, entails a similar mistake (confusing higher and lower) and results in similar consequences (disorder).

41   *Legat.* 11.

42   *Legat.* 21: τυφλώττει γὰρ ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς πρὸς τὴν τοῦ συμφέροντος ὄντως αἴσθησιν εἰκασίᾳ καὶ στοχασμῷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπιστήμῃ χρῆσθαι δυνάμενος. Note that here Philo uses Platonic terminology - εἰκασία, which refers to the very lowest form of knowing, conjecture, that of the prisoners fettered in the cave. See, Plato, *Republic* 514a.

43   *Legat.* 67–73.

21–23); however, in *De Iosepho*, Philo narrates the story from the
perspective of soul who remains blind to the truth and such
references to providence are characteristic mistakes of such
a soul. Philo uses sections of allegorical exegesis to explain
the narrative passages in *De Iosepho*. These exegetical sections
give context for understanding the apparent contradictions
presented in Philo's narrative. For instance, in the third section
of allegorical exegesis, Philo takes pains to explain that Joseph's
success is entirely due to chance and not to God.[44] Yet, in the
following section of narrative,[45] Joseph constantly ascribes divine
causation to the events in his life[46] going as far as to assert that
God is responsible for turning his suffering into good fortune.

Considering Philo's views on what can and cannot be rightly
ascribed to providence, there are a number of references to
providence in *De Iosepho* which, at face value, are highly bizarre.
After the chief butler is restored to his former position, having
followed the advice of Joseph while in prison, he quickly
forgets about Joseph's role in securing his release. Philo offers
two possible explanations for his lapse: "perhaps because the
ungrateful are always forgetful of their benefactors, or perhaps
it was according to the providence of God [κατὰ πρόνοιαν
θεοῦ] who willed that the happy events which befell the youth
should be due to himself rather than to man."[47] Here, Philo
juxtaposes the true cause – human ingratitude – with divine
causation. This foreshadows Joseph's error in ascribing chance
events to providence. Upon seeing his brothers again in Egypt,
Joseph supposes that they did not recognize him because:

> It was not God's will to reveal the truth yet, for cogent reasons
> which were best at the time kept secret, and therefore either the
> face [τὴν ὄψιν] of the commander of the land was exchanged for a

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44   *Ios.* 126–156.
45   *Ios.* 157–268.
46   *Ios.* 241, 244, 266.
47   *Ios.* 99: ἴσως μὲν ἐπειδὴ πᾶς ἀχάριστος ἀμνήμων ἐστὶν
εὐεργετῶν, ἴσως δὲ καὶ κατὰ πρόνοιαν θεοῦ βουληθέντος τὰς εὐπραγίας τῷ
νεανίᾳ μὴ δι᾽ ἀνθρώπου γενέσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ δι᾽ ἑαυτοῦ.

more venerable appearance [σεμνότερον εἶδος], or else the minds [διανοίας] of the brothers were turned away from an accurate comprehension [τὰς ἀκριβεῖς καταλήψεις] of what they saw.[48]

As the narrative unfolds and Joseph tests his brothers, their failure to recognize him rests not on God, but on Joseph's dissimulation. After submitting his brothers to numerous tests of loyalty, Joseph finally decides that their inability to recognize him is due to the providence of God (πρόνοια θεοῦ) despite that the motivation and reasons for testing his brothers are clearly his own.[49]

Both Joseph and Alexander are ignorant of higher realities, and they equate providence and chance. Alexander denies providence on this basis; however, Joseph's good material comforts, by chance, remain undisturbed, which he considers to be a personal blessing from God. Joseph's life misses the mark, and he fails to achieve the greatness of soul needed to recognize the true worthlessness of the things he values: "for if he had found it, he would have fled far away from the whole of Egypt never turning to look back. But, as it is, he finds his chief glory in feeding and fostering it, this Egypt over which the man of vision sings his hymn to God when he sees its fighters and its leaders sunk in the sea and destroyed."[50] Joseph's ignorance leads him to make claims about things he does not know. Far from the beneficial acts of providence that assist Moses in maintaining order and inculcating correct views, there is no resemblance to the just order of the cosmos or any benefit to mankind from any of the acts that Joseph ascribes to God.

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48   *Ios.* 165: μὴ βουληθέντος πω τοῦ θεοῦ τἀληθὲς ἀναφῆναι διά τινας ἀναγκαίας αἰτίας, ἃς τότε βέλτιον ἦν ἡσυχάζεσθαι, ἀλλ᾽ ἢ τὴν ὄψιν ἀλλάξαντος εἰς σεμνότερον εἶδος τοῦ τὴν χώραν ἐπιτραπέντος ἢ παρατρέψαντος τὰς ἀκριβεῖς καταλήψεις τῆς διανοίας τῶν ὁρώντων.

49   *Ios.* 232–236.

50   *Sobr.* 13: εἰ γὰρ εὕρητο, κἂν ὅλην Αἴγυπτον ἀμεταστρεπτὶ φεύγων ᾤχετο· νυνὶ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ τρέφειν αὐτὴν καὶ τιθηνοκομεῖν μάλιστα σεμνύνεται, ἧς τὸ μάχιμον καὶ ἡγεμονεῦον ὅταν ἴδῃ ὁ ὁρῶν καταπεποντωμένον καὶ διεφθαρμένον, ὕμνον εἰς τὸν θεὸν ᾄδει.

CONCLUSION

For Philo, having the right views is essential, and he gives criteria for understanding what can and cannot be ascribed to divine providence. Unless one seeks higher realities, beyond the world of the senses, they will remain, like Joseph and Alexander, pulled outward and chained to external things. Stuck in the land of the body, the fallen soul might never return to a true image of divine providence. Philo's world view is one where creation is the activity of ordering, mediated through a chain of causes until it reaches the perceptible realm. Human mediators are crucial at the political level, and by creating and keeping a state in peace, order, and justice, good rulers extend the creation to the external world of human affairs. However, without a strong leader who acts as a principle of justice and harmony, the human community is disordered and chaotic. With harmony of thought, word, and deed, and a soul ruled by reason, life in the material world has value and dignity. As long as all things keep their proper place in the natural order, there is, for Philo, a place for everything.